HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CUBANIA IN THE DRAMA OF ABELARDO ESTORINO

by

JOSEPH WILLIAM GOLDSTEIN

(Under the Direction of José B. Álvarez IV)

ABSTRACT

Through this study, I present the first thorough and comprehensive analysis of contemporary Cuban playwright Abelardo Estorino's published works. Although the author is now widely recognized as one of the most important Cuban dramatists of the twentieth century, I assert that it is only within the last few years that his plays have begun to receive the amount of critical attention they merit. In my analysis, I consider a wide range of topics in Estorino's drama, which is almost entirely concerned with specifically national issues. However, I pay special attention to totalitarian government, *machismo*, and race, which are three predominant themes in his plays. I demonstrate that these matters are either addressed in an immediate contemporary context, or set within a remote or partially imaginary temporal frame. I also show how the playwright has sought to develop an ideological dialogue with his audience, according to which the author's personal vision of Cubanness, or *cubanía*, is emphasized. Owing to the many and rapid changes that have taken place on the island since the advent of the revolution, I fully consider the historical context in which Estorino's plays were first presented—or were meant to be presented—to the public, and in this way I demonstrate the common audience concerns to which such works were meant to allude. Likewise, I take into account the historical

settings of the plays themselves, and in this way I discover the ideological intent which underlies the implicit comparison in Estorino's drama between past national realities and present-day ones.

INDEX WORDS: Estorino, Cuba, theater, teatro, cubanía, history, historical, historia, drama, contestatory, contestatario, dissident, disidente, metatheater, metateatro, machismo, revolutionary, revolucionario, racism, racismo, government, society, gobierno, sociedad, sexism, sexist, sexismo, sexista, censorship, censura, reader response, audience reception, realism, hyperrealism, realismo, hiperrealismo, theater of the absurd, teatro del absurdo, *El peine y el espejo*, *El robo del cochino*, *Las vacas gordas*, *La casa vieja*, *Los mangos de Caín*, *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de don José Jacinto Milanés*, *Ni un sí ni un no*, *Morir del cuento*, *Que el diablo te acompañe*, *El tiempo de la plaga*, *Vagos rumores*, *Parece blanca*, *El baile*, *Las penas saben nadar*

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this doctoral thesis to the memory of my maternal grandmother Dorothy Haas. She did not finish her doctoral degree, but she always believed that I could complete mine. I also dedicate this work to my paternal grandmother Florence Goldstein, whose support has been absolutely necessary for making reality my dream of earning a Ph.D. Finally, I dedicate this investigation to the memory of Gary Fodor, former Spanish instructor at Armstrong Atlantic State University in Savannah, Georgia. His impact upon my life has been unmeasurable.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Abelardo Estorino stands out as one of the most important Cuban playwrights of the twentieth century, arguably as important as Virgilio Piñera, José Triana and Reguera Saumell. For this reason it is somewhat surprising that a comprehensive critical study of his plays has not been done prior to this one. Perhaps the main reason stems from the fact that over the years Estorino's creative output has experienced numerous changes with regard to dramatic technique, thematic content and political perspective. This means that the literary researcher who attempts to base her investigation on any one of these categories will not find a common element present throughout the entire body of the author's work. Another possible reason is that Cuban theater as a whole is only now beginning to receive the full critical attention that it merits. Whatever the case, the time has come for a thorough critical review of the totality of Estorino's theater.

As mentioned earlier, over the years the author's work has evolved so much that at first glance it might appear to be insurmountably difficult to find a thread of continuity. However, this is not so. All of his published plays, perhaps with the exception of *La dama de las camelias* (2000), focus on Cuban reality and explore various themes of national identity. In other words, he consistently presents his own personal vision of *cubanía*, or essential Cubanness. In order to properly understand the full significance of this concept in Estorino's work, one must take into account the historical context of each play, whether in terms of the setting of the action, or with regard to the particular period in national history during which the work was first presented to the public. This means that *cubanía* is of a necessity historically contextualized, so that any

discussion of it must take into account the impact of history. Therefore, this study investigates, in an integrated manner, aspects of both *cubanía* and historical context in Estorino's theater.

As a lifelong citizen of Cuba who has experienced firsthand some of the most significant historical moments in that nation's history, the author can certainly lay claim to a truly authentic personal vision of *cubanía*. Born on January 20, 1925 in Unión del Reyes of Matanzas province, his earliest life experiences took place in a small town nestled within a rural environment.[1] After completing grammar and secondary school, Estorino began studying dentistry in Havana in 1946, a profession that he would practice from 1954 to 1957.[2] During these years he also did work in advertising.

His involvement in theater through Teatro Estudio commenced prior to the revolution. He began work as an assistant to playwright Julio Matas, then studied directing at Teatro Estudio. With the arrival of the revolution, Estorino was able to put aside his dental practice and devote himself exclusively to his theatrical activities. His first big success was *El robo del cochino* (1961), a play that firmly established him as one of Cuba's foremost playwrights. This was followed by *La casa vieja* (1964), for which he received honorable mention in the 1964 Casa de las Américas contest. The early years of the revolution were good for the author's professional development. During this time he became a literary consultant for the theater groups of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura and appeared to enjoy the full support of this organization. However, after the presentation of *Los mangos de Caín* in 1964, Estorino was unable to present to the public an original play until the staging of *Ni un sí ni un no* in 1980. This long gap in the

[1] Unsurprisingly, many of his plays have their settings in Matanzas province, while others take place in rural settings that are not specifically identified as the author's birthplace, yet nonetheless display all of its essential qualities.
[2] In *Las vacas gordas* (1962) and especially in several of his later works, the author chooses urban settings for his plays, undoubtedly drawing upon his own personal experiences in Havana in his presentation of life in Cuba's capital city. By showing both the rural and urban aspects of national society, he offers a complete panorama of Cuban life.

staging of new drama, from 1964-1980, a total of 16 years, can perhaps be attributed as much to the politically subversive content of *Los mangos de Caín* as to official reservations about the author's sexuality. However, by 1980 it appeared that the authorities at the Consejo Nacional de Cultura were willing to allow him to represent his works, and as a consequence he was able to write and publicly stage several original plays throughout the 1980s and 90s. These productions carefully avoid the kind of subversive analysis of national political realities that marginalized him in the 1960s, yet nonetheless offer profound examinations of some of the more controversial aspects of Cuban life and identity. Since the premiere of *El baile* in 1999, Estorino has not presented any new theater to the public. At the time of this writing he is 80 years old, but it is of course not inconceivable that he might one day offer yet another new play, since he appears to be in good health and sound of mind. Be that as it may, this study nevertheless ventures to examine the totality of the author's work, yet cannot rule out the possibility of new drama created by him in the future.

The critical evalution of an artist's overall contribution to the cultural community is without a doubt a problematic exercise, depending as it does upon highly subjective considerations. This is especially the case with regard to Estorino's plays, since it is apparent that among different literary critics there sometimes exists a relatively wide range of expressed views with regard to the aesthetic value of individual works by the author. However, there seems to be a broader consensus about the general value of his drama to the world of Cuban letters. It is widely agreed that Estorino belongs among the greatest national playwrights of the previous century. The critic Abel González Melo has even ventured to proclaim him "el más grande dramaturgo cubano en el tránsito del siglo XX al XXI" (51). Nonetheless, this supposed

preeminence should be seen in its proper context by taking into account the following factors explained by Matías Montes-Huidobro in 1992:

> Con la muerte de Virgilio Piñera, Carlos Felipe y Rolando Ferrer; el exilio de Eduardo Manet, Ramón Ferreira, José Triana y otros dramaturgos cubanos; el silencio de Antón Arrufat; las limitaciones de las obras de José Brene, Héctor Quintero y Raúl González de Cascorro; la ausencia de textos de valor permanente dentro del teatro de creación colectiva y la decadencia del llamado "teatro de autores"; Abelardo Estorino se convierte en el dramaturgo cubano más importante entre los que residen actualmente en Cuba. (246)

This statement might seem to imply that the author has become contemporary Cuba's most important playwright by default. However, it is more appropriate to see this quotation as an affirmation of his place within the group of illustrious writers mentioned. Rine Leal notes that "[s]i bien es verdad que la mejor de las escenas de Estorino no alcanza el nivel de la mejor de Triana, no menos cierto es que la peor de las escenas de Triana es muy inferior a la peor de Estorino" (En primera persona 341). Considering that José Triana is widely regarded as the greatest Cuban playwright since Virgilio Piñera, it is clear that Leal has designated a special place for Estorino among national dramatists. It should also be taken into account that Leal wrote these lines in 1966, many years before *Morir del cuento* (1984), regarded by many critics as Estorino's greatest theatrical achievement. In summary, although there may not be general agreement about the author's ranking among the best national dramatists, none will deny him his rightful place among them.

This would in itself be reason enough to undertake this study. However, the focus of this investigation is not the value of Estorino's contribution to the world of Cuban letters, but rather

the author's personal vision of *cubanía* and the historical context in which it is manifested. The intent here is to explore one particularly useful way of reading his works. It is a reading that will shed a great deal of light on the author's intent to communicate ideologically with his audience. It should be understood that in Estorino's case, this communication of ideas does not follow a single unified trajectory in terms of the nature of the messages conveyed, but instead is specific to the matters addressed in each play. This of course does not mean that ideological tendencies do not exist in the author's work, but instead highlights the importance in this case of carefully considering the content of each script while avoiding broad generalizations. Through this approach, one who reads or experiences Estorino's plays opens the door to a richer understanding of *cubanía* and national history. I argue that this wealth of perspective with regard to Cuban historical realities is ultimately what determines the author's distinguished place in Latin American literature.

The concept of *cubanía*, so central to this investigation, is one that merits thorough investigation and consideration before being utilized as a tool for the analysis of this text. Although I have already defined it as the quality of essential Cubanness, such an explanation only serves to give the most basic idea of how the term can be interpreted. It should also be borne in mind that there exists a profusion of different ideas regarding the true meaning of *cubanía*, notwithstanding the fact that the expression was coined by the renowned national historiographer Fernando Ortiz, in 1940.[3] Ortiz gives his classic definition in the following lines:

> Pienso que para nosotros los cubanos nos habría de convenir la distinción de la *cubanidad*, condición genérica de cubano, y la *cubanía*, cubanidad plena, sentida, consciente y deseada; cubanidad responsable, cubanidad con las tres virtudes teologales, de fe, esperanza y amor. (153)

[3] *Los factores humanos de la cubanidad*. Havana: Molina y Cía, 1940.

This neologism was inspired by Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno, who according to Gustavo Pérez Firmat,

> had established a similar distinction between *hispanidad* and *hispanía*. According to Unamuno, just as there is a difference between *humanidad*, a generic attribute, and *hombría*, an individual virtue. Following Unamuno, Ortiz defined *cubanía* as a higher and more complete *cubanidad*. [...] Rather than an accident of birth or a menu of manners and mannerisms, *cubanía* forms part of one's inner life: it's not asserted but felt, it's not flaunted but desired; it's not a reflex but a choice. (7-8)

Although Pérez Firmat describes *cubanía* as an "individual virtue," this in no way implies that collective national consciousness plays no part in it. On the contrary, the term signifies the expression of an entire nation's (or people's) common nature (or awareness) through the individual. Seen in this light, *cubanía* is the unifying thread of being and thought that brings together as one all Cubans. The previous definition also implies the active use of individual will since *cubanía* is "desired" and is a "choice." Keeping this in mind, if we accept Ortiz's definition of the term as "a higher and more complete *cubanidad*," we must conclude that the most profoundly authentic state of Cuban existence is one that results from the exercise of personal volition, yet also firmly grounds itself in a collective identity. However, since there has been and continues to be a wide range of views as to what constitutes the exact nature of the "true" national essence, both within and without the island, *cubanía* remains a term whose precise definition largely depends on the person or group who gives it.

As might be expected, understanding of the concept broadly falls into two camps: that of Cuban exiles in the United States, and that of those who have remained on the island. Within these two groups there are endless divisions and subdivisions. The main defining issue appears to

be the attitude taken towards Fidel Castro and his regime. In this regard, perspectives among Cubans range from outright and total rejection of everything that the post-1959 revolutionary society represents to undying devotion and unquestioning loyalty to a political chief considered to be the preeminent national hero and the realization of the island's long-cherished dream of true independence and authentic leadership. Between these two extremes are countless variations, just as much in Miami as in Havana. So, it is of course not surprising to see that there is no general consensus about *cubanía*'s deeper significance.

One surprising function of differing views among Cubans is to actually sharpen at opposing extremes common perspectives regarding authentic national identity. In other words, in this case self-definition is brought into greater relief by rejecting the ideological basis of the "other's" point of view. This is the equivalent of saying that one comes to know one's true self more profoundly by disbelieving what the enemy believes and vice-versa. Since this study investigates the *cubanía* of a playwright who has openly favored the 1959 revolution and has consistently supported the society that has resulted from it (although his questioning of its leadership is an entirely different matter), it is helpful at this point to consider those views which are greatly at odds with his. In his plays Estorino himself has presented several characters that evidence the general outlook frequently associated with the Miami exile community. The purpose of their inclusion in his drama is none other than to highlight the sharp contrast between their views and those of Cubans determined to remain on the island and support the revolutionary way of life.

Among Miami exiles who have expressed their thoughts about the deeper significance of *cubanía*, and who therefore to a significant extent share the perspectives expressed by the aforementioned characters in Estorino's plays, Ana María Alvarado serves as a good example.

She neatly summarizes the role that ideology has played in the separation of the Cuban people into two opposing camps: “Somos soplados por el Ser Supremo, nada más ni nada menos. Allá los darwinianos que se creen descendientes de simios. […] ¡La personalidad cubana, pues, la conforma la creación divina y ay del que lo dude!” (26). Although in this quote Alvarado doesn’t refer directly to the Marxism-Leninism that ideologically predominates on the island, her fierce opposition to it can easily be read between the lines. This means that on the most fundamental level she sees the current national regime as simply inauthentic, since revolutionary society since 1959 has purported to base itself upon the principles of “scientific” Marxist-Leninist socialism rather than Judeo-Christian ethics. Other observations by Alvarado regarding the essential Cuban character (21-26) tend to gravitate towards what Pérez Firmat has termed *cubaneo*:

> Like *cubanidad*, *cubaneo* manifests itself externally; but unlike *cubanidad*, it isn’t borne out in legal documents or governmental decrees, but in a loose repertoire of gestures, customs, vocabulary. While *cubanidad* is the serious formal designation of Cubanness, *cubaneo* is its irreverent doublet. Rather than naming *un estado civil*, *cubaneo* names *un estado de ánimo*, a mood, a temperament, what used to be called a “national character.” Its frame of reference is not *un país*—a political entity—but *un pueblo*—a social and cultural entity. Thus, *cubaneo* finds expression in all of those habits of thought and speech and behavior that we know as typically *criollos*—the informality, the humor, the exuberance, the docility. (4-5)

Since Alvarado doesn’t draw a distinction between *cubaneo* and *cubanía*, it is apparent that for her the two terms are interchangeable. The strongest evidence that she gives for this is by stating outright that: “El verdadero significado de ‘ser’ para el cubano de todos los tiempos ha sido el

existir a como dé lugar. Es más, el ser se concibe no sólo como existencia, sino como saber existir y sacarle partido a toda ella" (24). If this quotation is examined closely, it is evident that for the author, *cubanía* (here defined as the "verdadero significado de 'ser'") is an ubiquitous Cuban quality ("para el cubano de todos los tiempos") for those who exist "a como dé lugar." Therefore, in this case no effective distinction is made between *cubanía* and *cubaneo*. It should be noted that the true essence of Cuban existencial initiative (will) is here presented in the context of improvisation and adaptation ("a como dé lugar" and "sacarle partido a toda ella") as responses to one's situation in life. The wider implication of all this is to portray the "authentic" Cuban as one who is essentially reactionary (conservative) rather than proactive[4] (radical). By inference, it is clear that the former refers to the Miami exiles whereas the latter alludes to the supporters of the national regime. Since post-1959 revolutionary society has represented a radical break with what preceded it, and can even be seen as the triumph of *cubanía* over nonessential aspects of *cubaneo* (such as the *choteo*),[5] the refusal to make a distinction between terms amounts in this case to a fundamental rejection of the core activist values embodied by Castro's Cuba. This attitude is reflected in those anti-revolutionary characters in Estorino's plays who argue in favor of behaving in a reactionary way to national circumstances instead of taking a proactive role in unfolding events. Of course, to be fair to Alvarado, reactionary attitudes still thrive among many within Cuba who support the regime. This is a prominent theme in much of

[4] The terms "reactionary" and "proactive" are used here in a strictly literal sense: "reactionary" entails a reaction against the 1959 revolution, whereas "proactive" infers an active participation in the revolutionary process. There need be neither a pejorative nor a complimentary sense to either term. The underlying assumption here is that the 1959 revolution was a proactive event, since it strove to create its own political environment instead of simply participating in the one that already existed. Likewise, "conservative" and "radical" are here only used in relation to pre-1959 Cuban society—there should be no value judgment implied in the use of these terms either.

[5] Kapcia refers to this concept by noting that "popular culture [in 1950s Cuba] tended to sustain the image of the self-respecting Cuban male as an untameable, incorrigible, sexually predatory 'character', with a self-deprecating cynicism—the *choteo*—that, presumably, undermined any collectivist ethos" (86).

Estorino's drama, although unlike Alvarado, he tends to view reactionary individuals in a somewhat negative light.

According to the views of Cuban exiles like Alvarado who see the 1959 revolution as a complete mistake and therefore a grave aberration within the context of their nation's historical trajectory, the Castro regime has undertaken the task of systematically perverting the essential characteristics of the people. This is because for them *cubanía* is an inherent identity that was already fully realized prior to 1959, but has since been seriously compromised by an alien ideology. For such exiles, the individual will implied by *cubanía* simply refers to one's capacity to respond effectively—perhaps in a patriotic context—to life situations; his or her existential authenticity in terms of *cubanía* (that is, in relation to the collective) is a given. This must at least partly explain why Che Guevara's concept of the New Man[6] rings so hollow for them, as well as for those Cubans still living on the island who do not see the need of undergoing any radical personal transformation for the sake of the collective good.[7] In much of Estorino's work we witness the individual's resistance to abandoning ways rooted in pre-1959 society and the reluctance to replace them with new values. In contrast to such reactionary tendencies, the revolutionary concept of *cubanía* is that of a project continually in progress, begun during the earliest efforts to achieve independence from Spain. It is a lofty goal never fully attained but always aspired to, therefore the quest for a completely authentic Cuban existence that is

[6] Guevara insisted that the ongoing Cuban revolution have as its primary goal the radical transformation of individual consciousness and being, in other words, the creation of the New Man. This concept implies (and still implies today) the systematic elimination of reactionary outlook, behavior and attitudes that have their origin in pre-1959 society, and their replacement with revolutionary ones. According to this outlook, such profound individual changes have as their goal the betterment of the collective. Authentic *cubanía* is not seen as a given in this case, but rather as something to be earned through heroic effort, and the end result of radical personal transformation.

[7] I do not mean to discount here the existence of other kinds of ethical outlooks among the Miami exile community. For example, the Christian faith teaches the importance of performing acts of charity and of loving and serving one's fellow man, but in this case the need for personal transformation is related primarily to individual salvation rather than to the collective good. Likewise, many non-Marxist rational philosophies emphasize the importance of putting the needs of the community before those of the individual, although they do not always necessarily imply the need for personal transformation for the purpose of improving society as a whole.

grounded in an undying commitment to a truly independent and totally realized nation. This revolutionary attitude is epitomized in some significant way by all characters in Estorino's plays who are meant by him to serve as positive examples of *cubanía*.

In addition to considering the relationship between individual will and collective awareness and being, *cubanía* must also be understood by taking into account the island's history. Once again, it is an issue in which attitudes towards Fidel Castro serve to divide Cubans into two opposing camps: those who see the realization of the historical promise of true *cubanía* in their revolutionary leader, and those who witness the betrayal of its long tradition in a godless despot. However, despite such fundamental differences of perspective, both sides admit that the formation of the collective identity of the people has been an ongoing process, and that it has been far from simple. The Miami exile José Ignacio Rasco notes:

> En el caso cubano, la cubanía surge de un largo y fecundo proceso de integración en donde lo indígena, lo africano y lo hispano se han ido amasando en el transcurso de las centurias. Sin descontar tampoco otras influencias diversas posteriores. "Injértese en nuestras repúblicas el mundo" sentenció Martí. (339)

The inspiration for these words no doubt owes much to Fernando Ortiz's concept of the *ajiaco*, or Cuban stew, composed of the most diverse ingredients. For him it well symbolizes "la formación del pueblo cubano," and is above all "una cazuela abierta" (155). He extends the metaphor to the historical plane with the following remarks:

> Y así ha ido hirviendo y cocinando el ajiaco de Cuba, a fuego vivaz o a rescoldo, limpio o sucio, vario en cada época según las sustancias humanas que se metieran en la olla por las manos del cocinero, que en esta metáfora son las peripecias de la historia. [...] Mestizaje de cocinas, mestizaje de razas, mestizaje de culturas.

> Caldo denso de civilización que borbollea en el fogón del Caribe. [...] Acaso se piense que la cubanidad haya que buscarla en esa salsa de nueva y sintética suculencia formada por la fusión de los linajes humanos desleídos en Cuba; pero no, la cubanidad no está solamente en el resultado sino también en el mismo proceso complejo de su formación, desintegrativo e integrativo, en los elementos sustanciales entrados en su acción, en el ambiente en que se opera y en las vicisitudes de su transcurso. (156-157)

In other words, the national identity is not simply a sincretic composition of all the diverse cultural and ethnic elements involved in its formation, but rather the organic result of a highly complex process of fusion and assimilation. As is the case with any collective national identity, in order to truly understand what its defining characteristics are today, one must probe deeply into the historical context in which it was forged. This is precisely what Estorino does in plays such as *Milanés* (1973), *Vagos rumores* (1989) and *Parece blanca* (1994), all three of which dramatize racial interaction and tensions in Nineteenth-Century Cuba's past, thereby shedding light on present-day realities.

However, *cubanía*'s context within the island's history cannot be limited to issues dealing exclusively with the formation of an ethnically and culturally diverse national identity. One must of course take into account the chiefly ideological and hence political aspects involved in the development of *cubanía* over the years. This is not to deny the impact of race and culture on ideology, but rather to emphasize the effect that politically-oriented perspectives have had upon a complex society. An excellent study of the role played by ideology in the development of *cubanía* can be found in Antoini Kapcia's book *Cuba: Island of Dreams*, which seeks to explain the historical evolution of *cubanía* both before and after the 1959 revolution. It should be noted

here that Kapcia's analysis of post-1959 Cuba focuses upon the development of ideology on the island; the views of the Miami exile community are not actively considered. Therefore, Kapcia's rather disinterested investigations with regard to post-revolutionary *cubanía* serve as an effective counterpoint to—although not necessarily a refutation of—the emotionally charged views of anti-Castro writers like Ana María Alvarado. More importantly, Kapcia's observations on the subject may be used as an excellent base upon which to build an understanding of the ideological cosmovision within which Estorino's plays are contextualized and from which they draw so much inspiration.

Unlike other writers mentioned in this study, Kapcia avoids a single neat and static definition of *cubanía*. To do so would be to deny the historical evolution of Cuban identity. Rather, he sees it as an ongoing process:

> [*C*]*ubanía* should not be taken at face value. For a start, it has been a deliberately vague concept, malleable and adaptable to all, by all, and for all, and yet has never quite lost the exclusive character of its foundation, as a white, intellectual notion. Therefore, one fundamental factor in the organicity and legitimacy of *cubanía* has been the role of politico-historical myth within the ideology's trajectory, without which *cubanía* would not have been able to evolve and adapt while retaining its core elements and core credibility. (7)

Politico-historical myth here signifies the devoted belief in individuals, organizations or other entities (either human or ideological) whose histories—the significant events and deeds associated with their existence—are held up as exemplary guides for individual as well as collective being and action. In other words, myth in this context establishes the basis upon which collective national identity can be founded. Just as various new myths and mythical figures have

appeared throughout Cuba's history, so too has the people's perception of themselves evolved accordingly. Kapcia notes that several different kinds of *cubanía* have existed throughout the nation's history:

> [T]his study's purpose is clear—to trace and explain the trajectory, the evolution of *cubanía* (explained here as the teleological belief in *cubanidad*) from a minority (white) intellectual concerns, to a broader ideology of dissent (*cubanía rebelde*) that underpinned much of Cuban radical dissidence from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s, and finally evolved into the post-Revolutionary *cubanía revolucionaria*, a newly hegemonic ideology of dissent that became fundamental in guiding the revolutionary process through the maelstrom of the first decade and the competing orthodoxies of the more respectably socialist years, to the critical 1990s, where it became a vital element in guaranteeing survival, in balancing the demands for continuity and change, stability and adaptation, and in searching for yet another identity of the *nación*. (6-7)

Each of these historically-based forms of *cubanía* are manifested at one time or another in Estorino's plays. For example, *Milanés*, set in the nineteenth century, explores the first stirrings of the painful transition from a *cubanía* exclusive to "minority (white) intellectual concerns" to one based upon "a broader ideology of dissent (*cubanía rebelde*)." Likewise, *El robo del cochino* masterfully portrays the historical moment in which *cubanía rebelde* is replaced by the hegemony of *cubanía revolucionaria*. Finally, the concerns of *cubanía* in the difficult Special Period of the 1990s are allegorically expressed in *El baile* (1999). Other plays address concerns related to collective national identity, some more directly than others.

From these observations, however, one should not conclude that Estorino has simply given a dramatic representation of the official government ideology. Rather, the intention is to show how the various historical phases in the development of *cubanía* (subversive prior to 1959 and hegemonic after) have provided context for the author's plays. As mentioned earlier, *cubanía* can be seen as a necessary individual goal, in other words, the attainment of a fully authentic inner reality within the context of collective existence. In this sense, it is too limiting to think of it as simply an ideological construct created by the vanguard to be used as a tool of indoctrination and applied to the masses. Instead, it should be seen as a collective but never completely unified vision that owes just as much to the everyday individual's relationship to history and mundane existence as to the ideological aspirations of those who have been instrumental in shaping Cuban realities throughout the centuries. For these reasons there is not a neat correspondence between the Castro government's ideas about *cubanía* and Estorino's. In fact, any casual observer of post-revolutionary society can easily see that tremendous discrepancies in perspective and outlook have existed and continue to exist at all levels, and that such views have been significantly affected by the passage of time. Everyone on the island is free to privately develop her own vision of what the nation and its citizens should be like, but freedom to openly express one's deepest-held views is another matter. Estorino is a playwright who has at times taken considerable risks in dramatizing his personal understanding of *cubanía*, while on other occasions his theatrical discourse has harmonized well with the government's.[8] At any rate, his way of seeing his native country and its people is always exclusively his own, regardless of the ideological[9] content present in his individual plays.

[8] The concepts of transgression and conformity within Cuban society will be discussed in greater detail futher on in this study.

[9] Perhaps the broadest definition of ideology is as "the general material process of production of ideas, beliefs and values in social life" (Eagleton, 28). According to Kapcia, Terry Eagleton "equates" this term "with 'culture,'

As previously noted, since *cubanía* is a concept that must necessarily be understood within an historical context, a study of Estorino's works must take into account the role that history plays in them. The first step is to consider all the ways in which temporal considerations are important for the interpretation of drama. Two factors in this regard are key: 1) the date intended for a particular play's premier;[10] 2) the setting or contextualization within the play itself, whether in the "present" of the premier or at some moment in the past. For the purposes of this study, these two aspects will be collectively referred to as factors of historical contextualization in drama.[11]

In literary works of a supposedly universal and timeless quality, these matters may be thought by some critics to have relatively less importance than other literary concerns. For instance, one could argue that the play *Oedipus Rex* can be fully appreciated and understood without investigating too much into the historical realities associated with the approximate date of its first presentation to the Greek public or the historical context of the play's setting, in this case a distant, mythological past. For example, it is commonly understood that a Jungian analysis of this work yields fruitful results. However, a critical reading that takes into account the social, political and cultural circumstances of ancient Greece will no doubt also shed much light on

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according to which political thought is socially determined" (12). Kapcia himself "sees ideology as composed of a variable number of codes, which are, in a sense, the building-blocks of the ideology, defining separately the values, as beliefs, that will collectively form the whole belief-system that constitutes an ideology. What, then, is a 'code?' It is a set of related and cognate belief and principles that can be grouped together to make a coherent belief in a single, given, value" (13).

[10] Of course, the date of actual composition is also important, but considerably more problematic, since a work may be composed, then shelved for several years, and then edited—whether extensively or only slightly—in preparation for rehearsals and the play's premiere. Hence, without knowing exactly what modifications to the original script have taken place, and to what degree these changes have affected the drama, one must assume that the author, if responsible for the script upon which the premiere is based, has presented the work for the premiere's audience, and not for a potential audience that existed at the time of initial composition.

[11] There is no definite article placed before the term since the two aspects mentioned are not the only ones that can be considered as factors of historical contextualization in drama. Other possibilities in this regard will be considered further on in this study.

Sophocles's classic. The point here is to show that historical context can be a useful tool for literary analysis even in the case of such literature that seems to transcend time and place.

In order to fully explain the significance of this concept for literary analysis, it is helpful to consider the model for linguistic communication devised by Roman Jakobson,[12] in which an addresser (playwright) sends a message (the play) to the addressee (the play's audience at its premier). The message is defined by the following factors: 1) it uses a code familiar to both addresser and addressee, which in the case of a play would be spoken, non-verbal, and visual language; 2) it has a context or referent that makes it intelligible; 3) it is transmitted through a contact, which here would refer to all aspects of stage representation. It is clear that all three of these aspects must be comprehensible to the audience, otherwise the text's ideological intent[13] cannot be accurately transmitted by the message. It is also apparent that in drama, factors of historical contextualization play a key role in determining the addressee's interpretation of the message. Likewise, a thorough consideration of these factors is indispensable for inferring the message's intent.[14]

For example, *Milanés*, although set in the nineteenth century, nonetheless addresses issues that would have profound relevance for the Cuban public in the early 1970s, when this

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[12] Selden, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985: 3.

[13] By this is meant what the text (as a manifestation of the author's mind) ultimately intends to transmit ideologically to an audience. Determining this is a highly problematic exercise for three main reasons. Firstly, even though an author may specify exactly what her ideological intent is, she may not be telling the truth for any number of reasons, or she herself may not completely or accurately understand the text's ideological implications. Secondly, what the author intends and what an audience interprets (in and of itself a plurality of interpretations) may be two entirely different things. Thirdly, the critic may discover an ideological message that differs significantly from what the author intends and that bears little resemblance to what an audience may largely perceive. However, since this is a critical study, priority is given here to the critic's own determination of ideological intent by means of a careful study of the text and a careful consideration of the factors of historical contextualization in drama.

[14] The following views of David Bleich give a useful explanation of ideological intent in literature: "Every utterance indicates an *intention* and every act of interpreting an utterance is a *conferring* of meaning. Since this is true of all human attempts to explain experience, we can best understand the arts if we ask—what are the motives of those who create 'symbolic' renderings of experience? What are the individual and communal occasions for their response and creativity?" (123-124).

play was first rehearsed. For this reason, one can hardly defend a critical interpretation based upon the misleading notion that *Milanés* is nothing more than an artistic representation of a prominent figure in nineteenth-century letters. The collective cosmovision of 1970s Cuba, although not presented directly here, nonetheless completely permeates the script. Perhaps more importantly, *Milanés* is about a writer who for many has traditionally epitomized the inner reality of the nation, therefore there is special significance in the presentation of a radical reinterpretation of his life to a 1970s audience that had in the last decade collectively undergone a process of profound ideological reorientation. The historical distancing that the text presents ultimately serves not to alienate the spectator from what is represented, but on the contrary to invite her to see the clear and meaningful connections between Cuban past and present. Determining just what these connections are requires the investigator to actively consider the historical context of the play's first audiences,[15] since we must assume that the author directed his work to them. This implies that the work has to a significant extent been created with a certain kind of audience in mind, therefore one that has certain common qualities for interpreting ideological meaning as a result of sharing a common trajectory through space and time. Although each individual member of such an audience will not draw the same conclusions about the play, there will be commonalities in the way it is perceived. In a discussion of Jonathan

[15] From the critic's point of view this necessarily requires the ideation of a hypothetical audience, in other words, of a group of anonymous individuals from a particular time and place in history who, in conformity with these factors, share certain tendencies in interpretation. Of course, in any real audience there are as many possible interpretations of a play as there are spectators present. However, this fact does not mean that common tendencies in audience interpretation are not possible, even when taking into account the possibilities for ideological heterogeneity among an audience. It should not be imagined that the identification of such tendencies is so problematic as to render it unfit as a critical approach. Nor should it be supposed that concrete evidence—such as extensive interviews of all audience members after a play's presentation or reviews in which the audience's reactions are described—must be presented before offering any views with regard to an audience's possible interpretation of a play's ideological message. For the critic, it is only necessary to understand the historical context of the hypothetical target audience in order to infer common tendencies in that audience's interpretative strategies. This can in turn facilitate an understanding of the text's ideological intent, since the play is directed to such an audience and must to a significant extent be informed by an awareness of its general ideological makeup and common tendencies in interpretation.

Culler's ideas, Selden notes that "[w]hile readers may differ about meaning they may well follow the same set of interpretative conventions" (120-121).

It may be asserted that a Cuban audience shares certain distinctive qualities with spectators from culturally similar countries. For example, Alberto Julián Pérez recognizes in Latin American society "tres tipos de lectores: el lector *dependiente autolimitado* (colonizado), el lector *dependiente contestatario* y el *lector salvaje***"** (282). The first reader fully and unquestioningly accepts the ideology of capitalist cultural production and cannot interpret literature outside of the parameters it dictates, the second calls capitalist cultural ideology into question yet finds herself bound within the discourse that it creates, and the third manages to transcend capitalist-created discourse and interpret literature from a truly liberated point of view. Despite the revolutionary socialist rhetoric of the Castro regime, it is apparent that all three types of these readers—and not just the third one—have existed and continue to exist in Cuba. However, Pérez's system of classification can hardly be expected to define any one individual under all possible situations where interpretation of literature may occur. Also, if all Cuban audiences were entirely composed of "lectores salvajes," Castro would already have his ideologically "perfect" society. A close look at Estorino's work reveals that the three types of readers appear at one time or another as characters. Since his plays are supposed to be a reflection of Cuban society, it may be assumed that his drama simultaneously directs itself to all three kinds of Latin American readers and spectators, who necessarily share key interpretative tendencies. Were it not so, they would be unable to personally identify with the author's drama.

Cuba's status as a Caribbean culture is another important factor in considering the reception of its literature by its own people. Since the history of the island peoples is so unique,

complex and full of abrupt and radical changes, it might seem to be a difficult task to envision the common interpretative tendencies of a Cuban audience. Antonio Benítez Rojo observes:

> The main obstacles to any global study of the Caribbean's societies, insular or continental, are exactly those things that scholars usually adduce to define the area: its fragmentation; its instability; its reciprocal isolation; its uprootedness; its cultural heterogeneity; its lack of historiography and historical continuity; its contingency and impermanence; its syncretism, etc. (1)

Nonetheless, it is possible to conduct a fruitful investigation of the Cuban audience's mindset through a careful consideration of historically contextualized *cubanía*. In consideration of the island's Caribbean nature, such an investigation avoids excessively broad generalities in its conclusions, yet is keen to point out the shared ways in which the island's spectators have viewed theater.

Any audience's cosmovision is significantly affected by historical context since the conditions of human existence have always been undergoing a continual process of change. For example, an American Broadway musical presented to an all-Cuban audience in Havana in 1950 would very likely have received a far different reception from the one it might have gotten in 1970, if indeed such an event had been possible in that year. In 1950, *cubanía rebelde* was not in a position to decisively direct the majority of national sentiment against the products of American cultural production, whereas in 1970 *cubanía revolucionaria* was hegemonic and therefore able to do just that. However, it must be understood that this opposition was not and is not directed at American cultural production *per se*, but rather at the ideological content for which it has been the bearer. Therefore, the change in public perspective between 1950 and 1970 that developed both in reaction to and in concordance with important historical developments

served to significantly alter common tendencies in ideological interpretation. Nonetheless, it should not be inferred from these statements that the Cuban intellectual vanguard[16] or government has exercised complete control over the interpretative faculties of the population. It is necessary to go beyond a mere analysis of the government's official line in order to get a clearer picture of common tendencies in the people's mindset. Society as a whole must be carefully considered. Only then can the ideological concerns of the play be fully addressed.

This is of course not the first critical study to approach literature with an emphasis on the addressee's reception of the text, whether spoken (as in a play) or read. The term "reception theory" refers to the common body of work done by those literary critics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have investigated the reception of text by the addressee. Some of the concepts outlined by these authors will be used in this study for the purpose of interpreting the relationship between dramatist, play and audience, thus throwing greater light upon important aspects of *cubanía* and historical context in Abelardo Estorino's drama.

In considering the relationship between messenger, text and addressee in a literary context, one must first define the exact nature of the interaction taking place between each one. If the focus is placed upon the addressee (whether reader or spectator), the first step is to explain the nature of her interaction with the text. Rather than suggesting that the reader is "a passive recipient of an entirely formulated meaning," Selden, in a discussion of Jakobson's views, asserts that she "applies the code in which the message is written and in this way *actualises* what would otherwise remain only potentially meaningful," thus making her "an active agent in the making of meaning" (107). Nonetheless, it should be noted here that any interpretative act takes place

[16] Just what constitutes such a group remains a matter of significant disagreement both within and without Cuba. The term is used here in the most inclusive sense possible, meaning anyone considered by a significant part of the population at any time in history to be a member of the intellectual vanguard.

within the context of the interpreter's own ideological framework, which is in turn greatly influenced by her position in time and space.

When considering factors of historical contextualization in drama, two distinct interpretative categories can be imagined with relation to the actualization referred to by Jakobson. Firstly, in plays whose temporal and geographical setting is the same as the intended spectator's, the actualization that takes place involves a direct association of realities, one of which is the "reality" presented in the text and the other the concrete reality of the spectator. This means that she witnesses a version of her immediate reality[17] presented upon the stage and will consequently actualize in her mind the presentation she sees by relating it—whether consciously or subconsciously—to her own conception of her current reality. For the purposes of this study, such drama will be referred to as immediate. Of course, the spectator may discover aspects of *mimesis* in immediate drama that do not concur with her understanding of what is real.[18] Secondly, in drama whose action takes place in a temporal or geographical setting which differs significantly from the intended spectator's, the actualization that occurs must necessarily involve the comparison and contrast—rather than simple direct association—of textual "reality" with the spectator's reality.[19] In this investigation, such plays will be designated as remote drama. Since

[17] This implies the spectator's own highly personal reality as well as the general reality that surrounds her.

[18] Even though each audience for a play normally consists of several spectators, it may collectively be seen as one "reader." As such, it may be narratee, virtual reader or ideal reader. By "narratee" is meant in this case the actual physical audience. Selden, while discussing the ideas of Gerald Prince, notes that "[t]he narratee is […] distinguished from the 'virtual reader' (the sort of reader whom the author has in mind when developing the narrative) and the 'ideal reader' (the perfectly insightful reader who understands the writer's every move)." Owing to these factors, plays will inevitably "produce their own 'readers' or 'listeners', who may or may not coincide with actual readers" (109-110), just as Prince has argued that narratives do.

[19] Both immediate and remote drama require the audience or reader to infer meaning in a personal and historically contextualized sense, since literary text is of course more than a simple code to be deciphered. In a discussion of the ideas of Wolfgang Iser, Selden observes that "[t]he meaning of the text is never self-formulated; the reader must act upon the textual material in order to produce meaning. [...] [L]iterary texts always contain 'blanks' which only the reader can fill" (109). This interpretative process becomes more challenging when one approaches texts whose representations of reality are not in complete accord with the considered views of the hegemonic order. While considering the views of Hans Robert Jauss, Selden observes that the writer of such texts "directly affronts the prevailing expectations of his or her day" (116).

all of the plays addressed here have the same geographical context as that of their originally intended audiences, this study will limit itself to the analysis of temporal differences when exploring remote drama.

In considering immediate and remote drama, it should be kept in mind that both can be seen as either contemporary or past literature with regard to the date of composition. With the passage of time, immediate drama begins to take on the qualities of past literature. This is because a present-day audience, owing to the intervening changes that have occurred since the time of the play's originally intended audience, can no longer make the same direct association between the reality represented on stage and its own reality. For example, Estorino's *Las penas saben nadar*—first performed in 1989 and published in 2000—is immediate drama consisting of a long monologue performed by one actress who pretends to speak improvisationally to the audience as if she had not really memorized the script prepared for her, while reciting a few lines here and there from another play.[20] The hyperrealism used here demands an immediate identification between spectator and representation. Basically, the audience is not asked to suspend disbelief, but rather to accept *mimesis* as reality itself.[21] Also, there is a very specific context for the play's presentation, the Segundo Festival del Monólogo in Havana in 1989. The monologue is supposed to be taking place within this exact context. Therefore, the play unavoidably became past literature the very instant that its premiere ended.

Unlike immediate drama, remote drama, when set in the past as opposed to in a hypothetical future, evidences from the date of its premiere certain qualities that are associated

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[20] This technique is often referred to as metatheater, or theater-within-theater, and is present in various plays by Estorino. The greater significance of this method will be explored at length further on in this study.

[21] This also occurs in *Ni un sí ni un no*, *Morir del cuento*, and *Que el diablo te acompañe* (1987). In all of these plays, the false impression is explicitly given that *mimesis* has been suspended and that the actors are not acting, but rather just being themselves.

with past literature. [22] This is because the temporal setting of remote drama, as is the case in all past literature, does not correspond to the immediate reality of the audience. Therefore, in such plays the spectator must inevitably compare and contrast the past that is represented on stage with her own present-day reality.[23] This process is not dissimiliar to the reader's interaction with past literature. In a discussion of the ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Selden argues that,

> all interpretations of past literature arise from a dialogue between past and present. Our attempts to understand a work will depend on the questions which our own cultural environment allows us to raise. At the same time, we seek to discover the questions which the work itself was trying to answer in its own dialogue with history (115).[24]

Remote drama is of course significantly impacted by the historical context in which it is created. Such drama, like immediate drama, has an intended original audience, and therefore its content must to a certain extent be shaped accordingly by the author's perception of the shared interpretative characteristics of that audience.[25] For example, several of Shakespeare's historical plays are naturally examples of remote drama, since their originally-intended audience would have understood that the dramatic action was set in the past. However, there are very great

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[22] Since none of Estorino's drama is set within a hypothetical future context, this study will not address the issue. If a play's setting is not in the present or the past, it can only be in an imaginary time frame which may be futuristic, mythological, fantastic, etc. Such types of theater fall outside the scope of immediate and remote drama as defined in this study. Since a definite knowledge of the future is technically impossible, remote drama can really only refer to plays whose action is set in the past.

[23] According to Jauss's views, "a hermeneutical notion of 'understanding' does not separate knower and object in the familiar fashion of empirical science, but views understanding as a 'fusion' of past and present: we cannot make our journey into the past without taking the present with us" (Selden, 116).

[24] Of course, Gadamer's views here also describe perfectly the interpretative method employed in this study.

[25] It may be argued that there is no need for any significant connection between the *mimesis* of a play and the concrete reality experienced by the audience outside of the theater. However, in a discussion of Gadamer's views, Selden notes that "while a literary work does not represent objects, it does refer to the extra-literary world by selecting certain norms, value systems or 'world-views.' These norms are concepts of reality which help human beings to make sense of the chaos of their experience. The text adopts a 'repertoire'of such norms and suspends their validity within its fictional world" (112-113). It may be assumed that such "norms" must not only be comprehensible to the audience, but must also be to a significant extent personally relevant.

differences between the interpretative capacities of a Seventeenth Century audience as opposed to a present-day one, so much so that practically any printed edition of these plays will be filled with copious notes and references for the purpose of helping the modern-day reader to understand the dramatic content just as a contemporary of Shakespeare might have done. In the same way, a present-day Cuban audience that watches a presentation of *El robo del cochino*, also an example of remote drama, cannot be expected to interpret it exactly the same way as the play's original audience in 1961. The most obvious reason is that the play is set in the year 1958, which at the time of the premiere was only three years distant. Therefore, the events represented in *El robo...* would have evoked a strong sense of immediacy at that time, since the members of that audience would have experienced them quite recently. In contrast, an audience in 2006 will see the events portrayed in *El robo...* as forty-eight years distant, and for this reason will not experience the exact same kind of identification with them. The critic may choose to interpret the text of this play as if she were sitting in the audience at its 1961 premiere. In this way she can come to a fuller standing of the work's ideological intent.

Despite these considerations, one may assert that an independent-minded person, whether a critic or audience member, can meaningfully interpret a play without taking into account factors of historical contextualization. Although the possibilities for interpreting a particular text are endless, one should not deny the historical limitations imposed upon any single interpretation. In a discussion of the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Selden observes:

> [He] argued that what is distinctive about human existence is its *Dasein* ("givenness"): our consciousness both *projects* the things of the world and at the same time *is subjected* to the world by the very nature of existence in the world. We find ourselves "flung down" into the world, into a time and place we did not

> choose, but at the same time it is our world in so far as our consciousness projects it. We can never adopt an attitude of detached contemplation, looking down upon the world as if from a mountain top. We are inevitably merged with the very object of our consciousness. Our thinking is always in a situation and is therefore always *historical*, although this history is not external and social but personal and inward. (111)

This historical thinking forms an integral part of the spectator's identity, which both informs the nature of such thinking and is in turn informed by it. Personal identity is itself a kind of "theme" that serves to guide interpretation of drama. Considering the views of Norman Holland, Selden notes that,

> every child receives the imprint of a "primary identity" from its mother. The adult has an "identity theme" which, like a musical theme, is capable of variation but remains a central structure of stable identity. When we read a text, we process it in accordance with our identity theme. We "use the literary work to symbolize and finally replicate ourselves." We recast the work to discover our own characteristic strategies for coping with the deep fears and wishes that shape our psychic lives. (122)

Following from these views, it can be inferred that *cubanía*—as a collective and personal identity imprinted upon the "child" (Cuban individual) by the "mother" (Cuba)[26]—is necessarily a form of historically contextualized thinking. In the case of Estorino and all Cuban interpreters of his work, *cubanía* must not only inform the author's creation of the text, but also the

[26] The word "Cuba" should here signify *patria* in the widest sense in order to include Cubans living both within and outside of the country.

interpreter's way of reading—whether as spectator or reader—the play.[27] Although this study has emphasized the importance of considering the common interpretative tendencies of a play's premiere audience, this does not necessarily imply that they should be given priority over those of a later audience. In a discussion of Jauss's views, Selden observes that,

> [he] uses the term 'horizon of expectations' to describe the criteria readers use to judge literary texts in any given period. […] The original horizon of expecations only tells us how the work was valued and interpreted when it appeared, but does not establish its meaning finally. (115)

However, he also observes that,

> we will never be able to survey the successive horizons which flow from the time of a work down to the present day and then, with an Olympian detachment, to sum up to the work's final value or meaning. To do so would be to ignore our own historical situation. (115)

In light of these arguments, one may see the original horizon of expectations not as a privileged set of interpretative criteria with regard to "the work's final value or meaning," but rather as a favored perspective for investigating a text's original ideological intent.[28] In Estorino's case, a careful consideration of the original horizon of expectations simply serves to bring to light the ideological message that a particular play meant to convey to its audience at its premiere. Selden

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[27] Reception theory critic David Bleich's classroom experiments led him "to distinguish between (i) the reader's spontaneous 'response' to a text, and (ii) the 'meaning' the reader attributed to it" (Selden, 124). This study argues that the spontaneous "response" of the reader is ultimately the one that counts the most when considering a play's ideological content, since the "meaning" that the reader attributes to a text may only reflect prior ideological conditioning rather than genuinely personal reflection. Much of Estorino's drama undoubtedly has evoked and continues to evoke spontaneous "response" that is at odds with attributed "meaning." This is paralleled by situations in these same plays whose conflict stems from the confrontation between passively accepted ideas (attributed "meaning") and truly independent thought (spontaneous "response").

[28] Of course, the critic's own investigation of the original horizon of expectations must unavoidably be to some extent historically contextualized.

explains that, according to Jauss, the ultimate meaning of a text would constitute a "fusion of horizons," therefore a "total merging of all points of view which have arisen [...] which to the hermeneutical sense of the critic appear to be part of the gradually emerging totality of meanings which make up the true unity of the text" (115-116). Although undeniably important, such considerations go beyond the scope of this study.

It should not be imagined that Estorino and his Cuban audiences have always shared the same original horizon of expectations. On the contrary, what gives so many of the author's plays their thematic richness is the way in which they challenge the audience's usual preconceptions of themselves, the nation in which they live, and the leadership that directs their lives. According to Selden's interpretation of the views of Jauss, this process functions in the following way:

> It seems that, while texts do set the terms on which the reader actualises meanings, the reader's own "store of experience" will take some part in the process. The reader's existing consciousness will have to make certain internal adjustments in order to receive and process the alien viewpoints which the text presents as reading takes place. This situation produces the possibility that the reader's own "world-view" may be modified as a result of internalising, negotiating and realising the partially indeterminate elements of the text. (114)

Developing a fuller understanding of an audience's collective "store of experience" should be an important goal for any critical investigation that seeks to explore the nature of the ideological dialogue between text and premiere audience. By doing so, the critic can more readily identify how exactly the text intended to modify the original spectator's "world view." In *El peine y el espejo* (1956), for example, the author offers the audience an unflattering yet compelling mirror-image of itself, therefore one that both confirms the spectator's own cosmovision—in the sense

of accurately portraying it—while simultaneously problematizing it through the highlighting of its illogical and dysfunctional aspects. This same technique is put to admirable effect in *El robo del cochino, La casa vieja, Los mangos de Caín,* and several important plays from the 1980s and 90s, such as *Morir del cuento*.

The original audiences for these plays not only saw themselves reflected in them, but also interpreted the works themselves as an expression of their own collective identity. According to Selden's analysis of the views of Norman Holland, such an interpretative tendency can be described as "the interplay between the reader's identity theme and the text's unity: the latter is discovered by the reader as an expression of his or her identity theme" (123). As mentioned earlier, the discrepancies between the audience's own identity theme and the play's content allow for the modification of the former's world view. Likewise, such modification may be seen as a key goal with regard to the ideological purposes of literature. Therefore, in order to more fully comprehend the original ideological intent of Estorino's drama, it is essential to give careful consideration to the historical circumstances that not only contextualized the writing of the text itself, but also had a decisive impact upon the premiere audience's identity theme—its collective understanding of *cubanía*—and thus upon its interpretative tendencies.

El peine y el espejo, premiered in 1956, is the earliest play by Estorino addressed in this study. Therefore, it may be seen as marking the beginning of the historical framework for the creation and original reception of the author's drama. The play was first presented three years after Fidel Castro's unsuccessful Moncada barracks attack in 1953. In December of 1956, the young revolutionary arrived in Cuba with an invasion force from Mexico in the yacht *Granma*. Therefore, *El peine y el espejo* stands at the threshold of the revolutionary movement that would bring a new government to power in 1959. All subsequent works by the author have been

premiered after January of 1959, thus their creation and original reception are contextualized within revolutionary Cuba. Castro's revolution should be seen as an ongoing process instead of as one event that ended once the rebellion became the hegemonic order. It is a movement that can be divided into several different historical phases,[29] each one with its own distinguishing characteristics. Every individual phase has important implications for the original horizon of audience expectations as well as for the author's cosmovision at the time a particular work was written.

Of course, Cuban cultural production itself also forms an important part of the nation's historical trajectory, and is similarly characterized by its own phases of historical development. For example, *El peine y el espejo* was first represented in the shadow of the repressive Batista regime, and therefore does not venture any direct criticism of that government. Likewise, in 1964, the year in which *Los mangos de Caín* was premiered, any overt criticism of Castro's leadership would have automatically forestalled a play's premiere, and would have additionally resulted in harsh and immediate reprisals for the dramatist. However, drama in post-1959 Cuba should not only be seen in terms of the censorship imposed by institutional authority upon playwrights,[30] but also as "a medium for projecting the revolutionary message" (Medin, 131). Medin observes: "[F]rom very early on, theater reviews published in the ever-radical *Verde Olivo* established that a basic criterion for evaluating a work of theater was the extent to which it

[29] It should not be imagined that—in terms of its defining characteristics—each historical phase is neatly divided from those that precede and follow it. Rather, each one is simply marked at its beginning and end by important events or developments that have had a definitive impact upon government and society, and therefore establish a timeline for a particular period of development in Cuba. The duration of each historical phase in national society is not surprisingly a matter of debate. This study makes use of its own system of historical divisions while at the same time taking into consideration systems employed by others.

[30] Self-censorship should also be considered as a form of institutional control. This is when the writer edits her own material either to avoid problems with the authorities or to improve her chances of publication. Publishing activities in revolutionary Cuba have completely been under state control since 1968, therefore those individuals involved in state-sponsored publishing have had a clear incentive to only publish works that meet the approval of the authorities. These matters will be given greater consideration further on.

contributed to the spectator's revolutionary consciousness" (131). It is clear that Castro has striven from the beginning to facilitate the production of theater that will promote the cultural revolution his government has been attempting to lead. Roger Reed defines this kind of revolution as "[t]he campaign to create the New Man […] in the sense that the word 'culture' refers to the ideas, customs, and skills of a given people at a given time" (9). The leadership's ideas about what such a movement should entail have evolved in accordance with the nation's different historical phases. Estorino's theater has likewise unfailingly directed itself towards the furtherance of the cultural revolution in Cuba, although the author's conception of what this means has not always been in complete agreement with the government's.

This study divides the author's theatrical production into different historical phases, each of which is represented by one chapter. Every individual phase is characterized by particular tendencies in Estorino's dramatic production during those years. These chapters begin with a general overview of Cuban history—in terms of both political and cultural developments—for the time period under consideration. This is followed by a detailed examination of plays by the author that correspond to the historical time frame given. This analysis seeks to explore aspects of *cubanía* in Estorino's work through a careful consideration of relevant factors relating to historical contextualization in drama. Emphasis is placed upon defining the original horizon of expectations for each play, since the author's historically-contextualized awareness played a key role in the formulation of the text's ideological intent. Certain prominent themes in the author's work, such as race, gender and authority, are considered in relation to *cubanía* and historical context. The final chapter presents this study's conclusions.

CHAPTER 2:

1956-1961: "Variaciones machistas sobre familias provincianas."[31]

Abelardo Estorino began his career as a dramatist during the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista (1952-1958). The Cuban nation, long closely aligned with the United States politically, economically and culturally, was during those years experiencing internal tensions that would eventually lead to a revolution destined to sever connections with its powerful northern neighbor and ultimately strengthen ties with the Soviet Union. There was an ever-widening gap between the general public's growing material aspirations and what was realistically within its reach. This had just as much to do with the low prices paid internationally for Cuba's all-important sugar harvest as with endemic political corruption and the relative indifference of national leadership towards the welfare of the population as a whole. In addition, Batista's United-States-supported coup in 1952 did much to erode the people's faith in the nation's political system as well as to create a profound feeling of distrust towards Washington.

Still, the early years of the Batista dictatorship were in many ways characterized by the complacent willingness of the people to accept the unfortunate state of affairs under which they were compelled to live. Since the announcement of the establishment of the Republic in 1902, Cuba had suffered under a long series of corrupt and repressive administrations usually given the full backing of the United States government. In this sense, Batista was seen by many as simply the continuation of political tradition on the island. Without a significant change in the direction of leadership, 1950s society for the most part represented the conservation of standard models for human interaction, belief and thought. The capitalist system of the north was widely emulated despite its obvious inadequacies and injustices within a Cuban context. Tied in to this economic

[31] Estorino, Abelardo. "Diálogo con Estorino," *Bohemia*: October 30, 1964.

paradigm was a traditional cultural outlook according to which Christian religion—whether Catholic (colonial) or Protestant (imported from the United States)—together with Afro-Cuban belief systems upheld a patriarchal order that exalted *machista* values and degraded women.

El peine y el espejo

This is the world represented in *El peine y el espejo* in 1956. In this play, the male aspect of society is embodied in Cristóbal, a *machista* type who lives with his sister Carmela, a devout Catholic, and his wife Rosa, who turns to the Afro-Cuban *santería*[32] of the charlatan Hilaria in the hopes of drawing her husband away from the arms of his lover. Carmela's dedication to her brother has incestuous overtones, and her religious fervor seems to be motivated more by the need to control and dominate others than by any sincerely felt piety. Hilaria's motives in prescribing superstitious remedies for Rosa are shown to be essentially economic. Through this kind of association, such practices are demonstrated to be a fundamental part of an exploitative capitalist order that can only offer empty promises for a better future. In spite of his basically conservative outlook on life, Cristóbal rejects the Catholicism of Carmela just as disdainfully as the *santería* practiced by Rosa and Hilaria. In fact, he sees the two as equally pernicious and useless. Although proclaiming his dedication to the *machista* code of existence and everything it

[32] Cuban *santería* is one of several Afro-Cuban religious expressions. According to Kapcia, "[t]he term *santería* is often misleading; referring to only one of the Afro-Cuban religions, it is often used for all. In fact, it was largely based on the Lucumí (Yoruba) culture, while the more secretive *Abakúa* […] was based on the Efik (eastern Nigeria)" He notes that, in Nineteenth-Century Cuba, "[a]t one level [*santería*] was a safety valve, allowing an opportunity for collective self-expression and thus some residual cultural identity in the face of appalling conditions, brutal treatment, collective deculturalation and the Spanish preference for formal religious conformity. Thus, while the term 'syncretic' is rightly condemned for implying a non-existent equality of status and power, it nonetheless stresses that, for the oppressed cultures of the Empire (African or indigenous), a tolerated religious hybridity did allow some valuable degree of cultural resistance and defensive self-expression […], especially in colonial Cuba, where the Church's institutional and social weakness (with few adherents, neglect from Madrid and no *mulato* priesthood) allowed greater freedom to slaves to preserve their cultural and religious practices"(44). However, *santería* practices were not limited to blacks, although many *mulatos* and whites who made use of them were frequently compelled to do so in secret because of the lack of social acceptance accorded to such activities (Kapcia 151). Unsurprisingly, such social perspectives on *santería* endured until the 1950s, as the dramatic action in *El peine y el espejo* shows.

entails, he nonetheless expresses a profound feeling of incompleteness that he is unable to fully articulate. He senses that something is missing in his life, and that this inner dissatisfaction has something to do with his relationship to the whole of society.

The expression of these sentiments in Cuba in 1956 had as its background the failed attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953, the subsequent arrest and jailing of Fidel Castro, his release through general amnesty and defiant speech upon leaving prison in 1955, and his self-chosen exile in Mexico shortly thereafter. In other words, beneath the surface there was the sense that something was seriously wrong with society, and Castro's exploits were giving concrete expression to this awareness, despite their apparent failure at the time to make a significant and widespread impact upon Cuban consciousness. At the time *El peine y el espejo* was first performed, preparations were underway for the *Granma* invasion, which would be carried out in December of 1956. Although the original audience for the play was unlikely to have been aware of the impending invasion, it nonetheless would have realized that Batista was struggling to preserve the *status quo* in the face of an opposition that no longer saw the existing political process as a viable means for obtaining its objectives. So, although the long-established order of things continued to function as it always had, there was the sense that a better alternative existed, not just to the oppressive politics and economic hardships of the Batista era, but also to the *espiritista* and religious aspects of a culture dominated by *machista* values and defined by exploitative relationships between individuals. In other words, *cubanía rebelde*, which had up to that time simply aspired to true national independence, was on the verge or being supplanted by *cubanía revolucionaria*, which would also demand radical changes at all levels of society. Antoni Kapcia considers the continuing evolution of *cubanía* in the 1950s in the following way:

> *Cubanía* […] became less a "nationalism" than a political expression of a growing collective desire to rescue and define an "imagined community," with all the contradictions that such a search must necessarily entail. Hence Cuba became by the 1950s a veritable "island of 'dreams,'" mixing illusions with teleological visions, and creating "real" plans on the basis of long-postponed but still believed "dreams" of utopia. (24)

In the case of Cristóbal, this "dream" of a better Cuba is not manifested through a cohesive revolutionary political agenda, but rather by his own poorly understood feelings that something is profoundly wrong with his life and the world that surrounds him. This does not exactly constitute an "imagined community," but it does indeed indicate real dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in society:

> CRISTÓBAL: […] Ya es tarde. Me parece entonces que me falta algo por hacer, que no debo acostarme sin hacer una cosa más. ¿Qué es? ¿Qué me falta por hacer? […] Y después, cuando vuelvo a casa me doy cuenta que falta algo, que se me ha olvidado algo. […] Es algo que tiene que ver conmigo y con mis hijos, y contigo y con la finca y con la gente de la calle. No sé, es como que algo se hubiera desperdiciado en el día. (182-183)

These are not necessarily the words of a man who is ready to take up arms with the rebels soon to come ashore on the *Granma*, but they are indeed the sentiments of a pre-revolutionary Cuban population slowly becoming aware of its own collective existence and the need to work together for the common good. Such concerns would emerge as the ideological foundation of the revolution. Thus, Cristóbal's thoughts about the missing part of his life prophetically foreshadow

the profound social and cultural changes that would soon occur as a result of Fidel Castro's rise to power.

However, *El peine y el espejo* is not a play about the transformation of individual consciousness, but rather deals with the distressing persistence of disfunctional cultural roles, mental models, and patterns of behavior in Cuban society. It is a stagnant dramatic universe in which conflict and tension remain unresolved at the play's end since the unjust and alienating state of affairs that exists at the beginning is left fundamentally unaltered. Since there is nothing particularly exceptional about what takes place, it is clear that the dramatist's intent is to offer a portrayal of a typical family, therefore of society in general. The work's four characters each represent certain aspects of the national reality. Cristóbal is the typical machista male with his extramarital lover, antiquated ideas about a woman's role in society, propensity to violence and authoritarianism, rejection of both *espiritismo* and traditional religion, and deep inner disquiet about his relationship to the collective whole of society. Rosa is a sterotypical representation of the frustrated wife who seeks hope and solace for her marital disappointments through the economically exploitative practices of *espiritismo*. Carmela serves as a symbol for the Catholicism practiced on the island: repressive, judgmental, committed to the *machista* code, and above all hypocritical because of a dirty conscience. Finally, Hilaria, as a practitioner of *espiritismo* for profit, embodies the false promises and hopes offered by superstitious remedies.

El peine y el espejo has been addressed in a few critical studies. Perhaps one of the first journal articles to offer an analysis of the text is "El 'machismo' en el teatro de Abelardo Estorino" by Salvador Arias, published in 1966. This study is in large measure a response to Estorino's comment that *El peine y el espejo, El robo del cochino,* and *La casa vieja* could be collectively classified as a trilogy of sorts consisting of "variaciones machistas sobre familias

provincianas" (Diálogo 10). Therefore, Arias focuses upon the representation of *machismo* in the previously mentioned plays. The critic notes that in these works the "exacerbada discriminación femenina se sustenta sobre estructuras socio-económicas propias de países subdesarrollados, tales como los de América Latina" (9). Thus, the article looks at the issue of *machismo* from a decidedly Marxist perspective. In contrast, "*El peine y el espejo:* el rosario, el ekuele y el espejismo" by Luis Linares Ocanto considers the psychological and symbolic aspects of the play from a Lacanian point of view and employs an analysis of the parallels between the *espiritismo* practiced by Hilaria and the Catholicism embodied in Carmela. Other articles and book prologues briefly address *El peine y el espejo* in context with additional works by Estorino and other dramatists. The views of Arias and Linares Ocanto in this context are both highly relevant when considering aspects of *cubanía* and historical contextualization in the play, which uses the socio-economic consequences of *machismo*, as well as the psychological implications of Cuban religious practices, for the purpose of creating a disquieting portrait of contemporary national realities.

Estorino's representation of a typical 1950s household begins with the voice of a radio announcer who promises to end all of the Cuban housewife's problems with a simple bar of soap:

> Señora, se acabaron sus problemas domésticos. Coja una envoltura de jabón de baño Tul, el que deja su cutis besable y escriba su nombre y dirección al dorso, y debajo el nombre del santo de su devoción […] ¡y envíenosla! El último domingo de mes Ud. puede ser propietaria. El jabón Tul le ofrece un hogar feliz. (171)

This apparently innocuous commercial seems more sinister in retrospect as the play progresses, since in Estorino's dramatic universe neither prayer to saints nor the performance of *santería*

rituals can produce anything worthwhile. The announcement calls attention to the obvious similarities between *santería* practices and Catholic ones, both of which require money in exchange for highly unlikely or frankly impossible results. This becomes significant later on when Carmela, ever the "good" Catholic, vigorously and hypocritically condemns *santería*. Also, the fact that the Tul company has resorted to the shameless method of combining sweepstakes marketing with Catholic saint worship, implies that capitalist society, with the complicity of the church, brazenly uses religion for exploiting the masses. The promise of "un hogar feliz," "cutis besable" and the resolution of "problemas domésticos" through a mere bar of soap is nothing more than a ploy to associate a humble household product with the deepest existencial desires of targeted consumers. Thus, this brief radio message neatly summarizes the lamentable state of pre-revolutionary Cuban society in the 1950s while foreshadowing the ideological concerns that the play raises further on.

Hilaria enters upon the stage immediately after the radio announcement. Rosa informs her that "el baño" which Hilaria had prescribed for her as means to win back her husband "no dio resultado" (171). Thus, from the very beginning of the play, Estorino associates *santería* and Catholicism with exploitative capitalism. Rosa guesses that the magic has failed since she wasn't married by the church (172), which implies that in her mind *santería* and Catholicism are two equally legitimate spiritual universes, therefore coexisting and influencing one another. Shortly after the play begins, Hilaria tells Rosa that she is "rifando una imágen de la Purísima Concepción. [...] ¡Y me la bendijo el cura! [...] El de aquí no, ése no. Y además, qué va a bendecir ése... Tú sabes. La situación está mala" (173). This indicates that Hilaria is willing to use both *santería* and Catholicism—the latter without the approval of official clergy—in order to

exploit people.[33] She cynically appeals to Rosa's awareness of economic hardship under the Batista regime in order to justify running a raffle for a sacred image without the local church's permission. This is pointedly hypocritical since Hilaria herself is engaged in the same kind of economic exploitation with which she has implicitly charged the local priest.

In Rosa and Hilaria's world, *santería* is simply a means to an end. For Rosa, it is the hoped-for solution to her marital problems, whereas for Hilaria it is an opportunistic way to make a living. However, in a larger sense, both women have turned to *santería* practices in order to provide for their material needs. In pre-revolutionary society, Rosa must have a husband to provide for her and her children or face certain destitution. The economic stability of her family is threatened by the appearance of Cristóbal's lover: "ROSA: Es que me han dicho que se va. Que él se la va a llevar. [...] ¿No ve que el hermano de ella le ha formado la gran pelea? [...] Se la va a llevar, Hilaria" (173). Rosa has more than enough reason to fear abandonment by her husband, since her marriage to him was forced by her brother, who was prepared to kill Cristóbal if he didn't restore his sister's honor, which was supposedly lost when Cristóbal deflowered her (185). As the previous quote demonstrates, a similar state of circumstances now exist with regard to Cristóbal's extramarital affair, which means that the fear of vengeance from an angry brother may in this case cause him to run away with his lover and abandon his family. Both Hilaria and Rosa believe that the latter's key to keeping her man, and hence the only way to save herself and her children, is to lure him into bed with her sexual charms, which is precisely what Hilaria's remedies promise.

Hilaria's offers her own personal history as testimony to the preeminent importance of a woman's sexual attractiveness in determining her economic circumstances. While lamenting her

[33] Estorino also emphasizes here the way in which *santería* practices form an integral component of Catholic belief for many Cubans.

present hardships, she reflects on better days in the past: “Uno se cansa, ya estoy vieja. Si me hubieras conocido de joven... ¡Qué nalgas las mías! Mira ahora, uno se cansa” (173). When Rosa asks her why her man left her, Hilaria responds: “La situación era muy mala. La harina lo aburrió. (*Tocándose las nalgas*)” (173). This abandonment is followed by difficult times for Hilaria: “Fue después que él se fue cuando me di cuenta, cuando me quedé sola... Los muchachos eran chiquitos, la situación era pésima, ya te lo dije” (174). The clear intention here is to promote the sale of her services by showing what can happen if Rosa does not succeed in winning back her husband. When asked by Rosa why Hilaria wasn’t able to save her marriage with the same remedies that she has prescribed for Rosa, she responds: “El caso era distinto, muy distinto al tuyo. Además, entonces yo no había desarrollado mis facultades” (174). Despite Hilaria’s insistence that “el caso era distinto,” it is obvious that it was not, but rather identical. Thus, it is apparent that Rosa could very well follow the same path in life as Hilaria: abandonment, grave economic hardship, prostitution, and finally the peddling of worthless remedies for women whose longings and fears she deeply understands and masterfully exploits. This destructive, repeating cycle is set in motion by men who treat women as mere sexual objects to be disposed of when they have passed their supposed prime, and it is reinforced by the unethical vending of superstitious cures.

Cristóbal’s sister Carmela adds another important dimension to Estorino’s analysis of *santería* and Catholicism in Cuban society. Although she continually strives to point out the supposedly stark contrast between *santería* and Catholicism, her efforts have the opposite effect on the spectator, therefore blurring the distinction between the two belief systems. Before even uttering a word upon the stage, Carmela unintentionally and symbolically “replaces” Hilaria’s discourse with her own by placing items associated with the Catholic faith in the same spot

where Hilaria's herbs had been: "*En ese momento entra Carmela. Rosa tiene que darse prisa para esconder las yerbas. Carmela deja sobre la mesa, en el lugar donde habían estado las yerbas, un velo de misa, un rosario y un abanico*" (175). However, the playwright's intent here is not to contrast Carmela and Hilaria, but rather to demonstrate the interchageability of their ritual instruments, and in this way manifest the fundamental similarities that exist between *santería* and Catholicism.

From the moment that she appears onstage, Carmela begins to attack Rosa, who is quick to defend herself from her sister-in-law's accusations. Carmela criticizes Rosa for not attending church. Rosa replies that a busy wife and mother has no time for such things. She points out Rosa's lack of religious education, to which the latter responds: "Creo en Dios. Y no necesito estar metida en la iglesia todo el santo día" (176). Rosa then adds: "Mi madre se casó en la catedral de Matanzas. Y mis hermanas, ¡todas! Mamá sintió mucho que yo no lo hiciera, pero tú no quisiste" (176). It is then revealed that Carmela had informed the local priest about Rosa's character, which effectively prevented her and Cristóbal from having a Catholic wedding. At this moment it becomes clear that Rosa and Carmela are both fighting each other over Cristóbal:

> ROSA: No tenías que decírselo al padre.
>
> CARMELA: Se lo dije en confesión.
>
> ROSA: No era tu pecado.
>
> CARMELA: Era de mi hermano, que casi he criado. Era asunto mío. Y es asunto mío también todo lo que pasa en esta casa. ¡La casa de mi padre!
>
> ROSA: Ahora es de mi marido.
>
> CARMELA: De mi hermano, que todo me lo consulta, que no se mueve sin que yo lo sepa, que le compro la ropa y… ¿Por qué lloras? […]

ROSA: No tengo nada. Ni hijos, ni casa, ni marido. (176)

The struggle between the two women is in reality the embodiment of the conflict existing among antithetical contemporary realities. Carmela is the encarnation of Catholic culture itself, in this case symbolically manifested as a sister who is determined to keep her brother in a dependent state, much the same way that Catholicism or religion in general, as alleged by Marxist theory, has served as a tool of domination for the ruling order.[34] As a consequence, Cristóbal is prevented from progressing to the next stage of his natural development as a man, which in this case signifies the full assumption of his responsibilities as husband, father, and member of the national community. As for Rosa, she is the prototype of the anguished Cuban wife, whose relative indifference to religious dogma owes much to what she has suffered as a result of its rigid application, and who finds herself marginalized within her own family and society at large as a consequence of the negative effect that Catholic culture has had upon her husband. The person most responsible for causing and maintaining this sad state of affairs is Carmela, who implicitly approves of her brother's infidelity to Rosa by deliberately refusing to confront the facts:

CARMELA: […] Ya llevan ocho años de casados, es natural, creo yo, que salga. Mi padre lo hacía y mamá nunca se quejó. Que salga y hable con sus amigos de pelota, de política, de trabajo.

ROSA: ¡Y de mujeres!

[34] Cline notes that: "[a]ccording to Marx, religion is an expression of material realities and economic injustice. Thus, problems in religion are ultimately problems in society. Religion is not the disease, but merely a symptom. It is used by oppressors to make people feel better about the distress they experience due to being poor and exploited. This is the origin of his comment that religion is the 'opium of the masses.'" Hence, Carmela's treatment of her brother, supported by Catholic dogma, serves as a kind of psychological opiate for him, since he allows his sister's enabling behavior to cause him to forget about his exploited existence as well as his fundamental responsibilities towards his family.

> CARMELA: No creo que hable de mujeres. […] Le sobra con su esposa y su hermana. (177)

It is significant that Carmela sees men's marital infidelities as simply a continuation of time-honored tradition preserved throughout the ages. The intent is to demonstrate that Catholicism, which according to Marxist perspective sustains and propagates itself primarily through blind imitation from one generation to the next, has fostered socially corrosive practices that are unthinkingly accepted by the population and have as a result become firmly entrenched in the Cuban community. The gross hypocrisy of Carmela's attitude towards her brother's adultery is revealed by the fact that Rosa's premarital pregnancy is punished by the church while Cristóbal's open philandering remains intentionally overlooked. Through these associations, Estorino brings into question the entire concept of preserving tradition for its own sake, while also drawing attention to the double standard for men and women.

The deliberate cultivation of an argumentative attitude towards commonly-held assumptions would prove to be important in developing widespread support for the upcoming revolution. Also, an informed Cuban audience member in 1956 would have been aware of the serious challenges that had been raised against the established order by Castro's opposition. Although it was not clear at that time what the specific details of the rebel leader's political agenda might be, it was at least evident that he did not represent the *status quo,* and was in fact resolutely opposed to it. Therefore, the play's pointed examination of social mores would have spoken directly to the audience's awareness of the contemporary struggle in Cuba between the inveterate old order and a progressive new one endeavoring to attain hegemony. The questioning of traditional attitudes would become a defining characteristic of Estorino's drama, since almost

all later works by him address problems caused by the automatic imitation of generational outlook and behavior, whether with regard to gender, authority or race.

At the center of the play's critical investigation of national reality is Cristóbal, who feels just as irritated and burdened by the fear and helplessness of his wife as by the overweening solicitousness of his sister. In a sense, Rosa and Carmela both fail him since neither of them help him to assume the full responsibilities of a husband and father. Rather, their behavior contributes greatly to the stagnation of his personal development. His wife's protests against his behavior are weak and abject, and inevitably degenerate into fearful supplication:

> CRISTÓBAL: Coño, qué aburrido me tienes, Rosa, qué aburrido estoy de ti.
>
> ROSA: ¿Con ella no te aburres? ¿Qué hace que no sepa hacerte yo? […]
>
> Yo te quiero Cristóbal.
>
> CRISTÓBAL: Déjate de esas cosas, ya no somos novios.
>
> ROSA: Por eso, porque no somos novios. Ahora sí. Ahora me paso el día esperando que llegue la noche. Y no vienes. Y ahora te necesito en la cama.
>
> CRISTÓBAL: (*se ríe, su vanidad está satisfecha, y para demostrarlo le da una nalgada).* Eres una puerca. (179)

Rosa's behavior is of course not motivated by lust, but rather by fear for herself and her children. Cristóbal's inability to understand this is symbolically represented by his decision to comb his hair in the mirror, which occurs immediately following the previously quoted dialogue. Since for him it is "*una complicada tarea*" (179), it is apparent that he is deeply engrossed in his own image. In other words, he is completely self-absorbed and thus incapable, at least on a conscious level, of fully understanding what his wife must really be thinking and feeling. Luis Linares notes: "Cristóbal sólo parece llenar el vacío frente a su propia imagen reflejada en el espejo. Su

'doble' es el Otro que lo alimenta. En su imagen en el espejo encuentra la satisfacción de su narcisismo" (108-109). His self-centeredness blinds him to the true mindset of his sister as well:

> CARMELA: […] Cristóbal, ¿es verdad que piensas irte?
>
> CRISTÓBAL: ¿Quién inventa esas cosas? […] Ya no soy un muchacho, Carmela.
>
> CARMELA: Pero tengo que cuidarte. A ti y a tus hijos. (181)

Carmela's objective is clearly not to protect an immature and needy brother, but instead to continue to possess him and keep him under her power. She realizes that she can facilitate this control over Cristóbal by convincing him that he needs her to look after him and his children. Thus, she contributes to the continual deferral of the full realization of his manhood. Rosa alludes to her sister-in-law's secret agenda in the following discourse, which she directs at Carmela: "ROSA: Los vecinos saben que te confiesas mucho. ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué te confiesas tanto? ¿Es tan malo lo que me deseas? Dime, ¿qué quieres? ¿Que deje a Cristóbal? ¿Que me muera? ¿Por qué vas tanto a la iglesia? ¿Qué le confiesas al cura, qué, qué?" (179). Carmela's slavish devotion to her brother suggests incestuous tendencies[35] that she feels compelled to confess to her priest. In an allegorical sense, her guilty conscience is meant to mirror that of the Catholic religion. The dramatic intent is to show that the church, like Carmela, deliberately aims to retard the progress and development of the Cuban male in order to safeguard its own perverse vested interests. This casts a sinister light on Carmela's tireless dedication to providing her nephews with religious instruction, which is seen in this context as a means for perpetuating

[35] Estorino once again addresses the theme of incestuous tendencies in *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de don José Jacinto Milanés*, in which the sister of the poet evidences the same kind of unhealthy devotion as Carmela in *El peine y el espejo*. In both cases, the abnormal attachment that each male character has to his sister appears to prevent him from realizing a satisfactory conjugal relationship with another woman. One possible reading of the dramatist's use of incest is to see it as a symbolic expression of the inability to progress beyond one's origins, therefore the chief cause of the stagnation of individual development.

dysfunctional social behavior. Should Cristóbal truly dedicate himself to Rosa and fully assume his responsibilities as husband and father,[36] he would expel Carmela from his house, or at least emotionally gain independence from her. The wider implication is that the Cuban who is sincerely committed to the well-being of the national family must also banish the Catholic religion from his or her life, despite the fact that it represents countless generations of tradition. According to the dramatist's perspective, such severing from the familiar is necessary for complete individual and hence collective development.

Although Cristóbal disdainfully rejects both Catholicism and *santería*, he offers no alternative to them except the *machista* code by which he lives. In fact, this code is itself sustained by the belief systems that he so deeply scorns, since both Rosa and Carmela, as representatives of *santería* and Catholicism respectively, unknowingly reinforce his negative behavior through their indulgent and servile attitude towards him. Cristóbal is of course oblivious to this fact, owing to his complete self-absorption. Were he only to develop a full awareness of his situation and of what he needs to do in order to remedy it, he could very well break the generational cycle of degradation and dysfunctional behavior within his family. Estorino alleviates somewhat the hopeless dramatic universe that he has created by allowing Cristóbal to admit that he is aware that "falta algo" in his life (182). However, lest the reader or spectator think that Cristóbal is on the verge of a major personal transformation, the character

[36] According to Estorino's dramatic perspective, such responsibilities go beyond the purely material aspects of family life. For example, Carmela argues that it is enough for Cristóbal to simply provide for the family's economic needs: "Mira, Rosa, tú no tienes de qué quejarte. Él es un buen padre, a los muchachos no les falta nada, a ti tampoco" (177). However, Rosa's suffering and misery clearly indicate how gravely her husband has emotionally neglected her and her children. Cristóbal's abandonment of his fatherly responsibility is graphically shown by his willingness to leave his sons in the street "[c]omo unos mataperros […] [b]orrachos y mujeriegos" so that they turn out to be "real men" like him (181). The pointed irony of these views is that Cristóbal is actually proposing to transmit his own irresponsible masculinity to the next generation by encouraging his sons to imitate his egotistical and self-indulgent behavior. It should also be noted that Cristóbal is on the verge of abandoning his material obligations to his family owing to the complications that have resulted from his adulterous affair.

shortly afterwards follows the aforementioned confession with the basest kind of *machista* braggadocio in response to Rosa's accusation that he is a coward:

> Pregúntales a mis amigos las broncas que he tenido en los bailes, los dientes que he roto con esta mano. Cuando tenía la máquina me comía la carretera a 180. A 180 y borracho. Y me he tomado una botella de coñac en el cementerio, sentado en la tumba de una vieja. A las dos de la mañana. (185)

When this fails to convince Rosa that he is not irresolute, he beats her, then proceeds to once again lose himself in his own image before the mirror: "*Rosa queda en el suelo, llorando. Cristóbal comienza a arreglarse la ropa y alisarse el pelo con la mano. Se acerca al espejo*" (185). Thus, it is apparent that the mirror and comb represent the endemic self-centeredness that prevents Cristóbal from really understanding what is missing from his life. Since this issue is at the heart of the play, the two grooming items are used for its title. Luis Linares considers in semiotic terms Cristóbal's obsession with the mirror:

> Es significativo que las dos ocaciones en las cuales Cristóbal se mira en el espejo tienen que ver con su "papel" de hombre. Sin embargo, por la aclaración del autor, acerca de las veces que el espejo se ha barnizado, nos da la impresión como que Cristóbal no ha salido aún de lo que Lacan denominaría "the mirror stage."[37] Al parecer no tiene un objeto de deseo y esto deviene en un ritual narcisista sin fin. Con respecto a esto, Julia Kristeva señala: "[…] la identificación del sujeto con el Otro simbólico, con el ideal del Yo, pasa por una absorción narcisista del objeto del deseo que es la madre, absorción constitutiva del Yo ideal. El

[37] Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.) *Femenine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the ècole freudienne*. New York: W. W. Norton and Pantheon Books, 1985: 30.

> enamorado conoce esa regresión que lo conduce de la adoración de un fantasma ideal al agrandamiento extásico o doloroso de su propia imagen y de su propio cuerpo." (107)[38]

In Estorino's dramatic world, Cristóbal's entrapment within the "mirror stage" is representative of the Cuban male's psychological condition, and in a wider sense indicative of national society's destructive egotism and hence inability to effectively repond to the needs of the community. As Kristeva mentions, such self-obsession is intrinsically connected to the adoration of the mother that occurs in an earlier stage of psychic development. Therefore, by assuming a motherly role in relation to her brother, Carmela does not allow him to move beyond an idealized image of himself. As noted earlier, her Catholicism plays a decisive part in influencing her actions towards him. In order for Cristóbal to progress beyond a narcissistic stage, he must first separate himself from the maternal influence that is no longer appropriate for him. Likewise, according to the playwright's perspective, Cuba must leave behind its traditional religious background—an ideological system of "maternal" origin—in order to fulfill its true destiny: in other words, to more completely realize its vision of *cubanía*.

However, one should not assume that Estorino intends to blame Cristóbal's *machismo* for the lamentable state of Cuban society in the 1950s. Rather, the play means to emphasize how the character's particular mindset has been formed as a consequence of living within such a social context. Salvador Arias notes:

> El "machismo" es el escamoteo del sentido de "hombre" en su trascendencia más amplia, probablemente como un sustituto a otros propósitos y acciones de mayor compromiso. Por eso, más que estar muy ligado a la existencia de desigualdades

[38] Julia Kristeva, O. Mannoni, E. Ortigues, M. Schneider and G. Haag. *(El) trabajo de la metáfora: identificación/interpretación*. Margarita Mizraji (trad.). Barcelona: Editorial Gedisa S.A., 1985: 52.

> económicas que frenan el desarrollo social y cultural, puede decirse que es un producto de ellas. (9)

In other words, when men are offered no real possibilities for economic advancement in an underdeveloped and ruthless society, they themselves become implacable. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the community's awareness of mercy or pity has been completely extinguished in such an environment. Rather, the two conflicting tendencies—ruthlessness and pity—exist in a state of constant and unresolved tension. Cristóbal alludes to this state of affairs in the following discourse, which he directs at his sister Carmela:

> CRISTÓBAL: Porque tú me habías enseñado a tener lástima y me hablabas de piedad. Piedad, piedad, piedad, piedad. Jamás he oído esta palabra… ¿Qué sabes tú de piedad? ¿Qué sabe la gente de piedad? Si se la digo a un hombre en la calle pensará que hablo en chino. No la conocen. Piedad. Eso fue lo que me amarró.
>
> CARMELA: Y qué mala soga.
>
> CRISTÓBAL: ¿Por qué tú la odias?
>
> CARMELA: Mi religión no me permite odiar pero…
>
> CRISTÓBAL: La odias. (181-182)

Of course, it appears more likely that Cristóbal married a pregnant Rosa not out of pity but rather owing to his fear of her brother's jealous honor. Still, this dialogue demonstrates the blatant hypocrisy of Carmela, who can hardly expect to serve as a model of Christian compassion for her brother. The ideological intent is to show that it is not enough to simply teach pity: one must actively practice benevolence in one's own life in order that others may learn from and follow the example. Thus, in the eyes of the people, the Catholic church's inability to act according to its own standards has nullified its doctrine of good will and consequently led to the propagation

of ruthlessness among the population. Likewise, since Carmela has failed to provide meaningful moral guidance for her brother, he has rejected a life based on Christian tenderheartedness and instead turned to the *machista* code as an alternate and completely inadequate existential compass. However, as Salvador Arias observes, the *machista* man does not necessarily abandon all consideration for compassion:

> Mas para Estorino, con evidente calamiento humano, el tratar de conseguir esa característica es fuente de hondos conflictos en el "machista". Es la lucha del hombre como ser sensible ante la imposición de conductas sociales determinadas, productos del sistema económico existente, que lo obliga a una lucha despiadada por su subsistencia. Porque si el "machismo"es una fuerza gravitante sobre los personajes masculinos de Estorino, no es menos constante en ellos otras fuerza contraria: la piedad. (10)[39]

Therefore, the play's central message is that, contrary to the common *machista* mindset, the Cuban male does not lose his essential manhood by practicing compassion, but rather more fully realizes his masculinity—and thus his *cubanía*—through a solicitous and deeply committed concern for others. Since Cristóbal does not consciously come to an understanding of this during the play, the dramatist's intent is to show that the Cuban male in the pre-revolutionary 1950s is far from abandoning the *machista* code.

El robo del cochino

Estorino's next play, *El robo del cochino*, also focuses upon matters of *machismo* and compassion in Cuban society, but in this case within a hegemonic revolutionary perspective.

[39] The issue of compassion is also central to *El robo del cochino* and *La casa vieja*, Estorino's second and third plays respectively.

First staged in 1961, the play has a very different historical context from *El peine y el espejo*, despite the fact that only five years separates the dates of their respective premieres. Unlike *El peine y el espejo*, which is an example of immediate drama, *El robo del cochino* is remote drama,[40] since the action takes place in 1958, three years before the play's premiere. It represents the decisive moment in Cuban history when Castro's revolutionary forces began to control the terms of its conflict with the Batista regime, therefore a series of key events which greatly facilitated the widespread enlistment of the general population in the rebel army.

The principal characters in this drama are Cristóbal,[41] a middle-aged man of some limited social distinction and wealth who is keen on preserving his place in society, his son Juanelo, who is torn between loyalty to his father and his ever-expanding awareness of the momentous events taking place around him, Cristóbal's wife Rosa, who is unable to move beyond her mourning for a long-lost daughter and comprehend the transcendence of the era in which she lives, and Rodríguez, a tenant of Cristóbal and poor country farmer whose son Tavito has been falsely charged with and arrested for the supposed robbery of a pig. The play derives its title from this baseless accusation. The real reason for Tavito's arrest is his decision to succor a wounded revolutionary on the run from the authorities, who lie to the public about the true motive behind the detention in order to forestall any spontaneous outbreak of sympathy for a man they intend to interrogate through torture and then kill. Rodríguez turns to Cristóbal for help, asking him to use his status within the community to intervene on Tavito's behalf, but the latter feels that he has everything to lose and nothing to gain by taking his tenant's side. Juanelo must decide whether to

[40] See Chapter One for a definition of these concepts.

[41] The repetition of character names from *El peine y el espejo* (Cristóbal and Rosa) in *El robo del cochino* does not signify the reappearance of the same characters. However, in terms of characterization, there are some significant similarities—as well as differences—between the married couples in the two plays. Each representation of the pair is in effect a variation on Estorino's vision of the prototypical Cuban marriage. The repetition of other character names in succeeding plays by the author also serves to draw attention to the return of prototypical national figures possessing personal qualities both similar to as well as markedly different from those manifested in preceding dramatic representations.

follow his father's example or to oppose him and thereby put himself at great risk in an effort to save his friend's life. This dilemma serves as the play's central conflict.

At the time of the work's premiere in 1961, the pre-revolutionary world was a mere three years distant. The Cuban nation had been radically transformed both politically and socially, but the memory of the great conflict was still very fresh. Not all citizens of the island could be expected at such an early date to have a complete understanding of the fundamental paradigm shift that had so recently taken place. *El robo del cochino* would therefore have served a distinctly didactic purpose, since it masterfully explains this profound change in Cuban society through an allegorical representation whose ideological implications would have been readily grasped by the audience. In response to this dramatic method, the spectator would have found herself comparing and contrasting the national realities of 1961 with those of 1958.

The play emphasizes the corruption, fear, hypocrisy, arrogance, injustice and selfishness of the old order while calling attention to the honor, bravery, righteousness, humility, justice and selflessness of the new order. Thus, the context of the dramatic conflict not only provides an explanation of the ethical motives behind the revolutionary struggle, but also a moral justification for the revolution's very existence. Especially during the early years, the widespread diffusion and acceptance of such pro-government views would be critically important for the Castro regime, since its survival absolutely depended upon its ability to radically reorient the ideological perspectives of the people.

For this reason, *El robo del cochino* would have a significant role in the cultural revolution that was already well underway in 1961. It also would have been seen as a dramatic representation of the newly hegemonic values of *cubanía revolucionaria*. As such, the play would have given the audience the opportunity to once again experience the stirring sensations of

populist struggle on behalf of the Cuban people. Since the revolution is seen as an ongoing process, keeping alive the memory of its origins is just as important for Castro's regime as promoting the remembrance of Christ's earthly ministry is for Christian clergy. In this sense, Estorino's drama serves to consecrate an allegorical series of events whose theatrical presentation may produce a form of revolutionary communion among an audience.

However, unlike the modern-day congregation at a traditional religious service, the play's original audience would have perceived the relative immediacy of the events recounted. For this reason, according to the original horizon of expectations, the work's heroic characters—Juanelo, Tavito and Adela[42]—would not simply have had an iconographic function,[43] but would rather have prompted direct identification between spectator and character. In this way, these courageous figures would have been elevated to the level of archetypal and hence mythical entities. This means that despite the play's status as remote drama, the distance between its temporal setting and the historical context of the original theatergoers is small enough to allow the work to serve as a collective portrait of its first audience, although one partially contextualized within a formerly hegemonic paradigm. By stimulating an awareness of this

[42] Tavito and Adela (Juanelo's girlfriend) are referential characters and thus do not appear on the stage. Nonetheless, they play key roles in the drama.

[43] The public's identification with myth depends upon the former's ability to relate personally to the storyline of the latter. This capacity can be worn away with the passage of time, since changing conditions in society can make it continually more difficult for one to closely identify with a storyline that refers to a past that may be seen as increasingly irrelevant to contemporary circumstances. Kapcia notes: "The difference between myth and either symbol or icon here lies in the 'story-line;' a myth needs one, to remain as a living, adaptable and meaningful guide to real collective action, parallel to the society's self-image, while both a symbol and an icon lack a 'story-line' and thus remain more static, the latter more as a model for perfect being, almost certainly on an individual rather than a collective level. Thus it can be argued that a politico-historical myth has the potential to revert to the status of symbol—to become 'symbolized;' if that status is maintained for any length of time, without that status's being challenged and without any resistance, or attempt (by accepted interpreters) to rescue the mythic core of the symbol, then the symbol has the potential to become refined to the status of icon" (28). From this one may deduce that a present-day staging—in 2006—of *El robo del cochino* in Cuba would have more of an iconographic than mythical significance for many members of the audience, especially for those born too late to experience firsthand the transformative events of 1958.

important difference, *El robo del cochino* would have led the spectator to compare and contrast her present with her not-too-distant past.

At the time of this writing, a suprisingly small amount of literary investigation has focused upon *El robo del cochino*,[44] none of which has extensively considered the significance of historical contextualization in the play. Most of this writing is either found in the prologues to editions of the work, or is included as a relatively small part of articles and books that consider several other theater pieces. One article that specifically centers upon the play is "La transferencia dialéctica en *El robo del cochino* de Estorino" by Emilio Bejel, which skillfully blends Marxist interpretation with semiotic analysis. Another investigation worth mentioning is *From the House to the Stage: Family and Identity in Contemporary Cuban and Puerto Rican Drama*, by Camilla Stevens, which dedicates a complete section to an examination of *El robo del cochino*. Stevens's study considers family dynamics and their wider social implications.

Similar to *El peine y el espejo*, the setting of *El robo del cochino* is a living room in the home of a typical Cuban family residing within a rural context. The specific time frame is given as "*el verano de 1958*" (51). After giving a detailed description of the antiquated appearance of the room, the stage directions note that "*un radio de último modelo contrasta con el mobiliario*".[45] Thus, even before the actors appear upon the stage, Estorino has made a specific visual statement to the audience. The radio is of course the means by which the residents of the house receive information about what happens in the larger world outside. Therefore, the decision to specify the use of a radio "*de último modelo*" is particularly significant, since it

[44] *El robo del cochino* is arguably Estorino's best-known drama and was probably the most successful Cuban play of the 1961 season in terms of attendance and number of presentations. Despite the piece's enduring popularity, it is not necessarily the author's best, a distinction that perhaps instead belongs to *Morir del cuento*.

[45] It should be noted here that the "newness" of the radio must be limited to 1958, the temporal context of the play. Therefore, a present day audience—in 2006—for *El robo del cochino* would probably be less likely to see a 1950s-era radio—by Twenty-First Century standards an antique—as out-of-place among Nineteenth-Century furnishings. In other words, the visual impact resulting from the contrast between the radio and the furnishings would have been most noticeable to the original 1961 audience, and progressively less perceptible to succeeding ones.

contrasts the "newness" of what is taking place in a collective context (the transformative process that is ocurring throughout the island as a consequence of the revolution) with the "oldness" of the house's setting (the perpetuation of traditional and hence conservative[46] ways of living). This antithesis is at the very heart of the play, since Juanelo must decide whether to conform to the bourgeois existential patterns established within the limited confines of his home, or to participate in the burgeoning rebellion that is destined to revolutionize the nation. The contraposition of the old furnishings with the new radio also suggests a comparison between the conventional family and the emerging national reality. The tension that results from this contrast is resolved at the play's end, when Juanelo realizes that his loyalty to his Cuban brethren must be given precedence over his attachment to his immediate relatives.

The play begins with a dialogue between Lola, the maid, and Rosa. The former is exhausted after a long evening of dancing and carousing. The latter has also been up all night, but in her case this comes as a result of waiting for her husband and son to come home. The purpose of this interchange is to establish early on a contrast between two social classes. Lola, as a representative of the working-class, gives the appearance of being carefree and happy in her enjoyment of music, dancing and casual sexual experiences, whereas Rosa, an example of a typical bourgeois housewife, seems dejected and worried. This suggests that the material benefits of the landowning class have not necessarily brought emotional well-being to its members. Likewise, Lola's joyful disposition implies that her spirit has not been broken by the poverty and exploitation that she suffers. Perhaps this contrast is most plainly evidenced by the sleeping habits of the two women:

LOLA: ¿Usted padece de desvelo?

[46] In this context, "conservative" signifies the preservation of long-established mental models and existential patterns.

ROSA: Dando vueltas, esperando… Cogí y me levanté. ¡Piensa uno tantas boberías cuando está desvelado!

LOLA: Yo duermo como un tronco. (52)

In this scene Rosa also manifests for the first time her obsessive preocupation with the cleanliness of her home, which is an obvious symbolic reference to the guilty conscience of her social class. Similar to Cristóbal, who in *El peine y el espejo* is only able to indirectly express his dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs by saying that "falta algo," Rosa only manages to express her subconscious awareness of a society in crisis through her insistence that "¡[h]ay que limpiar esta casa!" (52). Later in the play, it becomes apparent that Rosa's husband owes his social position to the ignoble and criminal—hence, "dirty"—means he has employed to attain it. This is foreshadowed by Lola's observations regarding the new mayor—Alfonso, a close friend of Cristóbal—and his wife Maestra, who form part of the Cuban bourgeoisie just as Rosa and Cristóbal do: "Antes que yo trabajara en esta casa, cuando estaba con la señora del alcalde, que entonces no era alcalde… ¡alcadesa!, ¡ahora le dicen alcadesa!, ¡unos muertos de hambre es lo que eran! ¡Cicateros! […] La gente del alcalde, son unos cicateros" (53). The implication is that one advances socially and economically in Cuba as a consequence of ruthlessness, cruelty and deception. Thus, according to Lola, upward mobility in society is nothing to celebrate, but rather indicates the moral degeneracy of the individual who has managed to materially prosper in a cutthroat community. Later in the play, Cristóbal and Juanelo's relationship to the mayor and his family serves to progressively sharpen the ideological contrast between father—the embodiment of opportunistic and immoral social and economic advancement—and son—the encarnation of class solidarity and ethical integrity.

The audience is first made aware of Juanelo when Rosa asks Lola if the former's son has awoken. Speaking of Juanelo, Rosa remarks: "Él vino tarde anoche. Creo que eso me desveló. No puedo quedarme dormida cuando está en la calle" (53). Thus, from the play's very beginning, the impression is given that father and son have similar personalities, lifestyles and values. Indeed, the close camaraderie at first manifested between the two men reinforces the initial notion of similarity. However, as the action unfolds, Juanelo and Cristóbal gradually but inevitably begin to ideologically diverge from one another. In reality, the motive causes for this separation are already well established when the play begins, since later on it is revealed that while Cristóbal has stayed out late with his extramarital lover of several years, Juanelo has spent the better part of the evening with Adela, an active revolutionary who has opened his mind to the radical teachings of the movement that is sweeping the country.

The father is the first of the two men to appear upon the stage. From the beginning, it is apparent that Cristóbal, the owner of a farm and employer of several agricultural laborers, has a role in the struggle between the landowning and working classes. The workers on his farm appear to be disinclined to obey him:

> ROSA: […] ¿Qué tal la finca?
>
> CRISTÓBAL: No hay un solo guajiro trabajando.
>
> ROSA: Pero es domingo.
>
> CRISTÓBAL: Les dije que tenían que chapear y no lo han hecho. Domingo, sí, pero a la hora de pedir un vale para la bodega no miran qué día es. (54)

In this brief exchange of words, Estorino succeeds in describing the ideological essence of the problematic relationship between capital and labor in 1950s Cuba. In a society whose legal system and social customs are supposed to be decisively influenced by Judeo-Christian

principles, one might expect employers to give their workers a day of rest on the sabbath, whether through statutory compulsion or simply as a result of personal religious conviction. In the eyes of the workers who serve the ruling class, the consistent practice of this convention might, at least in theory, validate to some degree the authority of those in power. However, in this case, Cristóbal's utter disregard for the sabbath as a day of rest has effectively invalidated his claim to exercise legitimate authority in a Judeo-Christian social context. By retorting that "a la hora de pedir un vale para la bodega no miran qué día es," he unintentionally calls attention to the fact that he underpays his workers, who are subsequently obligated to purchase on credit necessary goods from his store. As a consequence, they have amassed large debts that they will only be able to pay off by selling Cristóbal their land. Later on in the play, it becomes clear that this is a calculated technique that he has been using over the years to steadily accumulate more real estate. Most significantly, this exploitative method has been used by him to deprive Rodríguez, Tavito's father, of his land. This makes Cristóbal's refusal to help Rodríguez in the hour of his greatest need all the more ignominious. However, despite all that he has suffered at his employer's hands, Rodríguez initially clings to his faith in the traditional Cuban code of patronage.[47] He expects that his *patrón*, no matter how unjust and heartless his previous actions towards Rodríguez, will eventually intercede on behalf of Tavito's life, since according to the traditional understanding of benefaction in pre-revolutionary national society, defending the lives of the families that work for him is Cristóbal's most fundamental responsibility. While

[47] The traditional—ie, prior to the 1950s—Cuban *patrón* was, despite a tendency to show a certain amount of solicitous interest in his charges, a fundamentally exploitative individual whose livelihood depended upon gross political, social and economic inequalities. However, bound up in the costumary conception of landowning authority was an implied social contract, which, at least in theory, made the *patrón* responsible for the well-being of his tenants and workers, or at the very minimum for their survival. Thus, the *patrón*'s honor was supposed to be firmly connected to the way in which he treated and defended those under his rule. Estorino's portrayal of Cristóbal as an usurper of the traditional *clase pudiente* is meant to draw attention to the social degradation of the 1950s, during which years the time-honored concept of patronage was largely abandoned and replaced with a ruthless capitalist mentality that had little or no regard for the welfare of the laboring class.

Rodríguez maintains this key expectation, he can contemplate no far-reaching resistance to Cristóbal's authority, despite his keenly-felt grievances against his boss. Likewise, at the play's beginning, the refusal of the *guajiros* to work on Sunday does not constitute an outright rebellion against the *status quo*, nor an outright rejection of the social system under which they live. Rather, it may perhaps be seen as an effort to reclaim what they were once entitled to under a more traditional labor arrangement. Thus, Cristóbal represents the end of the more benevolent aspects of long-established society and their replacement with the ruthless capitalist code of existence. According to the dramatist's perspective, Cristóbal's ascent to the dominant class has made a whole-scale return to customary society impossible,[48] therefore the only real alternative to the deepening national crisis is the rapidly-approaching revolution. Thus, the futility of clinging to past models of existence and the need to embrace the new revolutionary doctrine are key themes in the play.

Juanelo, as the play's protagonist, is the character that most clearly symbolizes the radical transition from traditional to revolutionary Cuban existential models. As a youth, he represents the promise of the future. Although Rosa and Cristóbal, as emblems of an older generation, appear unwilling to acknowledge the fundamental changes that are taking place in Cuba,[49] their son Juanelo succeeds in understanding the full implications of the growing revolutionary movement. Rather than lament the impending loss of his privileged social status, Juanelo chooses to embrace the opportunity to join forces with the rebels and by doing so demonstrates his solidarity with the proletarian class. However, at the play's beginning, Juanelo does not have

[48] Similar to Batista himself, Cristóbal represents the disappearance of the traditional ruling class and its replacement by a ruthless and ambitious bourgeoisie that has risen up from the working classes.

[49] The older landowning generation's tendency towards intransigence with regard to the revolution, although of course not universal, would have been clearly evident to a Cuban audience in 1961, since agrarian reform was already in place. Fidel Castro has, since the beginning of his rule, understandably placed great emphasis on the political indoctrination of youth, since they are seen not only as more mentally open to revolutionary philosophy, but also because they represent the promise of the nation's future. Thus, the play's focus on Juanelo's personal transformation highlights the important role of youth in the new revolutionary society.

this level of commitment to the revolution. His romantic involvement with Adela, who is several years his senior, appears to have begun as a simple sexual conquest, therefore something to be customarily expected from a young Cuban male who seeks instruction in the art of physical love from an older woman. Cristóbal, speaking to Rosa, expresses his approval of his son's sexual adventure: "Bueno, tú no creerás que él piensa casarse con ella, ¿no? Será para ver lo que puede coger. […] Es un hombre, ¡déjalo! […] Déjalo, Rosa, él sabe lo que hace, que aproveche ahora que es joven. Después sabrá buscar lo que le convenga" (60). Cristóbal is clearly unaware that Adela, by opening Juanelo's mind to revolutionary theory, has gradually come to represent much more than a mere object of physical desire for his son.

Rather, the father expects the son to eventually settle down with the considerably younger Laurita, the daughter of Alfonso. Similar to Cristóbal, Laurita's father has succeeded in rising up from the working class and now occupies a position of some distinction in society. Thus, according to Cristóbal, Juanelo's marriage to Laurita would be ideal, since it would permit his son to eventually inherit the wealth accumulated by Alfonso. Cristóbal himself has married Rosa in order to take possession of her father's land and exploit the benefits that result from admittance into genteel society. Although Cristóbal is perfectly aware that Juanelo regards Laurita as nothing more than a "niña boba" (60), the father apparently does not feel that sincere mutual interest has any real place in choosing a marriage partner. From his perspective, matrimony is nothing more than than a social arrangement for promoting class interests. Hence, according to Cristóbal, should a man wish to fulfill his intimate needs, he can, as Cristóbal has done for the last several years, engage in an extramarital affair.[50] This means that the father initially sees his son's relationship with Adela as the first of many sexual adventures that will

[50]Importantly, Cristóbal's marital infidelity has ruined his relationship with his wife, similar to the situation in *El peine y el espejo*. Thus, Estorino once again intentionally associates adultery with the corrupt pre-revolutionary existential code.

continue after a marriage of convenience to Laurita. In other words, Cristóbal fully expects Juanelo to perpetuate the former's opportunistic and *machista* personal values.

Therefore, Juanelo finds himself at a crossroads in his life. He may either choose Adela—older, educated, liberated, feminist and revolutionary—or Laurita—younger, uneducated, naïve, traditional and passive. Union with Adela signifies a radical break not only with his immediate family, but also with the entire pre-revolutionary paradigm. Conversely, should Juanelo accept Laurita as his wife, he will have chosen to conform not only to the expectations of his parents, but also to those of conservative—and thus anti-revolutionary—Cuban society. By establishing this set of circumstances, Estorino implies that the *machista* code of existence—here represented by the possibility of marriage between Juanelo and Laurita—perpetuates the traditional cultural paradigm, whereas rejection of *machismo*—here demonstrated through Juanelo's commitment to Adela—is conducive to the strengthening of revolutionary values.[51] In another sense, the author also voices his conviction that the *machista* way of life has no legitimate place in revolutionary society, therefore it forms part of a regressive and reactionary mode of existence that, with the rebel victory, has ceased to be hegemonic. Thus, according to Estorino, *machismo* cannot be reconciled with true *cubanía revolucionaria.*

Traditional religion is another component of pre-revolutionary society that, according to the ideological perspective of *El robo del cochino,* is detrimental to the fundamental objectives of the revolution. Similar to Carmela in *El peine y el espejo,* Maestra serves as the embodiment

[51] In several later plays by Estorino, *machismo* is presented as a regressive tendency that has no legitimate place in true *cubanía revolucionaria*. In *El robo del cochino,* the *machismo* of Cristóbal is cleary portrayed as anti-revolutionary, since he openly expresses his disagreement with Castro's radical movement. However, in Estorino's next play, *La casa vieja* (1964), the character Diego, despite a firm commitment to serving the revolution, nonetheless displays *machista* tendencies that, according to the dramatist's perspective, run counter to the key objectives of *cubanía revolucionaria*, as well as hearken back to a pre-revolutionary society that has supposedly been supplanted. Thus, Estorino demonstrates that Castro's victory has not resulted in the elimination of *machismo* from Cuban society. Rather, he draws attention to the need to first recognize and then eradicate this negative tendency, which unfortunately still thrives in a revolutionary context.

of traditional Catholic values. As the wife of Alfonso, who like Cristóbal has risen in society as a result of his willingness to embezzle funds and exploit others, she represents the hypocrisy of religious devotion among those who directly benefit from unethical activity. However, Estorino also condemns the corruption of the church itself in the play. This occurs when Maestra arrives at Cristóbal's home for the purpose of collecting money to help impoverished Cubans marry through the Catholic church:

> MAESTRA: No [es] una colecta general, ¿sabe?, sino, solamente entre los matrimonios más representativos […] lo que se pretende es realizar matrimonios religiosos entre la gente pobre. […] Después, a los matrimonios que contribuyan se les dará una especie de suvenir y si quieren […] pueden ser padrinos de boda de uno de los matrimonios pobres que van a hacerse […] uno contribuye, cumple su parte y no se ve obligado a estar después, tú sabes cómo son las gentes, que se lo puedan tomar a pecho y si le sirves de padrino de boda, después capaz que los tengas metidos en la casa todo el día. […] entonces en el periódico del pueblo […] la directora del colegio, escribirá una viñeta sobre cada uno de los matrimonios más representativos, como dice el padre. (64-65)

A close look at this seemingly banal dialogue reveals the deeply-rooted injustice in Cuban society. The "matrimonios más representativos" are, from Estorino's perspective, those persons chiefly responsible for the economic exploitation that has impoverished the working classes. Therefore, the bourgeoisie's venality has ironically made such a collection necessary. Futhermore, the church's insistence on requiring an exorbitant fee in order to perform a wedding ceremony indicates how profoundly indifferent it has become to the economic well-being of the majority of its parishioners. This lack of concern also suggests the church's complicity with the

exploitative economic order, which is itself governed by the "matrimonios más representativos." The offer of a "suvenir" and "viñeta" in the local newspaper draws attention to the ruling class's need for material compensation and public recognition. Thus, according to the dramatist's perspective, the Cuban bourgeoisie must have such petty incentives in order to perform the most minimal acts of charity.[52] Finally, the church's disdain for the poor is demonstrated by the former's willingness to give contributors the option to forgo spending time after the wedding with the sponsored family lest the ruling class be made uncomfortable by the presence of the downtrodden people that they have so shamelessly misused. Maestra's commentary on this option is particulary ironic, since she and her family were themselves not long ago "unos muertos de hambre." Therefore, according to Estorino, the church is actively involved in maintaining the unjust pre-revolutionary social order, which pits Cubans against one another through class struggle.

However, the church itself is not at the center of the play's ideological statement. Rather, religion is simply shown to be a key factor contributing to the oppression and exploitation of the masses. The thematic focus of *El robo del cochino* is the culpability of the bourgeoisie, for whom Catholicism is nothing more than a means for perpetuating the interests of the ruling class. However, the author does not make Cristóbal's—and thus, the bourgeoisie's—guilt plainly evident at the beginning of the play. Rather, the character is permitted to defend and justify his actions up until the final confrontation with Juanelo, so that the original audience would be obligated to weigh the evidence and decide whether or not Cristóbal's advice for his son is in the latter's best interests. Estorino complicates this process by making Juanelo's father a superficially likeable character whose warm, fraternal feelings for his son, dedication to his

[52] This of course stands in sharp contrast to what Estorino portrays as the heroic and selfless sacrifice of *los barbudos* in the Sierra Maestra, who claim to ask for nothing in return for their efforts but loyalty and service to their cause.

family's material well-being, and admirable work-ethic seem, at least initially, to counteract to some extent his disdainful attitude towards his workers and his marked lack of respect for his wife's feelings. Likewise, the original audience might have found itself sympathizing to a certain degree with Cristóbal's arguments in favor of his personal philosophy, which is largely based on the premise that the world is an unavoidably cruel and ruthless place, therefore one has no choice but to "pelear para ganar terreno" (98). This audience could also have empathized somewhat with Cristóbal's iron determination to transcend the limits of his impoverished origins, and undoubtedly many would have been able to relate to his frank desire to "llegar allá, sí, donde dices que tienen diez" (97), in other words, to rise up to the level of those who economically have a controlling influence over him.[53]

Still, none of Cristóbal's rationalizations, all of which assume the indefinite continuance of the accustomed existential paradigm, take into account the imminent possibility of radical, large-scale social transformation through revolutionary upheaval. Thus, the original audience would have had to decide either that Cristóbal simply doesn't believe that the revolution has any chance for success, or that he is counting on it to fail because he is convinced that he personally has more to gain with the perpetuation of the *status quo*. The first position is of course somewhat more morally defensible than the second, since by openly favoring the established order, he can

[53]Cristóbal's remark here is in response to the following observation made by Juanelo to his father: "[T]ú tienes tres y tienes que suplicar a los que tienen cinco" (97). Although Cristóbal has risen socially and economically to the level of those who once exploited his labor, and thus holds dominion over his workers, he still finds himself subject to those whose political power and wealth transcend his own. This is made evident by his fruitless trips to Matanzas for the purpose of obtaining a loan. During these visits he is forced to wait: "CRISTÓBAL: [...] Hora y media en la antesala. ¡Claro!, porque no es aquí. Quién se atreve a hacerme esperar aquí. Aquí todo el mundo en el pueblo me conoce. Que soy amigo del alcalde, del teniente, que tengo una finca, que vivo en la casa que fue de don Gregorio y ahora es mía. Mañana tener que volver" (79). According to Cristóbal, one can only manage to avoid such humiliation by either becoming one of those who "tienen diez," or by obtaining a university degree, which is to be valued because of "las puertas que abre" (79). Not surprisingly, he desires the second option for his son, whom he considers unfit for the farm owner's lifestyle owing to what Cristóbal perceives as Juanelo's lack of rigor with the workers. However, it has not occurred to him that the higher knowledge associated with university training—here aptly represented by Adela, who is herself a university professor and, as mentioned earlier, has educated Juanelo in the philosophy of the revolution—can promote a revolutionary consciousness that has the potential to eliminate the viciously competitive social paradigm that drives Cristóbal's behavior.

no longer believably insist that his unscrupulous behavior is nothing more than a necessary response to an unfortunate set of circumstances over which he has no control and for which there can be no remedy. Estorino finally and definitively resolves the issue towards the end of the play, when Cristóbal's pretence of necessary complicity with the established order is stripped away at the moment of Juanelo's departure for the mountains—with the intent of joining the rebel forces—immediately after the execution of Tavito:

> JUANELO: [...] Hay un montón de gente que quiere cambiarlo todo. Allá arriba están, en la Sierra. Llevan allí un año y medio y cada día son más.
>
> CRISTÓBAL: Van a acabar con todos.
>
> JUANELO: Eso lo vengo oyendo desde que llegaron.
>
> CRISTÓBAL: Tienen que acabar con todos. (98-99)

The shift from "[v]an a acabar" in the first sentence to "[t]ienen que acabar" in the second indicates Cristóbal's abandonment of his pretended role as dispassionate observer of the conflict, and confirms his true status as defender of the ruling order.

Juanelo's announcement of his decision to leave forces a decisive battle of existencial perspectives between father and son. For several pages (95-101) a heated dialogue ensues. This discussion serves two distinct purposes, one of which is purely dramatic, and the other ideological. With regard to the first, Estorino uses the final confrontation as an opportunity to review the many sources of conflict and disagreement between Cristóbal and Juanelo, so that the latter's firm decision to break with his father may be seen as much more than an impulsive reaction to the injustice suffered by Tavito. Rather, the death of Juanelo's friend is the catalyst that prompts him to act decisively in response to personal convictions that, although new, are nonetheless based upon many years of individual experience, and which place him in direct

opposition to a father he has loved and admired for most of his life. Thus, Juanelo's parting is given the full dramatic impact that it merits. In reference to the scene's philosophical import, the author employs what is ostensibly a highly personal clash of views between two people in such a way that one character—Cristóbal—represents the collective outlook of the reactionary bourgeoisie and the other—Juanelo—that of the emerging and classless revolutionary society. Nonetheless, in the context of the play, this exchange of differing perspectives does not so much constitute a debate as it does the ruinous collapse, when challenged by the selfless values of the revolution, of the faulty logic used by the ruling class to justify its exploitative actions. In another sense, Cristóbal, faced with the devastating loss of his son's loyalty and devotion, and unable to come to terms with his eroding position before the onslaught of the rebels, begins to reveal the true and shameful nature of his complicity with the *status quo*. These confessions are tantamount to an admission of guilt from the *nouveau riche* ruling class itself:

> ¿Y qué me pagaban? Diez pesos y la comida, ¡la comida! ¡Y cómo entraba dinero en aquella bodega! Cómo le cobraban a los guajiros que venían con sus vales ¡el doble, el triple!, se le ganaba a todo. Y aprendí a llevar los libros, ¡ríete! [...] Pues robé, ¡coño!, tuve que robar o me aplastaban. Si no, no había forma de salir de aquella mierda. (99)

Thus, although Cristóbal's motive in revealing his immoral actions to his son is to justify his reactionary views, he only succeeds in making the revolutionary position seem like the only real solution to the woes of a hopelessly corrupt society. Also, despite Cristóbal's insistence that he wants no part in the wider conflict taking place, Juanelo retorts that one has no choice but to become involved: "Tienes que estar en un lado o en otro" (100). Undoubtedly, this statement

would have been just as immediately relevant to a 1961 audience actively involved in the ongoing revolutionary process, as it must have been to real-life Cubans in 1958.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *El robo del cochino* gave its original audience the opportunity to reflect upon the profound changes that had taken place in Cuban society over the previous three years. Thus, an implicit dialogue between past and present would have arisen as a consequence of that audience's ability to strongly and personally identify with the play's context and situations. For this reason, the work served to help the 1961 spectator strengthen her revolutionary consciousness in a number of ways. Firstly, Estorino's thorough analysis and scathing condemnation, through the example of Cristóbal, of the pre-revolutionary capitalist credo was meant to remind the audience of why it had been necessary for the revolution to replace the corrupt and inhumane old order. The playwright's decision to allow Cristóbal to give full expression to his views, and to avoid representing him in an entirely unfavorable light, was meant to fully engage the intellectual faculties of the theatergoer, so that she might decide for herself whether the reactionary or the revolutionary ideological position had more merit. One must additionally keep in mind that in 1961, many Cubans might still have been under the mistaken impression that the chief motive behind Castro's rise to power was simply the overthrow of a ruthless dictator. Hence, the play would have made clear to such individuals the deeper reasons for armed rebellion and radical change. Secondly, the painful relationship between Cristóbal and Juanelo, which begins with camaraderie and ends in irrevocable separation, would have called attention to the fact that many audience members had very recently experienced painful divisions within their own families as a result of the revolution. Of course, it was not Estorino's intention to belittle the bonds of affection that hold families together. Rather, his play would have served to give a dramatized example of why the

prerogatives of the revolution had to take precedence over all family considerations. Also, Juanelo's commitment to his friend Tavito and his deep affection for the housemaid Lola seem to imply that the true revolutionary's family consists of all those who share his desire for a better world. Hence, audiencegoers would have been reminded of the pressing need for solidarity at a time when reaction against the new regime, both at home and abroad, was rapidly beginning to stiffen. Thirdly, but not less importantly, the play's representation of sexual roles—specifically, the contrast between the *machista* code and the concept of sexual liberation[54]—was intended to emphasize the importance of government initiatives, already well underway in 1961, that sought to transform the sexual role of women in Cuban society.[55] Thus, the heroic figure of Adela, despite the fact that she is only a referential character, was not only supposed to serve as a model of inspiration for female spectators, but also to indicate to men what kind of women would be most desirable according to the new cultural paradigm. Finally, the play's call for a new moral code, free from the pernicious influence of traditional religion, was meant to help the audience to seriously question its customary relationship with Christianity, and thus to embrace a new political doctrine which by 1961 had begun to supplant Cuba's time-honored spiritual practices.

In summary, *El robo del cochino*, as one of Estorino's greatest works, marvelously captures the Cuban *zeitgeist* of 1961, and must have been an excellent propaganda tool for supporting Castro's fledgling regime, although such was unlikely to be the ideological intention of the author. It might have seemed at the time that the author had found an excellent dramatic formula with which to indefinitely serve the needs of the new government. However, in

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[54] Here, sexual liberation does not refer to unconstrained liberty with regard to sexual acts, but rather to one's freedom—whether female or male—from unnecessarily restrictive sexual roles.

[55] Among these was the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*, founded that same year. Although this organization has never been "feminist" in the sense that this term is commonly understood in countries such as the United States, it has always stood for the betterment of women in Cuban society, not only through increased opportunities for work and education, but also by means of an ever larger and more important role for women in the general revolutionary process.

hindsight it is apparent that for Estorino, this work was simply a point of transition between one stage of creative evolution and the next. The intervening years would demonstrate that the author, far from being a blind follower of the revolution, was fully prepared to apply to the new hegemonic order the same intense and unrestrained scrutiny that he had focused upon the old one. In fact, in *El robo del cochino* there is at least one piece of evidence strongly suggesting that such critical questioning had already begun. One should consider the following comments by Cristóbal with regard to those who live under the authority of the Batista regime and who choose to openly criticize its actions:

> Pero ellos mismos se lo buscan. Se hacen eco de todo lo que oyen, no hay bola que no repitan. Todo lo encuentran mal, todo. Y un gobierno tiene que hacerse respetar. Y no es que yo esté de acuerdo, ¡tú lo sabes! Pero yo trabajo, de eso vivo, yo no tengo nada que ver con la censura, ¡qué me importa a mí la censura! Yo muelo mi caña y no tengo problema. Y el que es zapatero hace sus zapatos y el otro hace lo que tiene que hacer. Allá los políticos que se fajen entre ellos. (73)

What makes these words particularly telling is that the 1961 audience, whether consciously or unconsciously, would have recognized these sentiments not just in relation to the Batista government of 1958, but also with regard to a present-day revolutionary regime that had grown increasingly intolerant of those who dared to contend with its official line. So, although firmly loyal to the fundamental principles of the new society, Estorino here appears to express his conviction that oppressive control—the same as *machismo*, corruption, exploitation and religion—has no legitimate place in his personal vision of *cubanía revolucionaria*. In the latter two of the dramatist's following three plays (*La casa vieja* and *Los mangos de Caín*), the theme of unlimited authority and its attendant evils would grow considerably in importance. As a

consequence, his celebrated status as one of the government's preferred playwrights would rapidly be transformed into the position of blacklisted and rejected author.

CHAPTER THREE:

1962-1965: Experimentation, criticism, and marginalization.

The first three years after the victory of the revolution (1959-1961), were in a large sense a time for consolidating the new regime's power base. Cuba's revolutionary leader—who, despite his apparently leftist leanings, did not declare his "undying commitment to Marxism-Leninism" (Kapcia 101)[56] until December 1961—gradually but relentlessly began to implement radical changes to many aspects of national culture and government. Staten neatly summarizes the island's transformation during those years:

> [B]y the middle of 1961 the defining themes of the revolution were clearly in place. […] [Castro] defied the United States and created the first communist government in the Western Hemisphere, although it clearly reflected his own revolutionary design and imprint. A socialist economy was developed with programs designed specifically to redistribute wealth and address the needs of the poor majority in Cuba. Fueled by the mutual suspicions of the Cold War, the relationship between the United States and Cuba rapidly deteriorated to the point of outright hostilities during the ill-fated attempt by U.S. government-supported Cuban exiles to topple Castro in the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 […]. Mutually beneficial ties between Cuba and the Soviet Union were established. (89-90)

The Bay of Pigs Invasion (Playa Girón) in April 1961 proved to be a watershed moment for Castro and his regime, since it allowed him "to consolidate his power and eliminate virtually all his opposition on the island" (Staten 97). However, Cuba's successful repulsion of the invaders

[56] Kapcia notes: "The 'socialist character' [of Castro's revolution] was publicly declared on 16 April 1961. […] In December 1961, Castro announced his undying commitment to Marxism-Leninism" (101).

would eventually lead, in October of 1962, to one of the greatest crises the world has ever witnessed:

> [The invasion] gave Castro and the people of Cuba proof that the ultimate goal of the United States was to destroy the Cuban revolution. It convinced a reluctant Soviet Union that a relationship with Cuba could be very beneficial and entailed little risk. Finally, it led to the decision to place nuclear missles on Cuban soil. (Staten 97)

The Cuban Missile Crisis, which pitted the United States and Soviet Union against one another in a harrowing standoff for almost two weeks, was resolved in a way that "stunned and humiliated the Cubans," since they were not consulted by either nation. "The reality is that Castro and the Cubans were pawns during the missile crisis." Expressing his disagreement with what happened, "Castro set forth several demands that had to be met before he considered the crisis to be over." He insisted the U.S. put an end to its crippling embargo, cease to conspire to invade Cuba, "respect Cuban territory and airspace and return Guantánamo Bay to Cuba. These demands were ignored by the United States." As for the Soviet Union, "[r]elations between the Soviets and Cuba would be strained until August 1968 with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia" (Staten 99-100).

Thus, between 1962 and 1965, Cuban government and society was characterized by a kind of seige mentality. The island found itself with a hostile and powerful enemy only 90 miles to its north, and with a reluctant and unreliable ally thousands of miles to its east. In addition, "[n]early 250,000 Cubans had fled the island between 1959 and October 1962" (Staten 100). This massive exodus could only intensify the leadership's grave suspicions about the loyalty of those who had remained. As will be demonstrated futher ahead, such suspicions would lead the

government to take repressive measures against the general population, and to intimidate and silence many intellectuals. These actions would seriously compromise Cuba's image internationally. The island also witnessed increasingly bolder attempts by the government to radicalize its policy initiatives. Such efforts produced decidedly mixed results.[57] It was under these conditions that Estorino was to write and premiere his next three plays.

Las vacas gordas

After the resounding success of *El robo del cochino*, the Cuban authorities were prepared to support Estorino in the ambitious, highly elaborate and extremely costly production—especially so for a national government with very limited economic resources—of the American-Broadway-styled musical *Las vacas gordas*, which is undoubtedly, with regard to staging, the most demanding of the author's plays at the time of this writing. In seeking to follow the basic standards of this peculiarly American genre, Estorino faithfully included its essential components: rapid, breezy dialogue; a large cast of two-dimensional secondary characters; a small number of primary yet nonetheless relatively shallow characters that move the plot along; a heavy emphasis on plot twists, thus a subordination of dramatic substance to suspense; a so-called sentimental happy ending; numerous musical numbers, interspersed throughout the play between spoken dialogue, with lighthearted lyrics in tightly rhymed and carefully structured

[57] Staten notes: "Rationing of food began in 1962. The trade and balance of payments deficits ballooned. The lack of skilled personnel contributed to the chaotic and improvised nature of central planning in the Ministry of Industry. The attempt to achieve rapid industrialization failed. […] [T]he revolutionary government adopted a new strategy of development in 1964. This strategy focused on sugar and agriculture. […] The symbolic goal of this strategy was to be able to produce a massive 10-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970. In order to accomplish this, the state would have to direct the majority of its resources, labor and capital into the production of sugar. […] The new socialist man was to be committed to an egalitarian society and place the needs of community before himself. Laborers were to work for the good of society rather than personal gain. […] Non-material incentives […] were to compensate for overtime and volunteer work. […] In support of this commitment to an egalitarian society, the government provided access to social services free of charge. Healthcare, education, day care, social security and much housing were provided free to all Cubans" (101-102).

verses; constant changes of stage scenery to suggest a great number of different locales; and frequent, choreographed dancing.

Nonetheless, although the play's basic form matches the standard Broadway conception, its message is clearly revolutionary in intent, unlike the unmistakeably bourgeois ideological orientation of the American musical. Thus, Estorino hoped to demonstrate that a quintessentially American—and consequently imperialistic—art form could be effectively employed to serve the needs of the Cuban revolution. In this novel way, *Las vacas gordas* would express the newly hegemonic values of *cubanía revolucionaria*.

American-Broadway musicals had regularly run in Havana in the years immediately prior to Castro's rise to power.[58] Although such productions certainly appealed to the English-speaking Americans living in or visiting Cuba, they were also enjoyed to a certain extent by the island's native speakers of Spanish, although the high cost of a ticket and the language difference would have largely limited the genre's exposure to the educated and well-to-do. There must have been many Cubans who, although aware of the American-Broadway musicals being staged in their country, were either disinclined or economically unable to attend them. Still, as moviegoers, many would have seen filmed versions. For several such individuals, the prospect of experiencing, in Spanish, a distinctly national musical, especially after the victory of the revolution, must have stirred patriotic feelings. It would have signified a triumph for the new regime, which had now made it possible for all levels of society to enjoy, upon the theater stage, the kind of musical that not long ago had primarily been entertainment for foreigners or elite

[58] With regard to Cuban theater in the 1950s prior to the victory of the revolution, Carlos Domínguez Espinosa notes: "[L]os artistas de las tablas enfrentaron una contradicción entre el teatro de arte que muchos hubiesen querido hacer y las demandas económicas que los llevaron a buscar los seguros éxitos de taquilla. No fueron capaces de resolverla, y a la larga esta última opción se impuso. Un índice elocuente de las concesiones que eso implicó, se obtiene a través del análisis del repertorio que se puso en esos años. En esa ecléctica nómina en la que se mezclaban la vanguardia europea, el melodrama español, la comedia sentimental y las obras de reconocida calidad, dominan, sin embargo, los dramaturgos ingleses y norteamericanos. No es un hecho fortuito, sino el índice del peso que los grandes éxitos de Broadway empezaron a adquirir en la programación que veían los cubanos" (26).

nationals. Also, the use of the American-Broadway-musical format for the promotion of the values of *cubanía revolucionaria*, would have also indicated the inversion of the traditional Cuban-American cultural paradigm, according to which the United States had tended to dominate Cuba. For these reasons, and owing to the excellent reputation accorded to Estorino as a consequence of the success of *El robo del cochino*, the ambitious project of staging *Las vacas gordas* was sponsored and undertaken.

By several accounts, the musical's premiere, despite the high expectations associated with it, was a disappointment. However, the burden of blame seems not to lie just with the author's script, but also with the "menosprecio del género [que] ha impedido la instauración de un movimiento escénico," as well as "la carencia de actores, cantantes y bailarines con los cuales acometer el montaje de los espectáculos" (Espinosa Domínguez 12). Critical reviews of *Las vacas gordas*, which are few, focus mostly upon the inability of national theater to produce, in 1962, the required talent needed for the successful production of such a musical. In other words, at that time it was felt that Cuban theater had, by accepting to stage Estorino's massive extravaganza, undertaken a task that was beyond its capacity. Some mention has also been made of the prolixity of the script and the overabundance of musical interludes. However, very little has been said about the actual dramatic content of the play.

The relatively simple and standard premise—man and woman meet, fall in love, undergo a crisis, then marry—of *Las vacas gordas*, in addition to the American-Broadway style with which one commonly associates trivial content, belie the meaningful social commentary and ideological messages presented. However, the dramatic impact of these aspects is undermined by the lighthearted tone and shallow characterization that predominate throughout the script. Perhaps this particular genre is simply not an appropriate vehicle for weighty political

statements. However, despite some evident shortcomings, Estorino's musical deserves more critical attention than it has received up to this time,[59] since it reveals, through its exploration of a relatively distant past, so much about the pressing ideological concerns of a Cuban audience in 1962.

To a large extent, the musical is a history lesson taught from a decidedly socialist perspective. Estorino takes the spectator back to the days of *el baile de los millones*,[60] which were the heady times immediately prior to the precipitous fall of sugar prices in 1920. Practically overnight, this event drastically reduced many a personal fortune among Cuba's elite, although it hardly impacted the already impoverished proletarian masses on the island.

The dramatic action commences just as sugar prices begin their inevitable decline, and ends when all hope has been lost for the market's recovery. The play focuses upon two lovers, Rodolfo and Amanda, whose relationship develops at the moment of economic collapse. Amanda, a young woman from a very humble background, forms part of the tawdry world of American-style showgirl dancing, yet her talent, charm and physical beauty have given her privileged access to high society. Wanting to live a life of unbridled luxury, she aspires to marriage with her lover, Germán, who is a wealthy sugar tycoon and middle-aged man married

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[59] To my knowledge, critical commentary has, at the time of this writing, only appeared in prologues to editions of books in which the play appears. In such critical commentary, *Las vacas gordas* has only been given the most topical treatment, possibly because of the relatively low regard in which it seems to have been held as a work of dramatic art.

[60] Staten writes: "During World War I, an international committee made up of representatives from the United States and Great Britain supervised the sugar supply to the allies. By 1918, it had basically set the world market price of sugar at 4.6 cents a pound and purchased the entire Cuban crop. This was much higher than the prewar price but lower than what could have been obtained in a free market situation. Price controls ended in 1920 and the "Dance of the Millions" began. The price of sugar escalated from 9 cents a pound in February to 22 cents a pound in May. The price of sugar then collapsed as quickly as it had risen. By December, it had fallen to less than 4 cents a pound. This devastated most of the sugar mills that had contracted to purchase large quantities of sugar at high prices and borrowed money to expand operations based on the promise of higher prices. Then, when the price of sugar dramatically fell, they were faced with having to sell their processed sugar at a much lower price. Many went bankrupt and could not pay off their loans. By the end of 1921, the First National City Bank of New York had foreclosed on more than sixty sugar mills in Cuba. […] Cuba's sugar crop of 1921 sold for less than it had generated in 1915 even though it was the second largest crop in the history of the country" (51-52).

to Hortensia, also middle aged and the mother of Guillermito, an adolescent boy. Only a year has gone by since the legalization of divorce on the island, so Amanda pressures Germán to leave Hortensia and marry her. However, he is reluctant to do this owing to the loss of social prestige that would result, and seems content to keep Amanda as his lover. Likewise, Hortensia's younger paramour, Nené, from a renowned family that has lost its fortune, and desiring the economic benefits of marriage to a wealthy woman, begs Hortensia to divorce Germán. Similar to her husband, Hortensia is unwilling to face the social ostracism that would occur as a consequence of divorce, which, despite the recently passed law allowing it, is still considered scandalous among the Cuban economic elite. Rodolfo is a desperately poor yet attractive young man who has fallen in love with Amanda by watching her perform at the Alhambra Theater. His *pícaro* friend Lázaro, who is just as destitute as Rodolfo, assists him in his efforts to meet her and win her love. Rodolfo finally manages, under the false pretense of being a powerful sugar seller and cosmopolitan playboy, to gain entrance to an exclusive cocktail party thrown by Hortensia at her home, and thus captivates Amanda, who has defiantly attended the event for the purpose of offending Hortensia. Unfortunately for Rodolfo, Hortensia is smitten with his good looks as well as drawn to his supposed wealth and sophistication. To complicate matters even more, Hortensia, to Nené's dismay, has decided to pursue Rodolfo as her lover, and Germán, who has discovered Rodolfo's true identity, causes the latter to lose his job as revenge for having taken Amanda from him. The plot is propelled forward by the numerous complications that arise from these complex circumstances.

With regard to characterization, the only individuals that might inspire a modicum of the audience's sympathy or interest are Rodolfo and Amanda, and even they seem rather two-dimensional, except perhaps for the few but significant moments when they philosophically

reflect upon their lives and their place in society. Lázaro, although portrayed in a somewhat positive way, is simply a *pícaro* of the most vulgar type. As for Germán, Hortensia, Nené, Guillermito, and their large coterie of family, friends, and associates, they are no more than dramatic types rather than true characters, and are used primarily to advance the plot while serving as vehicles for the ideological commentary upon Cuban history.

However, *Las vacas gordas* nonetheless has moments of verbal brilliance. It also features incisive observations about national society, and in this way represents, through the author's personal vision of *cubanía*, an important moment in the island's history. For those audiencegoers looking for an entertaining and somewhat frivolous way to learn, from a socialist viewpoint, about the consequences of the *baile de los millones* and its collapse, Estorino's musical does not disappoint. Had Cuban theater been equal to the task of staging this challenging work, the musical might have been considerably more successful than it was. In all fairness to the author, it is apparent that he did not write the script with the intention of creating a masterpiece, but rather for the purpose of entertaining the public and of instructing them about an event of historical significance.

From its very beginning, *Las vacas gordas* strives to recreate the ambience of Cuba in 1920. In spite of the musical's rather whimsical feel, one notes the seriousness of Estorino's efforts to include relevant details of the past. The opening scene unfolds before the entrance to the famous Alhambra theater in Havana, where Amanda is performing the last few minutes of her standard act. A small group of street vendors has gathered before the door, waiting for the audience to exit. The announcements of the paper sellers quickly call the audience's attention to the unstable political conditions that prevailed at that moment in time:

VENDEDOR 2: ¡*La Discusión*! Zayas es aclamado en Holguín, en Guantánamo, en Bueycito.

VENDEDOR 3: Chiflan a Zayas en Holguín, en Bueycito. ¡Cómpreme *La Nación*!

VENDEDOR 2: ¡*La Discusión*!

VENDEDOR 1: ¡*El Día*!

VENDEDOR 3: ¡*La Nación*! Terrible desastre ferroviario. Los liberales arrancan los railes y mueren niños, mujeres y ancianos. ¡*La Nación*! (174)

Here, the plurality of news sources evidently does not help to inform the public better, as proponents of the capitalist system might argue, but rather only sows confusion. The reporting of each newspaper is clearly colored by favoritism towards a particular political base, and likewise by antagonism towards perceived political enemies. There is no objectivity in such newspapers, which only serve as instruments for advancing specific agendas. An audiencegoer in 1962 would certainly have reflected upon the fact that under Castro, newspapers had increasingly come under the unified control of the government,[61] and for this reason had largely ceased to contradict one another. Also, she would have compared the political chaos of 1920 with the ever firmer solidarity of the new revolutionary regime. Thus, what may initially seem to be nothing more than the playwright's efforts to historically contextualize the action, is also an attempt to make the audience ponder the profound social and political changes that have occurred since the victory of the revolution.

Immediately following the announcements of the paper sellers, two American sailors briefly appear onstage, accompanied by a prostitute. There is a quick exchange of dialogue, largely in English, in which one of the sailors requests free sex and is rejected. Then, a

[61] In the following chapter, I extensively treat the demise of an independent press in Cuba during the 1960s.

revendedor calls out to the public in his efforts to sell watches supposedly pre-owned by Americans, while a *billetero* cries out: "El noventa y cinco. Dinero llama dinero. El que no es rico es porque no quiere" (175). A poor *guajiro* and his young son approach the *revendedor* and ask if they can get into the Alhambra to see the last few minutes of the show. The *revendedor* tells them that the boy will not be allowed in unless he is wearing long pants. Of course, the *revendedor* has a pair ready to sell them.

These particular details once again call attention to the contrast between pre- and post-revolutionary society. By 1962, Castro's government had already taken decisive steps to eliminate the proliferation of prostitution, and American sailors, traditionally a prime source of income for Cuba's prostitutes, were of course no longer present on the island. The activities of men like the *revendedor* and the *billetero* were frowned upon by the new revolutionary regime in 1962, since the model citizen was now expected to devote herself to the common welfare of the nation, and hence to turn away from opportunistic and exploitative economic activity. Thus, from the musical's beginning, the 1962 spectator would have been compelled to reflect upon the positive transformations that had taken place in Cuban society as a result of the revolution.

Estorino also intends to debunk a common misconception about *el baile de los millones*, by showing that the economic benefits derived from high sugar prices, far from creating a state of general prosperity on the island, only really affected a relatively small number of wealthy Cubans, while the remainder of the population remained as destitute as ever. At the beginning of the first act, the dialogue of the street vendors sets the tone for the chief ideological concern of the musical: the end of *las vacas gordas*,[62] or of supposedly prosperous economic times:

[62] The term "*las vacas gordas*" alludes to the story of Joseph in the Bible in *Genesis*. Joseph had a dream in which he saw seven fat cows followed by seven thin cows. He interpreted this to mean that Egypt would experience seven years of prosperity followed by seven years of famine. The Egyptian pharoah took Joseph's prediction seriously, and therefore stored grain in anticipation of a long drought, which took place in accordance with the dream. In

REVENDEDOR: Hay que buscársela como uno pueda.

VENDEDOR 1: Y a esto le llaman las Vacas Gordas.

REVENDEDOR: Para los que tienen vacas.

VENDEDOR 1: Y azúcar.

REVENDEDOR: Eso, mucha azúcar.

VENDEDOR 2: ¡*La Discusión*! Sigue bajando el azúcar. Baja el azúcar, baja, baja, baja el azúcar.

VENDEDOR 1: Está bajando.

REVENDEDOR: Que suba o baje. La única que tengo es para el café con leche. (176)

The indifference of the poor towards the end of good economic times is contrasted with the great anxiety felt by the sugar tycoons. The musical's plot provides the necessary pretext for bringing together a small number of the nation's wealthy and poor classes, who normally would have had little or no occasion for meaningful interaction with one another. In this way, the respective concerns of the two social groups are brought into sharp relief. Clearly, the author's intent is to contrast the much more reliable and stable sugar exportation to communist China and

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Estorino's musical there is no Joseph-like figure to warn of the impending tragedy and take necessary preventative measures. The characters refer to the sugar boom as *las vacas gordas*, yet many, especially the wealthy, ironically seem to believe that the prosperity will continue indefinitely.

the Soviet Bloc in 1962,[63] with the volatility of the sugar trade, mostly with the United States and other capitalist countries, in 1920.[64]

As a wealthy, selfish, cynical, ruthless and reckless couple, Germán and Hortensia, who serve as the antithesis of Rodolfo and Amanda, represent the bourgeoisie. Rodolfo and Amanda are from the proletarian class, but both have found ways to insinuate themselves into bourgeois society. Rodolfo is portrayed in a largely sympathetic light, whereas Amanda is presented as inordinately ambitious and cynical, although Estorino does allow the audience to feel more sympathy for her when she reveals to Rodolfo her impoverished background and the degrading nature of her job. The interaction between the two couples demonstrates the baseness and hypocrisy of the upper class, and calls attention to the gross exploitation forced upon the proletariat, whose character is corrupted through association with the elite.

The collapse of the sugar market, coupled with Germán and Hortensia's decision to stay together, force Amanda to give up her hopes of joining the wealthy class, and therefore she accepts Rodolfo's marriage proposal. The imperfect nature of this union is emphasized when the couple sings the musical's closing number: "Sabemos bien / no es el amor quien triunfa aquí, / la situación es quien nos hace decidir. / Ya que es así, mejor callar / lo triste de esta gran verdad / que es en el sentir / de nuestras vidas / la realidad" (266). In this way, Estorino calls attention to the fact that Rodolfo and Amanda, as proletarians living in 1920, are still far from developing a

[63] In 1962, Cuba's sugar exportation was guided, in accordance with its own Marxist economic principles as well as those of its new trading partners, by a quota system and fixed prices. Staten notes: "The Soviet Union and Cuba signed a five-year trade agreement [beginning in February of 1960] in which Cuba would deliver 1 million tons of sugar annually in exchange for Soviet crude oil and the Soviets extended $100 million in credits to Cuba so it could purchase industrial equipment. […] In December [1960], China agreed to purchase 1 million tons of Cuban sugar and the Soviet Union agreed to purchase 2.7 million tons the following year. […] By the end of 1960, the Cuban state controlled the primary means of economic production on the island. Cuban capitalism had come to an end and its ties with the communist world were expanding" (95-96).

[64] The recovery of European sugar beet production after the end of the First World War, in addition to rapidly growing Asian sugar exports, eventually led to the precipitous downfall of sugar prices, which had risen dramatically during the war in response to the lack of global production. Thus, by 1920, Cuban sugar production was no longer as essential to world demand as it had been.

truly revolutionary consciousness, regardless of Amanda's decision to finally abandon her goal of joining the bourgeoisie. Therefore, Estorino invites the 1962 spectator to reflect upon how far Cuban society has come since the revolution in relation to the noted reduction of extremes of wealth and poverty, which has in turn facilitated the elimination of reactionary attitudes towards social relations.

The author's exploration of the influence that money and social status exercised, in 1920, upon individuals, incorporates a pointed analysis of the interaction between the sexes. Apart from the grave instability in the price of sugar, another historical event that significantly informs the musical's ideological message is the recently-passed divorce law, which is specifically referred to twice in the script:

> HORTENSIA: No voy a ser la primera de mi grupo que se divorcia.
>
> GERMÁN: La ley fue aprobada hace dos años.
>
> HORTENSIA: No está aprobada por la Iglesia, ni por la buena sociedad todavía. (201)
>
> BLANCA: ¿Divorciarte? ¿Pero está loco? ¡Ni pensarlo! La ley del divorcio acaba de ser aprobada y no se pueden estrenar leyes como si fueran vestidos. (251)

Since these words are spoken by members of the elite class, the author's intention is to accentuate the hypocrisy of this group—notorious for its own marital strife and infidelities—in its traditionalist condemnation of the new law. Estorino means to demonstrate that legal divorce is a necessary personal freedom, therefore to oppose it is to set oneself against the principles of a just society. It is also quite possible that the author means to call attention to the Cuban divorce code as it existed in 1962. At that time, certain legal restrictions still existed on divorce, and

these were not finally removed until 1975.[65] Thus, Estorino may imply that all impediments to divorce belong to Cuba's capitalist past, and that consequently they have no place in a revolutionary country.

However, in the musical, the topic of divorce is mostly employed as a device to create dramatic tension between the two couples, as well as to explore the nature of the economically-motivated interaction between the sexes. In *Las vacas gordas*, both men and women are motivated by money in their amorous pursuits. Likewise, both sexes are driven by their desire for physical beauty and youth, although in different ways. For example, Hortensia keeps Nené as her lover because of his youthful vitality and good looks, and pursues Rodofo for the same reasons. Similarly, Germán, as an older man, desires to keep the young and lovely Amanda as his paramour. However, the attraction that exists between Amanda and Rodolfo, although undoubtedly in part physical, transcends the superficial considerations that motivate the other characters, and develops, through the unfolding of the dramatic action, into something more profound. As mentioned earlier, once material considerations cease to have a decisive impact upon Amanda's relationship with Rodolfo, the couple is finally able to fully unite and realize the love they feel for one another. Since this moment of union represents the musical's climax, it thereby signifies a triumph—although a limited one—over the negative social forces that work against the couple's coming together. Therefore, the audiencegoer in 1962 could have easily surmised that such forces belong to an unjust pre-revolutionary world, and are hence incompatible with the goals of a new and just society.

Rodolfo's first obstacle to union with Amanda is ironically his friend Lázaro, who, although well-meaning in his efforts to help Rodolfo, is unable to think of love in anything but

[65] "The previous civil code [prior to 1975] permitted divorce only when sufficient cause was proven to the court. Even mutual incompatibility as grounds for divorce had to be proven to the court" (Evenson, 148).

purely physical terms. Lázaro's bad advice, based on the simple goal of sexual conquest, is wisely rejected by Rodolfo. Since Amanda admits that, as a showgirl, she is weary of having to "luchar contra una aburrida caterva de donjuanes" that want to sleep with her (228), Rodolfo has clearly taken the right approach to pursuing her. However, he is sharply rebuffed by Amanda when he tells her: "Siempre soñé con una mujer pura, intocada." She replies: "Escogiste muy mal. No soy pura ni mucho menos intocada" (229). These interactions demonstrate Estorino's dedication to dispelling certain misconceptions about the proper relationship between the sexes in Cuban society. For one, he condemns the idea that women are mere sexual objects for satisfying the desires of men. Secondly, he attacks the notion that only "pure and untouched" women are acceptable for men when making enduring commitments.

The original audience of the musical would have understood that the negative portrayal of such traditional attitudes was in keeping with the newest directives of the regime. By 1962, Castro's government had already begun to take decisive steps that would alter—although to a decidedly limited extent—certain traditional patterns of interaction between the sexes, and to advocate new models of behavior in which women were supposedly to be accorded more respect and consideration than in pre-revolutionary times.[66] For example, the Cuban Women's Federation, or FMC (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas*)—an organization formed "by the revolutionary government seeking to mobilize women to take on emergency tasks at a time of great urgency" (Evenson 101)—came into existence in 1960, two years prior to the premiere of *Las vacas gordas*.

[66] Evenson notes: "[T]he decade following the triumph of the revolution transformed women's lives. Concerted efforts were made to integrate women into the economic and political life of the country. To do so required an abrupt departure from the dictates of patriarchal tradition which dictated that the identity and life of women revolved completely around home, marriage and family. However, the revolutionary process and the new social organizations it spawned awakened women's consciousness to new possibilities offered by education, volunteer service, work outside the home, and control over reproductive choices. From this awakening would emerge more clearly defined goals of self-realization and full equality for women in Cuba" (101).

However, it should be noted that "[t]he governing statutes adopted by the FMC at its first congress in 1962 do not even mention women's equality as one of its goals." Rather, its stated purpose was simply "to strengthen support for the revolution by organizing women into the social programs and productive forces of the new society." Nonetheless, the initiatives of the FMC clearly challenged traditional ideas about a woman's proper role by launching "a major campaign to get women out of the house and into productive work."[67] Thus, despite the lack of an official declaration proclaiming the equality of the sexes, by 1962 it was evident that the revolutionary regime had some decidedly progressive ideas about the proper function of women in national society (Evenson 102-103).

Estorino's musical calls attention to these ideas by addressing the issue of women's rights within the historical context of the early twentieth century, almost forty years prior to the victory of the revolution. Nonetheless, most of the characters in the play display reactionary tendencies. For example, Rodolfo, notwithstanding his sincere devotion to Amanda and his honorable intentions, initially demonstrates a somewhat sexist attitude, and only abandons it because of Amanda's firm insistence on not playing a subservient role in their relationship. Other characters, in particular Germán and Hortensia, hold to a demeaning traditional concept of women. It is Amanda who, despite her degrading work as a showgirl, and in decided contrast to other characters, effectively serves as the author's voice for articulating his reformist views with regard to women:

AMANDA: […] Estoy aburrida de que los hombres puedan hacer lo que

[67] In this regard, Evenson explains: "The first activities into which women were recruited related to health and education. […] Women were given first-aid training and organized into health brigades that carried out the first nationwide vaccination programs against tetanus and polio. They were also mobilized to help repel the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. As a result of FMC organizing, young women, including adolescents, ventured away from their homes for the first time and joined the tens of thousands of youth who carried out the famous literacy campaign of 1961. In addition, the FMC was instrumental in providing training programs and social services that enabled thousands of former prostitutes to find new jobs." The government also assisted women to join the workforce by creating the first day-care centers in 1961 (103-104).

> se les antoje. Voy a luchar por el voto para la mujer, voy a meterme en política, voy a trabajar…
>
> GERMAN: Amanda, ¡tú eres feminista!
>
> AMANDA: Y a mucha honra.
>
> GERMAN: La mujer nació para el hogar.
>
> AMANDA: ¿Y por qué no me das uno? (185)

This dialogue, although contextualized within a relatively distant historical era, plainly refers to the increased political and laboral involvement of Cuban women in 1962. It also alludes to the progress in women's rights that had already been made between 1920 and 1962.[68] Thus, Estorino means to show his 1962 audience the deep historical roots of the significant recent changes to women's roles on the island. In other words, he intends to demonstrate that the new regime's initiatives with regard to women, are part of a long and ongoing struggle for a more just nation.[69]

Although the role of women in Cuba is a principal concern of *Las vacas gordas*, one should bear in mind that this topic is situated within the author's scathing condemnation of capitalist society. In Estorino's dramatic world, sexist tendencies are reinforced by the prevailing codes of conduct in a country dominated by bourgeois—and hence materialistic—interests. In such a demeaning environment, the sexual dynamic, instead of being an expression of mutual affection, tends to be either an end in itself or is used as a means to attain other ends:

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[68] Cuban women won the right to vote in 1934.

[69] This does not mean that Castro's government, whether in 1962 or in the present day, favors "feminism" such as it is commonly understood in countries like the United States. Evenson notes that "members [of the FMC] sometimes state that it is a 'female' not a 'feminist' organization, meaning that they do not concern themselves with women's rights divorced from comprehensive social change. […] The phrase is used often to distinguish their approach from what they perceive to be the pervasive approach among North American feminist groups: a struggle for women's rights separate from advancement of the socialist project" (122). Thus, Amanda's affirmation of being a feminist "a mucha honra" may indicate Estorino's desire that the revolutionary government—and by implication the original audience—adopt a decidedly feminist outlook.

> GERMAN: Me descuidas. Me paso todo el tiempo adivinando qué te gustaría para comprártelo. Y todavía no he logrado nada, nada, nada.
>
> AMANDA: ¿Nada? Ayer te di un beso cuando me regalaste el collar.
>
> GERMAN: Un collar, un beso. ¿Cuánto vale lo que quiero?
>
> AMANDA: Una firma ante el notario, nada más. (183)

In this situation, both Germán and Amanda are guilty of insincerity, the former since he simply sees his lover an object of sexual conquest that can be won with a few pieces of jewelry, and the latter because she does not love him, but only desires the social prestige and material prosperity that he represents. Amanda's coworker Herminia, when informed of the former's decision to abandon Rodolfo because of his poverty (and thus to continue her pursuit of Germán), expresses her disagreement with her friend's cynical attitude: "[Y]o no comprendo que sin el amor / te sea posible la felicidad. / Qué dolor, / vender los sueños sin pensar en más / que en el disfrute de una posición / en que has de ser sólo un objeto más" (219). Here, the author's purpose is to demonstrate that when women treat men as objects, they themselves become objects for men, and vice-versa.

This message would have been in full agreement with the newly hegemonic revolutionary political agenda in 1962, which proclaimed the abolition of an inhumane capitalist system responsible for robbing Cubans of their self-respect, and its replacement with a socialist arrangement dedicated to defending the inherent dignity of each and every individual. Estorino intends to show that the old bourgeois order not only degraded workers, but also poisoned relations between the sexes. Therefore, in order to more fully embrace the new revolutionary way of life, one must abandon former assumptions and ideas which lead to the objectification of the opposite sex.

Nonetheless, perhaps the author's greatest concern in *Las vacas gordas*, is the reality of love itself in the context of Cuban society. For Estorino, genuine love is a pure emotion that takes no account of economic or social circumstances. Also, it is not simply a manifestation of sexual appetite, but rather the full expression of the most noble spiritual[70]—although not religious—sentiments. These ideas are brilliantly expressed in the following dialogue, replete with double entendres, between Rodolfo, Germán and Hortensia, in which the first, despite his poverty and chaste devotion to Amanda, is mistakenly thought to be a wealthy sugar tycoon and insatiable lothario:

> GERMAN: ¿No le preocupa el azúcar?
>
> RODOLFO: La del café con leche.
>
> GERMAN: *(Riendo.)* Se ve que es villaclareño.
>
> HORTENSIA: Seguramente le preocupa más el amor.
>
> GERMAN: ¡Vaya con la juventud!
>
> HORTENSIA: No es cuestión de juventud, sino de espiritualidad. (210)

Germán takes Rodolfo's comment as a clever way to avoid discussing the bourgeoisie's pressing concerns about the price of sugar, whereas in reality Rodolfo has simply admitted that, as a proletarian, such matters mean little to him. Similarly, Hortensia assumes that Rodolfo's indifference to the sugar trade indicates his single-minded devotion to the art of sexual conquest. Such is her understanding of "amor." Of course, Rodolfo is concerned about "amor" in a much more elevated and noble sense, which is why he has accepted to assume a false identity in order to gain admittance to Hortensia's party and thus finally converse with Amanda. Finally, Hortensia's idea of "espiritualidad" is highly ironic for two reasons. For one, as a professedly—

[70] In this particular context, and in accordance with the Marxist views of the author, "spiritual" simply signifies those values that transcend purely material considerations, and implies no direct association with religion or any other belief in non-physical entities.

although not sincerely—religious woman, her remark obviously alludes to the Christian admonishment to turn away from the things of the world—in this case, the sugar market—and instead embrace those of the spirit. However, her understanding of "amor" as an erotic pursuit outside the bounds of marriage, cannot of course be reconciled with official religious doctrine. Secondly, Rodolfo's indifference to material concerns is actually driven by spiritual considerations that are diametrically opposed to the self-indulgent and hypocritical values of Hortensia.

Accordingly, the union of Rodolfo and Amanda at the musical's end, represents the defeat of the cynical outlook on love embodied by Germán and Hortensia. As mentioned earlier, it is an incomplete triumph for the couple, since it is only by dint of circumstances that they have finally been able to come together. The 1962 audience would have understood that the political, social and cultural limitations of 1920 prevent Rodolfo and Amanda from realizing a more complete love. Hence, the author's implied message to the original audiencegoer is that, thanks to the revolution, the contemporary Cuban now had the opportunity (and by implication the responsibility) to experience the highest and purest kind of love in opposite-sex relationships,[71] provided that she resolutely reject the values and outlook of a discredited and supplanted social order, and replace them with those of the new regime. In this way, Estorino implicitly outlines his ideal of love in accordance with his personal vision of *cubanía revolucionaria*.

In another sense, Estorino also means to demonstrate that the revolutionary way of life should not lie outside the sphere of relationships between men and women, but must rather guide

[71] In none of his plays does Estorino address in more than the most cursory way the issue of same-sex love. Whether this stems from a personal disinterest in the subject, or whether it is a consequence of wishing to avoid censure and punishment from a regime that strongly disapproves of homosexuality, has proven impossible to determine, since the author has not been inclined to discuss the matter in anything but the vaguest of terms. Considering Cuba's political environment since 1959, one might surmise that Estorino's reluctance to speak on the subject has been a survival strategy of sorts.

and define such relationships. This would have provided excellent propaganda for Castro's government, which in 1962, a mere three years after the victory of the rebel forces, was still urgently engaged in an effort to teach the Cuban population that the revolution was meant to impact every aspect of their lives.[72] Therefore, *Las vacas gordas*, despite its relative failure as a staged production in 1962 (at least in comparison to the stunning box-office success of *El robo del cochino*), must have been relatively well received, with regard to its ideological content, among Cuba's revolutionary vanguard.

La casa vieja

However, the same cannot necessarily be said for the author's following play, *La casa vieja*, premiered in 1964. Estorino's fourth major work is the first in which the dramatic action takes place within the historical context of hegemonic revolutionary society, in this case that of the original audience. The glorious socialist future alluded to in *El robo del cochino*, is finally represented on stage in the context of present-day reality, only it is far from glorious. To a significant extent, *La casa vieja* deals with the author's growing awareness of the chasm between Cuban revolutionary theory and actual practice in 1964.[73] Five years after the rebel victory, it is

[72] Reed notes the following examples of vanguard initiatives, in the first few years of Castro's regime, aimed at expanding and transforming the public's awareness of the revolution's proper role in their lives: "Castro said in September 1959 that it was necessary 'to begin to transform the mind, through an effort of consciousness and opinion, in order to go marching down the road we have to take.' He insisted that 'the workers must be taught to think as a class.' In November 1959, Castro said, 'What interests us more than anything else is the consciousness of the people […] Our duty is to create consciousness'" (6).

[73] In one sense, I allude to the simple fact that after five years of revolutionary society, the utopian vision of an ideologically unified socialist community had yet to be realized in Cuba. In another sense, and more specifically, I refer to the new regime's promise to inaugurate a truly free society, and its subsequent failure to do so. In January of 1959, Fidel Castro made the following observations in the course of a speech given in Venezuela: "Hablan del hombre, de la constitución, de la democracia, pero una de las cosas que más hace sufrir al pueblo es escuchar esas palabras en bocas de los tiranos, y cómo comienzan todo a disfrazarlo y todo a adaptarlo a aquella situación, que no es más que una situación de fuerza, ¡de fuerza! Es que no pueden gobernar de otra manera, sino suprimiendo todos los derechos, suprimiendo la Cámara que representa al pueblo, suprimiendo la libertad de prensa, suprimiendo la libertad de reunión, suprimiendo la libertad de expresión, todas las libertades, porque es que cuando se toma el poder por la fuerza no se puede gobernar de otra manera" (Castro, "Discurso" 24 enero 1959). Ironically, at the time of the

apparent that the new government has not yet been able to create a society whose individuals have severed all attachment to disfunctional pre-revolutionary ways of thinking. Sincere devotion to the new order does not prevent one from clinging to reactionary ideas which, deeply ingrained in national culture after countless generations, cannot be eradicated solely through regime change. That is, individuals will not undergo a necessary personal transformation of character simply because the government orders that this happen. Rather, such individuals must first realize that there is something about their ideological makeup that needs to be changed, then they must resolve to change it. Such concerns predominate in *La casa vieja*.

Still, the play is more than just commentary on the state of Cuban society in 1964. It is in equal measure a family drama that explores the complex and conflicting relationships between family members, whose interaction with one another has been made more complicated by the changes brought about by the revolution. In direct contrast to the relatively shallow characterization of *Las vacas gordas*, Estorino has here striven to create characters of considerable depth and complexity, none of which clearly functions as antagonist nor protagonist. Although similar in arrangement and feel to *El robo del cochino*, Estorino's fourth major play is, in terms of its representation of the "typical" Cuban family, very different. Rather than end with the promise of a great new society, *La casa vieja* finishes with the tentative hope for reconciliation among family members. Since this family should be taken to represent Cuban society as a whole, it is apparent that Estorino desires for all members of the national family to make peace with one another.

Although the play appears to focus primarily upon the circumstances of one particular family, it is apparent that Estorino also has in mind the state of the revolutionary government at

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premiere of *La casa vieja* in 1964, Castro's regime had, for several years, been actively engaged in supressing all of the necessary freedoms outlined in his 1959 speech. Specific examples of the repressive political climate in the early 1960s are considered in the following pages of this study.

the collective level. Even though there is no direct mention of the national leadership, the unjust actions of one family member, who has been entrusted with a degree of authority over certain local matters, naturally allude to the workings of the highest levels of command on the island. Thus, the dramatist's clear disapproval of the abuse of authority at the local level evidently also applies to the federal as well.

During the first half of the 1960s, several events ocurred that would be cause for grave concern, with regard to the exercise of political authority on the island, among members of an important sector of the Cuban intellectual and artistic community. These individuals began to realize that the new revolution, in spite of having supplanted a detested dictatorship backed by the bourgeoisie, and regardless of its sincere commitment to creating a more just and humane society, was becoming increasingly intolerant of anything that might deviate from official ideological norms, many of which, such as the regime's rather conservative views on sexuality, represented no significant departure from bourgeois standards,[74] and in some cases were considerably more rigorous.[75] Thus, by 1964, the year in which *La casa vieja* premiered, it was apparent that the new regime had not created the free and forbearing society envisioned by many

[74] "Cuban homophobia transcends temporal (pre/post Castro) and spatial (Havana/Miami) frontiers. The homosexual in Miami suffers the same affronts as those on the Island. This similarity has inspired a popular saying that the only thing Havana and Miami have in common is the explicit hatred and persecution that gays suffer in both places" (Álvarez, 77).

[75] For example, repression of gays under the Batista regime was more of a cultural phenomenon, and had much less to do with the dictatorship's officially policy. Under Castro's government, state persecution of gays attained levels not seen under the former ruling order. Many were sent to forced-labor camps, known as UMAP (*Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción*). According to Reed, "UMAP was created by Fidel Castro in November 1965" (84). Although *La casa vieja* (1964) premiered one year prior to the creation of the UMAP, it can hardly be imagined that the regime's discriminatory attitude towards gays only first manifested itself through wholescale arrests and detentions within UMAP camps. In regard to this repressive organization, Álvarez notes: "When the role 'revolutionary Man,' that has been autocratically designated, is transgressed, the power that the heterosexual hegemony attributes to itself is violated; this violation evokes a counterattack by hegemonic reactionary forces which, besides being repressive and controlling, violently lash out upon perceiving that the sexual order is being challenged. In the Cuban case in particular—whose socialist society has perpetuated bourgeois relations among heterosexual partners—the official responses were multiple, but for the most part, at the start of the 1960s, they took the form of indiscriminate arrests and subsequent transfers of citizens (all men suspected of being homosexual) to the UMAP camps" (80) Álvarez adds: "It is estimated that before the dismantling of UMAP camps in December of 1969, more than 35,000 homosexuals, religious followers (primarily Jehovah's witnesses), and those deemed 'counter-revolutionaries'suffered mandatory sentences there" (80).

who had initially participated in the revolutionary struggle. As will be demonstrated later, Estorino's play addresses this matter, although it does so in a manner that is decidedly and necessarily oblique. The need for such indirectness must be seen as a consequence of the repressive nature of the regime.

A number of occurrences in the early years of the revolution clearly indicated the government's commitment to imposing ideological conformity by force when deemed necessary. For example, shortly after the victory of the revolution in 1959, Castro began to take decisive steps to put an end to an independent press in Cuba. His first step was to "occupy newspapers and radio stations that belonged to Batista personally or to people connected with the old regime." Then, he proceeded to "attack journalists who were critical of the government." Several newspapers were shut down or forcibly taken over by the Cuban authorities, either through economic strangulation or government decree, between 1960 and 1961. These actions clearly indicated the new leadership's intolerance of dissenting views (Reed 46-55).

As disturbing as such events must have been to many members of Cuba's intellectual community, they were not quite as ominous as the subsequent suppression of the film *P.M.* and the literary magazine *Lunes*, which was the "weekly supplement on art and literature of the newspaper *Revolución,*" and "which had helped finance *P.M.*" (Reed 56-57).[76] Reed describes the controversy surrounding the film:

> *P.M.* was screened at the Casa de las Américas on May 31, 1961. The audience included many intellectuals who were concerned that freedom of expression was being threatened. After the showing, there was an enormous debate that lasted 17

[76] With regard to *P.M.*, Reed reflects: "Why was the film seized? After all, *P.M.* was apolitical. Ironically, this may have been one reason the authorities did not like it. *P.M.* had no propaganda value. It had absolutely nothing to do with the Revolution. Instead, it showed [black] Cubans singing and dancing in bars" (56).

> hours. […] ICAIC[77] offered to lift the prohibition of *P.M.* if the film's supporters allowed it to be sent to the "mass organizations" like the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution for an up-or-down verdict. The *P.M.* supporters refused, believing the the "mass organizations" were controlled by the PSP[78] and would simply ratify the ICAIC decision. Sensing that the film was a lost cause, filmmaker Néstor Almendros took the microphone and accused the censors of being Stalinists. He warned them that they had embarked on a dangerous course […] After the meeting, the official decree banning *P.M.* was published in *Hoy*. The *P.M.* supporters then sent the authorities a protest signed by about 200 people. Seeing an even greater collision coming, Carlos Franqui talked to Castro, who agreed to have a "very quiet meeting" with the protestors. This was the genesis of the famous Discussions in the National Library. They turned out to be far from quiet. (57-58)

At this meeting, held on the third Friday of June 1961, during which he gave a speech commonly known today as his "Words to the Intellectuals," Castro observed that,

> the discussions had revolved around "the fundamental problem […] of creative artistic freedom." Everybody agreed that freedom of *form* would be respected. The essential question, he said, was freedom of *content*.[79] Castro then laid down

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[77] The ICAIC (*Instituto Cubano de Artes e Industrias Cinematográficos*) was founded in March 1959. The "new cinema" that it produced led to the transformation of Cuban film into "the most popular, radical and committed form of cultural expression" and helped to "shape the new consciousness with its emphasis on documentaries, and its epic themes of rebellion, Cuban history, struggle, exploitation and popular life" (Kapcia 145).

[78] By 1961, the PSP (*Partido Socialista Popular*) had come to completely dominate Cuban politics.

[79] With regard to form, Castro's regime has repeatedly and consistently rejected any suggestion that Cuban artistic production adhere to the parameters of so-called "socialist realism," which served as the aesthetic norm in the former Soviet Union (1917-1991), and which stringently prohibits all experimental or avant-garde approaches. However, insofar as artistic content is concerned, the Cuban leader has demanded that the ideological imperatives of socialist doctrine inform and guide all production. Reed notes: "The truth is that the Cuban government has never really rejected socialist realism but, rather, supports a bastardized version of it" (69).

> the standard used to judge what is permitted and what is prohibited: "Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing." (quoted in Reed 59)

Since *Lunes* was seen by Cuban officials as a publication with an "eclectic" political outlook that "follow[ed] the latest trends coming from rebel groups on the outside" (Reed 62), it consequently fell under the classification of what was "against the Revolution," with regard to the regime's accepted standards of political orthodoxy in 1961.[80] Thus, it was no longer sufficient to simply demonstrate support for the new government in order to be allowed to express oneself openly. Rather, it had now become necessary to demonstrate complete conformity with official doctrine. Accordingly, even though constructive criticism of the leadership was supposedly permitted by the authorities, in the 1960s it could be exceedingly challenging for one to express ideas that deviated from the official party line, or to advocate reform, without being accused of subversion.[81]

When one takes into consideration the increasingly repressive political, cultural and social climate of Cuba in the early 1960s, it is evident that *La casa vieja*, with its call for greater tolerance and understanding, alludes, albeit in a somewhat non-specific way,[82] to the government-sanctioned persecution of individuals who have deviated from established norms.

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[80] By December of 1961, *Lunes* had effectively been "liquidated altogether" by the government (Reed 64).

[81] With regard to the 1960s in Cuba, Reed notes that "to avoid censorship, it was not enough to be 'within the Revolution' in the sense of supporting the Revolution, believing in Marxism-Leninism, or belonging to the Communist Party. Something else was required: obedience. Even a hard-line Communist would be called a 'counterrevolutionary' if he was against Castro, because 'the Revolution' was Castro himself. […] Anybody who disagreed with Castro was 'against the Revolution'" (97).

[82] In this case, the tendency to obliquely address controversial issues is evidently a response to repressive government. Besides being motivated by the artist's desire to avoid censorship (whether by state-controlled publishing or by the government itself), such indirectness stems in large measure from a wish to avoid serious punishments such as blacklisting, prohibition on involvement in artistic pursuits, the loss of a valued profession, or in more extreme cases, imprisonment, torture, exile, and even execution. For this reason, the artist who chooses to work under such conditions, yet endeavors to express some degree of disagreement with the prevailing order, customarily develops a strategy according to which the audience may clearly infer such disagreement without the work presenting an overtly contestatory message. This technique, used in a somewhat restrained way in *La casa vieja*, is employed in much more challenging fashion in *Los mangos de Caín*. Largely as a consequence of the latter play, the author would find himself marginalized for several years among Cuba's intellectual community.

The central concern of the play, through which other conflicts among family members and neighbors are brought into sharper focus, is the decision to deny an academic scholarship to a young lady who is suspected of having engaged in unchaste behavior. This puritanical outlook with regard to a woman's sexual role is clearly portrayed by the author as the continuation of negative and wholly inappropriate pre-revolutionary attitudes that have unfortunately endured within the context of a new society. Of course, one might easily surmise that since the author condemns prudery with regard to female sexuality, he also means to refute all traditional views about human sexuality in general. Thus, it would have been easy for the original 1964 audience to conclude that Estorino was advising the government—and by implication the audience as well—to judge individuals solely according to their capacity to serve the revolution, and hence without taking into account their sexual conduct or proclivities.[83] In this way, he advocates a highly inclusive version of *cubanía revolucionaria*, in which the pre-revolutionary tendency to exclude others and judge them because of their sexuality, is replaced by acceptance and understanding of supposedly non-standard sexual behavior (and hence of alternative sexual orientation). Hence, with the premiere of *La casa vieja*, Estorino begins to seriously challenge—although in an indirect way—the officially sanctioned version of *cubanía revolucionaria*.[84]

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[83] Of course, the subsequent large-scale arrests and detentions of homosexuals in UMAP camps can be seen as the consequence of intolerant attitudes toward non-standard sexual orientation or conduct. Also, it is quite probable that Estorino himself had highly personal reasons for opposing the government's intolerance towards what it considered unacceptable sexuality or sexual behavior. In a personal interview, in which the author discusses the government's reasons for not initially staging *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de don José Jacinto Milanés*, he states: "Mi teatro había estado prohibido durante un tiempo por la sexualidad, no la de Milanés sino la mía" (quoted in Boudet, "Teatro" 43). Unfortunately, this rather ambiguous statement is the only published reference to the author's sexuality that I have been able to find. In November of 2005 I corresponded briefly with Estorino by e-mail and requested that he elaborate more on the matter. He responded that he had already clarified the issue in a previous interview. Thus, I have concluded that Estorino does not care to say any more about his sexuality than he has already mentioned in his interview with Boudet. Nonetheless, the aforementioned statement does indeed indicate that Estorino has had personal reasons for promoting tolerant attitudes about human sexuality. Also, one might reasonably infer that the author's reluctance to say more about his sexual proclivities is motivated by a desire to avoid punishment from a regime that continues to take action against what it considers deviant sexuality.

[84] In none of his plays does Estorino call into question the legitimacy of the revolution itself, nor does he imply in any way that Castro's regime should be overthrown. As will be seen in the analysis of this play as well as in

Also, the author's call for tolerance in matters of sexuality can be seen in a wider sense as a general appeal to compassion and acceptance within a revolutionary existential paradigm. In other words, Estorino asks the audience to accept people for what they are instead of attempting to force them to conform to what one thinks they should be. As will be demonstrated further on, apart from human sexuality, the play addresses other social issues in relation to which the dramatist advocates greater open-mindedness.

At the time of this writing, relatively little critical commentary on *La casa vieja* has been produced. For the most part, the play has only received brief mention in a handful of articles and prologues in which additional works by the author and other Cuban dramatists are considered. Two articles which give significant attention to the play, and which were both written in Cuba in the 1960s, are "La casa vieja: cubanía y teatralidad" by J.M. Valdés-Rodríguez, and "El 'machismo' en el teatro de Abelardo Estorino," by Salvador Arias. The first is simply a brief synopsis of the play, and, quite possibly because it was published in a state-controlled magazine, does not investigate too profoundly the work's ideological objectives. The second, also appearing within a government-sponsored publication, includes an analysis of *La casa vieja* as the third drama in a trilogy of "variaciones machistas sobre familias provincianas." As mentioned in Chapter Two, Arias's article considers Estorino's representation of *machismo* in the Cuban cultural context. Although none of these articles openly acknowledges Estorino's implicit questioning of national authority (which is unsurprising considering the political environment in which they were issued), both consider the primary existential concerns of the play, although in a rather guarded and limited manner.

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subsequent ones, Estorino has always supported in principle the revolution and its leadership. His criticism of Cuban government is motivated by the desire to effect reform, and not by a wish to condemn national authority.

The dramatic action takes place in "[*u*]*n pueblo de provincias después de 1959*," (107) which evidently corresponds to 1964, the year of the play's premiere. Thus, *La casa vieja* is quite clearly an example of immediate drama. All three acts are represented in "*una cocina que ha sido ampliada para que sirva de comedor*" (107), which forms part of a somewhat humble and ramshackle family home. Esteban Sr., the elderly family patriarch, and a referential character that does not appear upon stage, is seriously ill, and is expected to pass away at any moment. His imminent death has caused his lame son Esteban, an architect who has had very infrequent contact with his family for many years, to take a leave of absence from his job in Havana and return to the family home. When the play opens, Esteban, who has been practically unable to sleep, has been waiting for his father to die for over a week. Living in the home are Laura, Esteban's sister, and Onelia, their mother. Both Esteban and Laura are single. Living nearby are Diego, Esteban's brother and a man of some authority in matters of local government, and his wife Dalia. The home is visited by Flora, a woman of ill-repute because of her many different sexual partners, who strives to persuade Diego to grant a scholarship to Luisa, a local teenage girl, in spite of the girl's bad reputation in the community. Another visitor to the home is Higinio, who is a family uncle and brother of Esteban Sr., and whose privileged economic status has been threatened as a consequence of the revolution. For this reason, he is preparing to depart for the United States.

Unlike *Las vacas gordas*, the dramatic action in *La casa vieja* is driven more by an exploration of the characters' inner lives and ideological makeup than by specific events or situations, whose primary purpose is to provide the author with a context in which to express his views on important social issues. For example, the approaching death of Esteban Sr., which has temporarily brought family members together, and which has forced them to confront a number

of disquieting personal issues, serves principally as a pretext for an analysis of the complex relationships between several characters.

Likewise, through Flora's efforts to convince Diego to grant Luisa a scholarship, and by means of Laura's secret and ultimately disappointing relationship with a married man, the author exposes the hypocrisy and reactionary nature of *machista* attitudes in Cuban society, and demonstrates their damaging effect upon individuals and the community in general. Finally, the deep-seated conflict between Esteban and Diego, which is somewhat resolved at the play's end, functions as a kind of philosophical debate between two decidedly different visions of *cubanía revolucionaria*.

The play begins with Esteban and Laura upon the stage. Their conversation turns to Esteban Sr.'s illness and delirium, as well as to memories of the family's past. Laura recalls a next-door-neighbor who passed away many years ealier, and whom they both frequently visited as young children. The manner in which Laura remembers this woman indicates ingrained prejudice towards blacks and the handicapped:

> ESTEBAN: ¿Cómo se llamaba la vieja aquella que vivía aquí al lado?
>
> LAURA: ¿La Coja? *(Molesta.)* ¡Qué bruta soy!
>
> ESTEBAN: ¿No era coja?
>
> LAURA: Sí, pero se llamaba Laudelina.
>
> ESTEBAN: […] ¿Te acuerda cómo me daba el jarrito de leche, cuando se le ahumaba, por la cerca del patio?
>
> LAURA: […] Yo no sé cómo te podías tomar aquella leche, si le metía el dedo para saber si estaba caliente.
>
> ESTEBAN: Tú también.

LAURA: Mira, blanco como la leche. *(Le muestra el índice.)*

ESTEBAN: Laura, que hay una revolución. (110)

Laura's self-correction about Laudelina's nickname, is of course in consideration of her brother Esteban, who is himself lame. The fact that Laudelina is black, and that Laura expresses a racist misconception about the cleanliness of Afro-Cubans, suggests that Esteban, who shares Laudelina's physical handicap, has a place among those members of the national community who, despite the exalted promises of the revolutionary leadership to create an equitable society, still suffer from the same kind of marginalization that they experienced prior to Castro's rise to power. As mentioned earlier, *La casa vieja* also explores the issue of sexual morality in national society, and calls attention to the unfair treatment and rejection suffered by women who deviate from reactionary concepts of decency with regard to sexual conduct. Thus, the author implicitly groups such women with blacks and the handicapped in the context of a society that has failed to attain its idealisitic goals for a better community. It is in such an environment that Esteban, as a handicapped man, and as a consequence of his ideological makeup, demonstrates his solidarity with those who have been unjustly marginalized within revolutionary Cuba.

It is apparent that Esteban's lameness has symbolic signficance. Since he is a voice for tolerance and compassion in a society that, as a whole, has only partially succeeded in exhibiting those qualitites, one may infer that the tolerant and compassionate individual is handicapped, or prevented from carrying out his altruistic impulses, in revolutionary Cuba. In other words, a kinder and more understanding form of *cubanía revolucionaria* has been rendered largely ineffectual (handicapped) by the ascendancy of its ruthless and intolerant counterpart.

Another possible interpretation is that Esteban's lameness symbolically refers to any individual quality or attribute that, owing to widespread and ingrained social prejudices, hinders

one from leading a fully-realized life. Esteban alludes to the figurative meaning of his physical condition in the following discourse, which he directs at Diego: "ESTEBAN: […] Hay que comprender, comprender… ¿No ves esa muchacha, Laura, Flora…? No se puede ser demasiado recto. ¡Hay tantas cosas torcidas! ¿Ser demasiado recto no es una forma de ser torcido? Hay tantos cojos en el mundo…" (176). It might seem that Esteban has contradicted himself with regard to one being "demasiado recto." Nonetheless, the author's intention is to explore the double meaning of this concept. When Esteban says, "No se puede ser demasiado recto," he refers to the need to "comprender, comprender." That is, one cannot be too upright in the practice of compassion, since in this world there are "tantas cosas torcidas," or imperfect individuals. However, when he asks, "¿Ser demasiado recto no es una forma de ser torcido?" he alludes to the intolerance that results from an exceedingly puritanical outlook which fails to take into account that there are "tantos cojos en el mundo," or people who do not entirely conform to hegemonic moral standards. So, although Esteban jokingly observes, "Yo no creo que todos los cojos tengan que ser estudiantes. […] ¡Esa muchacha que quiere la beca no es coja!" (128), in a symbolic sense, Luisa is indeed handicapped as a result of Diego's discrimination.

In the course of the play, Estorino strives to demonstrate that bigotry and prejudice have no place in revolutionary society precisely because they are reactionary tendencies that originated within and define the bourgeois order that the new regime claims to have defeated. In particular, he focuses upon the evils of racism and *machismo*, with considerably more emphasis upon the latter. However, this does not mean that the author's treatment of racism does not serve an important ideological function within the play. Rather, by presenting this issue within the context of a *machista* living environment, he intends to show, by association, that both racism

and *machismo* are anti-revolutionary.[85] Although by 1964 the Castro government had already officially manifested its opposition to racism in Cuban society, it had not yet articulated a clear policy with regard to women's rights.[86] Therefore, it is apparent that Estorino means to do much more with *La casa vieja* than simply create propaganda for the government. On the contrary, his purpose here is to advocate that the regime demonstrate greater tolerance towards those it governs.

In addition to the previously mentioned example of Laura's racism, Estorino presents a few other negative references to race in his play, all of which are spoken by Higinio, undoubtedly the most unapologetically reactionary character in the work, and all of which intend to denigrate women by associating them with blacks. Higinio's dismissive rejection of revolutionary values casts his racist and sexist remarks in an evidently anti-revolutionary light:

> HIGINIO: ¿Quién le va a hacer caso a una mujer que ha vivido con medio pueblo? ¡Hasta con un negro! (130)
>
> ESTEBAN: Laura es miliciana.
>
> HIGINIO: Vergüenza debiera darle. Yo quisiera que tú las vieras, las mujeres, con esos pantalones, marchando por la calle. ¿Dónde se ha visto

[85] Not long after the beginning of the revolution, Castro publicly addressed the flagrant discrimination and inequalities suffered by blacks in Cuban society. Moore writes: "[O]n March 22 [1959], Castro apparently felt the need to appease and reassure Black Cuba. In a nationwide televised speech, he now admitted that accumulated injustices and a legacy of prejudices from the slave period severely limited the progress of Blacks in Cuba. The revolutionary regime considered the eradication of racial segregation and the implementation of national integration to be one of its humanitarian duties" (19). Thus, the regime was quite clear about its opposition to racist tendencies among the population, although such disapproval did not of course lead to the immediate eradication of racism on the island, nor has it done so yet. On the other hand, by 1964, despite the founding of the FMC in 1960, the government had articulated no clear policy with regard to women's rights, how much less in relation to female sexual conduct. In the absence of any official condemnation against them, the *machista* cultural values that existed before the revolution, could only be expected to persist within revolutionary society.

[86] The passing of the Family Code, in 1975, is generally considered to mark the moment when women's rights were given a definite legal basis in Cuba. Evenson notes: "Both the Family Code and Constitution, enacted in 1975 and 1976 respectively, declare the equal status of men and women in Cuban society. Although the direct impact of these laws on the achievement of gender equality has been mixed, yielding both advances and disappointments for women, the laws not only codified the commitment to equality, but most importantly, articulated an ideal against which progress could be measured" (111).

> eso? Con los negros, hablando con los negros en la calle.
>
> ESTEBAN: Cualquiera que te oye se cree que tú eres de la artistocracia.
>
> HIGINIO: De la aristocracia no, pero me sé dar mi lugar. (140-141).
>
> ESTEBAN: […] [A]hora eres uno más, igual que todos, igual que Diego, que papá, que cualquier negro que trabaja.
>
> HIGINIO: Y por eso me voy. Para un país donde un negro es un negro y una puta es una puta. (142)

Such regressive attitudes towards women are shown to be based upon prevalent ideas about what is considered proper behavior for "las muchachas decentes" (125). Diego refuses to grant Luisa a scholarship since, according to him, "No reúne las condiciones de… moralidad" (129). Estorino emphasizes the hypocrisy of this statement when it is revealed that Diego himself had multiple sexual partners prior to marriage (115-116), and that as a teenager he fathered an illegitimate child with Flora (155-159), whose pleas on behalf of Luisa he flatly rejects:

> DIEGO: ¿Tú te acuerdas de cuando tenías diecisiete?
>
> FLORA: Por eso mismo lo digo. […] Esteban, yo te aseguro que es una buena muchacha, que quiere estudiar. Se echó ese novio y perdió un poco la cabeza, ¡es la verdad! Pero…
>
> DIEGO: Tú misma lo reconoces.
>
> FLORA: Pero hay que darle un chance, ¿no? […]
>
> ESTEBAN: Es que ya no nos acordamos de cuando teníamos diecisiete.
>
> DIEGO: Da igual. Da lo mismo si nos acordamos o no. Ya no tenemos diecisiete. (124-125)

Thus, Estorino draws attention to the double standard for sexual behavior in Cuba. Men are permitted to be as sexually unrestrained as they wish, whereas women are held to a strict standard, and are ostracized by the community should they transgress the commonly-recognized bounds of propriety. Clearly, such values are difficult to reconcile with the regime's purported goal of creating a society in which true equality is realized.

Aside from *machista* and racist attitudes, Estorino also calls attention to other reactionary tendencies that continue to define Cuban society, despite the victory of the rebels. For example, Diego's wife Dalia, regardless of her husband's unquestioned devotion to the revolution, nevertheless evidences a grasping materialism that makes it difficult to believe in the sincerity of her commitment to socialist principles. When she remarks, "A todo el mundo le gusta mejorar, ¿no?" (120), she calls attention to the fact that her regressive attitude is the norm rather than the exception among the general population. Secondly, the apparent continuance of the old system of "palancas" (123), or favoritism, suggests that nation is still far from realizing its goal of creating a merit-based, and hence egalitarian, society. Finally, Higinio's continued role within the family as the bourgeois uncle who is always prepared to provide money in emergency situations, suggests that the economic and social order of the former regime has, to some extent, still managed to endure.[87] All of these examples demonstrate the gap between the progressive revolutionary ideal and the still largely traditional reality of Cuban society. Thus, as Flora astutely observes, "algunas cosas no han cambiado todavía" (126).

To a large extent, Estorino explores the conflict between past and present through a series of debates among Esteban, Diego, and Higinio, who are the three most developed

[87] Higinio's imminent departure for the United States does not necessarily signify the end of his economic relationship with the family, since Cuban expatriates have, since the beginning of Castro's rule, sent money from the United States to their families on the island, although between the mid-1960s and 1977, such activity was greatly restricted.

characters in the play. These men are both similar to and different from one another. The author's presentation of these similiarities and differences, highlights the deep contradictions apparent in Cuban society. For example, Esteban and Diego are both committed to the revolution, yet are at odds with each other since they have antithetical ideas about what is truly revolutionary. Such conflict calls attention to the lack of ideological unity among those who support the new government. Higinio is clearly opposed to Castro's regime, yet his agreement with Diego's reactionary ideas, indicates that regressive tendencies still persist within revolutionary society. Finally, the near total disagreement manifested between Esteban and Higinio, implies that no reconciliation is possible between the true values of the revolution and those of the former regime. Thus, according to the author's point of view, Esteban is the legitimate standard-bearer for *cubanía revolucionaria*, whereas Diego, despite his noble intentions, represents a somewhat bastardized and corrupted version of it. Also, by clearly situating Higinio's views in direct opposition to revolutionary discourse, Estorino demonstrates that the ideological agreement between Diego and his uncle can only signify the former's unwillingness to abandon the reactionary attitudes and values of the formerly hegemonic paradigm.

In spite of the pronounced differences between the three men, they are bound together by their relationship to the dying Esteban Sr., whose life and personal outlook resist classification according to the rigid ideologies of Diego and Higinio. That is, Esteban Sr. has been neither a revolutionary nor a reactionary, but rather only a simple, hardworking man, full of imperfections, but nonetheless devoted to his family and friends. Estorino emphasizes the problematic relationship between Esteban and his father. The former's long absence from the family home weighs heavily on his conscience, and he is distraught that his father, as the result of debilitating

illness, is no longer able to recognize him, for which he has been deprived of the opportunity to beg for and receive forgiveness. Diego, who has assumed responsibility for the family's welfare since his brother's departure, and as a consequence has been unable to further his education and professional development, berates Esteban for having left the family in order to pursue his ambition to become an architect and live in Havana. Diego does this even though he is fully aware that his brother was encouraged to study in consideration of his handicap, which does not allow Esteban to perform the physical jobs available to men without higher education. Regardless of Esteban's grave concerns about his relationship with his father, it becomes evident in the course of the play that Esteban Sr. was more understanding towards and accepting of his son than the latter had suspected.

In a symbolic sense, Esteban's eventual realization that his father holds nothing against him, signifies the essential connection between both post- and pre-revolutionary *cubanía*. Accordingly, Esteban Sr., notwithstanding his lack of political involvement and his inability to fully comprehend the significance of the revolution, has played an important part in the struggle for a better nation simply by working hard and caring about his family and his friends. For this reason, Esteban and his father both represent the ideals of *cubanía*, although each consistent with his own capacity and in conformity with the historical context in which he lives. This is emphasized by the fact that the two men share the same name. Therefore, through his representation of father and son, Estorino means to show that there is no need to rewrite history according to the newly hegemonic existential paradigm. In other words, the Cuban past (Esteban Sr.) must be accepted for what it is by those who now carry the banner of *cubanía revolucionaria* (Esteban). Consequently, Esteban's rage upon hearing his father's funeral speech—in which a political functionary, invited to speak by Diego, misrepresents Esteban Sr. as a revolutionary—is

completely understandable, since he sees it as a heavy-handed attempt to falsify the memory of his father for the purpose of advancing the revolutionary political agenda:

> ¿Cómo voy a permitir que digan que se sacrificó toda su vida por una causa social? […] Lo admiraba porque era bueno, era simple, viviendo día a día, sin cansarse. […] ¿Por qué no dijo eso? Todo eso es la verdad. ¿Por qué tenía que callar esa verdad para inventar una mentira llena de frases huecas? ¿Por qué me quieren cambiar a mi padre y convertírmelo en una estatua? (168-170)

Estorino's condemnation of inflexible and oppressive revolutionary ideology also addresses the climate of fear created under the new regime. This is demonstrated through Laura's unwillingness to speak out in support of Luisa, regardless of the fact that the former's clandestine relationship with a married man is just as socially taboo as the latter's alleged sexual relations with a young man to whom she is not married:

> LAURA: Tengo miedo, sigo teniendo miedo. […]
>
> ESTEBAN: […] [T]odos hemos tenido miedo siempre. Miedo a hacer lo que más deseamos, miedo a decir lo que pensamos. Miedo siempre, a las reglas, a las leyes, a los números, a lo estricto. […] Miedo a romper las reglas. A romper cosas y quedarse sin nada. ¿Y qué más da que nos quedemos sin nada si lo que tenemos no sirve? (166-167)

These were bold words indeed for a play represented upon the Cuban stage in 1964. Although Esteban's comments ostensibly refer only to the feared loss of social standing and privileges as a consequence of making public one's violations of *machista* standards of sexual conduct, it requires little imagination to realize that such sentiments amount to a broad indictment against the intimidation and repression that caracterized the revolutionary government at that time.

However, Estorino does not simply condemn those aspects of Cuban society that he disagrees with. He also proposes an alternative set of positive revolutionary values to replace those negative reactionary ones that still prevail on the island:

> ESTEBAN: Entiendes, yo no quiero ser limpio. Que todos compartamos nuestras faltas y empecemos de nuevo, pero sin venganza, sin venganza. Con justicia, sí, pero sin venganza, sin miedo. (173-174)
>
> DIEGO: […] ¿Vamos a dejar que los muchachos se gobiernen?
>
> ESTEBAN: Hay que dejarlos vivir. No podemos cargarlos con las cosas nuestras, la amargura, el miedo, y ofrecérselos como si fueran estrellas. […] No podemos defraudarlos. Hay que dejarlos luchar, dejarlos vivir. Ellos también tienen el derecho a equivocarse… o a encontrar el cielo. (177)

In summary, the author advocates a tolerant, compassionate and intimidation-free society in which youth, unburdened by the negative tendencies and habits of the past, are given complete freedom to realize their fullest potential. This is a humanistic vision of the highest order. Therefore, in Estorino's ideal world, it is people, and not abstract ideas or concepts, that must be given precedence: "ESTEBAN: […] Yo creo en lo que está vivo y cambia" (179). Such personal convictions, although obviously agreeing in principle with official revolutionary rhetoric, are expressed in such a manner that they amount to a denouncement of the new regime's failure to put into practice its most cherished ideals. Nevertheless, despite its rather pointed commentary about Cuban society, *La casa vieja* contains no overt censure of Castro's government. Likewise, Estorino's following play, *Los mangos de Caín*, also avoids any direct criticism of the revolutionary regime. However, as will be demonstrated, its implied reproof of the national leadership is considerably stronger and much harder to overlook than in *La casa vieja*.

Los mangos de Caín

Written and premiered in 1965, one year after *La casa vieja*, Estorino's next play was first presented at a time when one began to witness a much wider and troubling application of the authoritarian tendencies that the author had so recently spoken out against, and to which I have abundantly referred earlier in this chapter. Perhaps the most evident example of this disturbing trend was the opening of the UMAP detention camps that year. Although it is uncertain as to whether or not Estorino was aware of these camps when he penned *Los mangos de Caín* (a hypothesis made more problematic by the fact that their existence was not publicly acknowledged), one may safely assume that the leadership's highly paranoid and repressive proclivities, which led to the creation of the camps, had already made themselves acutely felt at all levels of national society. This short play, which consists of only one act, is essentially about the grave necessity of independent thought and the deleterious effects of unchecked authority, and for this reason obviously alludes to the stifling ideological conformity imposed upon the Cuban population in the 1960s.

It is possible that more critical commentary has been written about *Los mangos de Caín* than any other one of Estorino's works. It is certainly an extraordinary play, not only for its peculiar stage presentation and use of dialogue,[88] but also because of its highly unorthodox and daring interpretation of the Cain and Abel myth, which is devastatingly employed as a means to

[88] In this regard, Espinosa Mendoza notes: "Un hombre que, con tres obras en el bolsillo y la garantía de lo que ya afirmaban de él público y crítica, decidió reescribirlo todo, recomenzarlo todo, reajustar su propio pasado" ("Los mangos" 8). He then adds: "*Los mangos*… prefigura una zona del teatro cubano que empieza a sentirse desde mediados de los sesenta cada vez con mayor fuerza. Agotadas o al menos ya amenazadas de repetición las estructuras naturalistas, los dramaturgos más agudos comienzan a apelar al juego, a la mascarada, para hacer avanzar una discusión que en las piezas precedentes había llegado a una suerte de límite" (11). Casey also observes: "En un idioma teatral nuevo para él, simbólico, se mueve tan bien como en el estricto realismo que caracteriza sus dos primeras obras*: El robo del cochino* y *La casa vieja.* ("Los mangos" 24). Finally, Estévez remarks: "La publicación [of *Los mangos de Caín*] debió provocar algunas sorpresas.[…] Hasta entonces, el joven dramaturgo había escrito dos obras de estructuras muy convencionales, casi aristotélicas, casi ibsenianas, de un realismo que buscaba apartarse, de modo tozudo, incluso desafiante, del camino trazado por Virgilio Piñera con *Electra Garrigó*" (30).

highlight the gross and tragic absurdity of totalitarian leadership in revolutionary Cuba.[89] However, most critics who have written about the play, the majority of whom are Cubans writing in Cuba, have either failed to fully acknowledge the extent of its subversive intent, or have prudently decided, in consideration of the government to whose displeasure they may be subjected, to focus upon other decidedly less controversial aspects of the work.[90] Estorino himself has yet to admit just how contestatory a play it is. As a U.S. citizen who is free to write practically whatever he likes about Cuban drama, I make no pretence of judging such writers. Nevertheless, neither can I limit myself to the parameters of analysis that they have either chosen or felt compelled to follow. Were I to do so, the integrity of this study would be seriously compromised.

Although critical commentary may reveal a great deal about the subversive nature of *Los mangos de Caín*, there is no better testament to the highly controversial quality of its contestatory

[89] Calling attention to the contestatory nature of the play (although in a notably guarded manner), Espinosa Mendoza observes: "En *Los mangos*… ya el círculo se abre y comienza un cuestionamiento a la autoridad (más que los padres, también víctimas, Dios mismo) que ocupará a esos autores en términos cada vez más riesgosos. […] Un dramaturgo de veras sabe que la crisis sobre la cual escribe parte de su propia crisis como creador. […] Textos de Arrufat, Brene, Estévez, Cano, Lemis, Raúl Alfonso… prolongan esa tradición que en *Los mangos*... se avizora de modo peligroso. […] [E]n esas obras la insolencia del verbo se ajusta a demandas en el cambio que el momento mismo anunciaba en sus contingencias, pero que se demoraban bajo los recelos de un ejercicio de poder que, desde lo que estas obras plantean, debe y tiene que ser discutido, puesto en tela de juicio. […] El hecho de que en esta obra el poder no sólo sea cuestionado, sino además ridiculizado, introduce un elemento desequilibrador de inesperadas resonancias y consecuencias" (11-12). These observations, published in Cuba in 2005, call attention to the somewhat greater degree of freedom of expression granted to intellectuals today as compared to 1965.

[90] The following are a list of all critical commentary on *Los mangos de Caín* that I have been able to find, excluding commentary about the play included in prologues to book editions in which the work appears. All of these articles are listed in this study's bibliography: Casey, Calvert. "Los mangos de Estorino;" Espinosa Mendoza, Norge. "Los mangos de Estorino: divertimento, ruptura y continuidad;" Estévez, Abilio. "El rebelde Caín;" and González Broche, Mario. "Habla Caín." With regard to critical analysis of the play, appearing in prologues, the most noteworthy observations, in my personal estimation, can be found in the preface, written by José Triana, to *El tiempo en un acto* (see bibliography), which is a collection of various contemporary Cuban plays. In his review, Triana, unlike most other critics who have considered *Los mangos de Caín*, fully and openly acknowledges that Estorino has denounced the regime's promotion of mindless conformity among the population. However, in all fairness to the other aforementioned critics, who resided in Cuba when they penned these articles, it must be noted that Triana wrote his comments about *Los mangos de Caín* while living in France.

message than the swift and severe reaction to the play on behalf of the Cuban authorities.[91] Despite the fact that the government made no official pronouncements about the work (nor, apparently, has it yet), the regime's decision—rendered instantly after the premiere—to immediately prohibit any further representations, can amount to nothing less than an admission that *Los mangos de Caín* was a serious affront to national leadership. The following description was written by Mario González Broche, who was involved in the play's initial presentation:

> El estreno fue a teatro lleno, allí estaban todos los intelectuales honestos apoyándonos. La crítica también tomó partido, en la persona de Calvert Casey […]. El domingo 15 de agosto, en la función de la tarde, también hubo muy buena acogida por parte del público. Cuando llegamos en la noche para hacer la segunda función, nos encontramos con la noticia de que había sido suspendida por orden de un grupo de jóvenes pertenecientes a la UJC en la Universidad de La Habana, sin ninguna explicación al respecto. (15)

Since, as mentioned earlier, the play makes no overt attack upon the regime, it would have been extremely difficult to prove that Estorino had written it with the intention of discrediting the government. Any official denunciation of *Los mangos de Caín* would have made legal proceedings against him necessary. Therefore, had he been put on trial, a lengthy and involved discussion of the work's contents would have ensued, and Estorino would thereby have been given an excellent opportunity to debate with his accusers. He would likely have done so largely on his own terms, since the nature of the proceedings would have been dictated by an

[91] Although the decision to suspend all performances of the play was officially given "por orden de un grupo de jóvenes pertenecientes a la UJC [*Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas*] en la Universidad de La Habana" (González Broche 15), it can hardly be imagined that by doing so, such youth did not represent the directives of the highest levels of Cuban authority. What seems much more probable is that the governent used such nominally democratic groups in order to enforce its decrees, thereby giving the false impression that the blacklisting of *Los mangos de Caín* primarily indicated the "people's" disagreement with the play's ideological message.

investigation of the supposed merits of the author's own dramatic production. Undoubtedly, such an inquiry would have seriously damaged the prestige of Castro's regime.[92] These considerations make it easier to understand why no explanation was given for disallowing additional stagings of the play.

Despite the fact that *Los mangos de Caín* does not mention Castro by name, refer to the government that he leads, nor make any specific mention of contemporary events and circumstances, one cannot fail to note, from the very beginning of the work, the evident representation of Cuban reality in 1965. The author's harsh critique of contemporary society is in no way lessened by the fact that the dramatic action takes place in a symbolic literary universe, in which "[*l*]*os personajes*," who are taken from the timeless and mythical past of the *Book of Genesis* in the Bible, "*estarán vestidos según la moda de principios del siglo XX*" (17). Rather, as will be explained, the effect of such a critique is greatly intensified by associating present-day reality with religious myth and the island's pre-revolutionary past.

In the most superficial sense, *Los mangos de Caín* is a fanciful retelling of the Biblical myth of Cain and Abel in which many seemingly irrelevant and quite frequently irreverent—though simultaneously telling and incisive—details are added to this ancient tale. The most obvious difference between the myth as it is presented in the Bible and Estorino's version, is that in the latter, Cain is (apparently) recast as the protagonist. To the most casual reader of the Bible, it must seem rather odd that Abel, as God's supposed favorite, is allowed to die at the hand of his brother Cain, whom God is presumed to have rejected, and that God then permits Cain to escape

[92] The revolutionary leadership was soon to learn of the disastrous consequences of putting writers on trial for supposedly seditious content. The Padilla Affair, which involved the various punishments, arrests, trials and persecutions of writer Heberto Padilla between 1965 and 1971 (Reed, 97-120), was—at least on the international level—a source of tremendous embarrassment for the government. The main difference between Padilla and Estorino is that the former openly confronted Castro's authority, whereas the latter has only done so indirectly. Thus, one can imagine what might have occurred had Estorino been put on trial for merely insinuating his disapproval of the regime.

and subsequently become a man of prestige and reknown who fathers so many children. Estorino does not call this part of the myth into question. Instead, he attacks the more basic premise according to which those legendary figures who oppose Cain (God, Adam and Abel) are "good," whereas those who oppose God (Cain and his mother Eve) are "bad." Only Adam, Cain, Abel and Eve are given words to speak upon the stage. God only makes his presence known by occasional peals of thunder, and the serpent that tempted Eve is merely a silent stage prop to whom Cain at times speaks as if it were able to understand him. In terms of plot, the play is exceedingly simple. Cain must decide whether or not to kill his brother and in this way make a decisive break from his family as well as free himself from God's repressive rule. The play begins with Cain condemning God's autocratic domination and expressing his disgust with Abel's subservience to the celestial dictator. It ends with Abel's murder at his brother's hands. The body of the play amounts to an extended debate, from a variety of perspectives, on the merits of independent thought and action as opposed to unquestioning and unthinking (yet at times cynically self-serving) obedience. Thus, Abel's murder at the play's end constitutes Cain's definitive judgement of the ideological issue at hand: free will and individual initiative must predominate over insincere and fawning servility.

As mentioned earlier, Estorino's denouncement of Cuban society—and by implication of Castro's regime—is manifested from the opening of the play. Cain appears alone onstage and speaks a long monologue to the immobile serpent, during which he recalls the fateful moment in which his mother was tempted by it. He speaks of how desperately he needs the serpent, and of the great debt that he owes it: "Háblame, por lo que más quieras, mira que estoy necesitado de saber. Y no tengo a quien preguntarle. Sólo me quedas tú, sólo confío en ti, que sé que hablaste una vez. Y te debo la vida. A veces siento que tú eres mi verdadero padre" (18). In this way,

Estorino demonstrates that Cain is *rebelde* in the most fundamental manner, since he professes allegiance to one who does not exercise any temporal ascendancy over him, and hence defies he who does. This implies that Estorino himself does not pledge his loyalty to the power of manifested authority (God = Castro), but rather to the spirit of intellectual truth (the serpent = the humanist ideal).[93] Cain, who continues to address the serpent, then rails against the insipid and stifling world in which he has been compelled to live:

> No seré lo que ellos quieren que sea aunque me convierta en piedra. Di algo, di cómo puedo vencerlo, cómo puedo vencerlos, ya no los aguanto más: con sus horarios, precisos hasta el segundo, para no cumplirlos; sus palabras correctas, en público, los coños en la intimidad; sus buenos días, sus champolas de guanábana, sus helados de tamarindo. (18)

Were these words taken out of context, and spoken out loud on the streets of Havana in 1965, each and every listener would instantly realize that they amount to a fiery condemnation of a Cuban society that has been stripped of all sincerity and meaning as a consequence of totalitarian rule. Undoubtedly, the individuals responsible for cancelling all further staging of the play were well aware of this. In fact, in accordance with the paranoid mentality common to all those who serve dictatorships, they almost certainly misinterpreted Cain's rhetorical question, "cómo puedo vencerlos," as signifying nothing less than a call to overthrow the government, and no doubt took Cain's assasination of Abel, ever "loyal" to God (Castro), as an invitation to begin killing all

[93] One should remember that the serpent tempted Eve to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so that her "eyes might be opened," in other words, so that she would be enabled to reason using moral criteria. Of course, if one is constitutionally unable to understand ethical principles (such as in the case of animals or small human babies), one cannot be held accountable for one's actions. Since such beings are incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, they are unburdened by a conscience, and as such may be thought of as residing in a kind of metaphysical paradise. Nonetheless, Western theology has never suggested that it is preferable for one to be ignorant of moral considerations. On the contrary, all Western religion is geared—at least in principle—to heightening one's awareness of one's ethical obligations. Considering the high value that is placed—again, at best in principle—upon one's capacity for moral reasoning in Western culture, it seems quite peculiar that the serpent is despised rather than celebrated. In its own original and highly relevant way, *Los mangos de Caín* addresses this puzzling contradiction.

sycophantic supporters of the regime. Of course, Estorino has clearly never intended that such actions be taken, as will be made evident further ahead.

Next, Abel appears upon the stage, and reproves his brother for having spoken to the serpent: "¿Ya estás otra vez en lo mismo? Pierdes el tiempo" (18). Thus, from Abel's point of view, asking questions, or engaging in any kind of independent intellectual activity, is a complete waste of time. This suggests the intellectual torpor of those who prefer to let the Castro government think for them instead of thinking for themselves. When Cain threatens to kill Abel if he informs on him, Abel responds: "Se lo digo a papá" (19). What follows is a childish—yet undeniably grim—presentation of a culture based upon the threat of tattling and the shared guilt of complicity:

> ABEL: Tú verás que se lo voy a decir.
>
> CAIN: Atrévete. Le digo que fuiste conmigo hasta la puerta, te juro que se lo digo.
>
> ABEL: No jures en vano.
>
> CAIN: Juro y rejuro que le tiramos piedras a los querubines.
>
> ABEL: Fuiste tú.
>
> CAIN: ¿Quién me alcanzó las piedras?
>
> ABEL: Pero no tiré.
>
> CAIN: Gatica de María Ramos. (19)

Estorino's intention here is to call attention to the recriminatory and conspirational nature of Cuban society under revolutionary rule. Fear of a harsh and unreasoning authority, whose chafing rule is secretly detested and resisted by many, leads to a community in which individuals are ruthlessly pitted against one another. The customary means for exacting retribution against a

fellow citizen is by denouncing her to the authorities, regardless of whether or not the informer was herself involved in perpetrating the very act of which she has accused another. In summary, the aforementioned dialogue is tantamount to a condemnation of the culture of mutual distrust, rancor, insincerity, and cynicism that Castro's regime was largely responsible for engendering in the 1960s.

Although God is only a referential character in the play, and is thus in some ways a rather indistinct figure, the descriptions of and references to him can nonetheless refer to no one else but Fidel Castro. For instance, Cain's God is one who has "querubines" who are "vecinos" that "[s]iempre tienen la oreja parada para irle después al Señor con el cuento" (20). Like Castro, Estorino's God is prone to temper tantrums: "¿Viste cómo se encolerizó? Tronando y echando fuego por los ojos" (21). Similar to the Cuban leader, he is lacking in experience, since "ayer mismo acabó de hacer el mundo" (22). He is a sexual prude, since he has ordained a "ley que se opone al nudismo" (23). He is of an irascible nature: "En estos días está insoportable, tiene oído de tuberculoso" (23). He is disinclined to forgive (24), demands unquestioning obedience (28), hypocritically demands that others work while he lives a life of leisure (28), "es demasiado orgulloso para responder" (34) and "no [hace] más que tronar" (34). He prefers Abel's bloodied sacrifice of lambs (death upon the battlefield in defense of the revolution) to the fruits (intellectual accomplishments) which Cain presents him. What makes such comparisons highly ironic is the fact that Castro is supposed to represent the overthrow of everything that bourgeois religion stands for, yet, according to the author, he is the very embodiment of the Old-Testament God of the Bible.[94]

[94] Curiously, in 1965, the same year that *Los mangos de Caín* premiered, "the American 'beatnik' poet Allen Ginsberg came to Havana to serve on a jury in the annual Casa de las Américas literature contest." Not long afterwards, he was expelled from Cuba, quite probably because of his homosexuality, drug use, and criticism of the

Similarly, other characters in the play transcend their usual mythical significance and take on specifically political implications. As previously mentioned, Abel embodies the cynical, insincere and unctuous servant of the regime, who has no regard for higher truth, and whose relationship to and interaction with the supreme authority is in reality only guided by consideration for his own selfish advantage. Adán symbolizes the sincere and devoted follower of the dictator. Adán's limited comprehension, deep-seated fears, and slavish obedience prevent him from realizing what an empty existence he has been leading. Adán's dedication to God's dictionary indicates the sheeplike revolutionary's interminable zeal for categorizing and defining everything according to hegemonic standards, and his inability to understand anything that falls outside the framework of his limited comprehension.[95] Eva represents the Cuban citizen who sympathizes with the dissident intellectual, and has even played a key role in developing his nonconformist and contestatory outlook, yet in the end is either unwilling or unable to join him in his efforts to confront and overcome the prevailing order. Finally, Caín exemplifies the *rebelde por excelencia*, therefore the true standard-bearer of the values of *cubanía revolucionaria*, who, utterly disgusted with the autocratic rule of his leader, has finally decided to speak out against him. Thus, Caín is an intellectual whose determination to know and live by the truth must not be suppressed. Consequently, Caín's noble quest justifies his actions.

As referred to earlier, Cain's murder of Abel, despite the probable misinterpretation of the Cuban authorities, does not signify a call to armed revolt against the supporters of the regime. For one, such an interpretation cannot be reconciled with the lighthearted and humorous tone that

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Castro regime. "After his explusion, Ginsberg denied that there had been a 'cultural revolution' in Cuba. A 'Catholic mentality' still prevailed there, he said" (Reed 77-80).

[95] As has been observed in other studies, when the characters search for a word, they inevitably read the words which precede it. Such words impart a strongly subversive meaning to the word to be defined: "CAIN: (*Buscando en el diccionario.*) Craso. *(Mira a Adán.*) Creador. (*Mira hacia arriba.*) Cretino. (*Mira a Abel.*) Crimen, criminal, criminalidad, criminalista, criminalmente […] Cri, crisis, crisma. Crisma: aceite consa… (*Murmura el resto de la frase.*) Figurado y familiar. La cabeza donde se aplica la crisma; romper a uno la crisma" (31).

prevails throughout the script. Secondly, the murder is a necessary part of the Biblical myth, which itself has figurative implications that transcend its literal meaning, at least for those whose mentality is able to accommodate such considerations.[96] Finally, such a reading is entirely inconsistent with what was known of the author's disposition and ideological outlook up to 1965, whether from personal interviews, or from the most superficial perusal of his dramatic production.

Nonetheless, the ideological message of *Los mangos de Caín*, represents a startling departure from that of the author's preceding play of only a year before: "Una revisión fría del teatro de Abelardo Estorino tendría pocos recursos para explicar […] la existencia de una obra como *Los mangos de Caín* inmediatamente después de *La casa vieja.*" It might have seemed to some that, prior to this strongly contestatory work, the author was merely "un dramaturgo menor que hacía eficaces obras de propaganda revolucionaria en tono menor, sin más" (Espinosa Mendoza, "Los mangos" 9-10). Such a misconception would prove difficult to sustain after *Los mangos de Caín*, which, as attested by the decisive action taken by the government against it, was to inaugurate for the author a long period of personal frustration and official opprobation:

> El silencio que pesó sobre Estorino en "esos jodidos años" setenta, cuando el autor podía dirigir obras ajenas y *collages* de poemas con intención patriótica pero no ser representado ni representarse, parece obra de uno de los rayos que el Señor envía sobre la pareja *pos edénica* cada vez que uno de ellos, sobre todo Eva […] se atreve a retarlo. (Espinosa Mendoza, "Los mangos" 12)[97]

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[96] Although I can make no suppositions about how the original 1965 audience would have interpreted the significance of Abel's murder, I think it likely that most dissident audiencegoers would have realized that it simply indicates the necessary defeat of corrupt and cynical servility at the hands of intellectual truth and integrity. Then again, a fundamental misinterpretation of the play's ideological intent could, at least in theory, occur among any kind of audiencegoer, whether conformist or dissident.

[97] As mentioned earlier, Estorino has implied that the professional limitations imposed upon him from 1965 to 1979 were a consequence of the leadership's disapproval of his sexuality (quoted in Boudet, "Teatro" 43). Intituitively, I

Mario González Broche also notes:

> [S]e comienzan a vislumbrar los matices oscuros de lo que más tarde sería el tristemente célebre "período gris de los años setenta", que tanto daño causó a la intelectualidad cubana. […] Año 2005: Las aguas han tomado su nivel, varias son las agrupaciones que han representado *Los mangos de Caín*. Estorino […] [a]hora puede disfrutar de sus obras sin sobresaltos. Estos son otros tiempos. Atrás han quedado esas tristes y oscuras páginas de la historia de nuestra cultura. (15)

Although the upcoming years ("los años jodidos"), characterized by even greater government oppression than the preceding ones, were to prove difficult for Estorino, they were also a time during which he produced two highly contestatory plays. One of these, *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de Don José Jacinto Milanés*, is rightfully considered by many to be an important milestone in the development of Cuban drama, and the other, *El tiempo de la plaga*, continues the author's indignant portrayal of unchecked authority and its corrosive effects upon Cuban society.

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disagree with this assessment. Were Estorino to publicly admit that the regime punished him for writing *Los mangos de Caín*, he would then create problems for both himself and the government. For this reason, he has most likely chosen the somewhat safer path of placing the blame upon his sexuality.

CHAPTER FOUR:

1965-1979: "Los años jodidos."[98]

By 1965, it was clear that the Cuban revolution had not only transformed a nation, but had also been itself transformed. The prevalent symbol of national authority and leadership had changed significantly. The romantic image of the rebellious *guerrillero barbudo* fighting in the mountains, although still important as a myth, had slowly but unstoppably been replaced by that of the hegemonic revolutionary government official who, regardless of his anti-bourgeois political outlook, was nonetheless the embodiment of the newly-constituted *status quo*. Of course, the chief of all leadership figures was Castro himself, now the unquestioned *comandante* of what had finally become a firmly-established ruling order. However, the relative consolidation of political power had not, as one might mistakenly infer, led to a relaxation of control over the population, but rather to a steady increase in repressive measures against perceived—or even simply potential—enemies of the regime. What ensued was a culture of fear and paranoia in which detentions and executions took place on a massive scale: "Cuba's 1960s were especially bloody—perhaps 8,000 men summarily executed, at least 50,000 political prisoners, and unknown numbers of extrajudicial executions in the guerrilla war that raged between 1960 and

[98] Estorino has used this phrase to describe the years during which he wrote *Milanés* ("El dramaturgo" 8). However, I have chosen to apply this term to the entire period of time during which the author was unable to see any of his original drama represented upon the stage in Cuba. He wrote two original plays, *El tiempo de la plaga* (1968) and *Milanés* (1973), from 1966 to 1979, none of which was represented during those years. (*Ni un sí ni un no* was premiered in 1980. *Milanés* was finally performed in 1984. *El tiempo de la plaga* was first published in 1997, although it apparently has yet to be staged.) My argument, stated and supported in the previous chapter, is that the premiere of the highly subversive *Los mangos de Caín*, which led to the immediate government prohibition on all subsequent representations of that play, marked the beginning of a frustrating era for the author, during which he would either refrain from submitting his original work, or would be denied the opportunity to have it staged. Thus, this chapter will focus on the years during which Estorino was, for all intents and purposes, largely silenced as an author of original drama.

1966" (Perez-Stable).[99] As mentioned in Chapter 3, UMAP detention camps, in which society's "undesirables"[100] were placed, began to operate in 1965, and were not formally disbanded until 1969. Thus, although it is evident that the Cuban government had been taking some coercive measures against the population since 1959, by 1965 the regime's intolerance and its appetite for retribution had reached unprecedented levels. It would be the beginning of a long and difficult period for Cuban society.[101]

The years 1965-1968 (*Los mangos de Caín* was penned in 1965 and *El tiempo de la plaga* in 1968) were also characterized by the escalating persecution carried out against intellectuals. What makes this so ironic is the fact that Che Guevara "warned in 1965 that Cuban art and literature were in danger of bureaucratization;" poet Roberto Fernández Retamar "said in 1966 that writers should give 'critical support' to the Revolution, pointing out 'theoretical errors' and 'incorrect measures' taken by decision makers;" and "old" Communists like José Antonio Portuondo and Carlos Rafael Rodríguez "encouraged 'live debate' and denounced the menace of 'an administrative invasion in the field of art" (Reed 72). Also, in 1967, the Cuban government sponsored an exhibition of avante-garde art called the *Salón de Mai*, followed by the Cultural congress of Havana in January 1968. Prominent intellectuals from all over the world were invited to attend these ostentatious events. These delegates "were given the impression that

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[99] There is a great deal of disagreement with regard to how many executions and detentions actually took place in Cuba in the 1960s. These run from the extreme of asserting that no executions have taken place in Cuba since 1953 and that only a few thousand were imprisoned, to claiming that tens of thousands were put to death and hundreds of thousands imprisoned. Given the Cuban government's propensity for secrecy in such matters, it is currently impossible to obtain precise data. I list Pérez-Stable's figures simply because they seem to fall somewhere between the two extremes previously mentioned. What cannot be questioned by any reasonably unprejudiced mind is the well-substantiated fact that arrests and executions took place on a massive scale in Cuba during the 1960s. In my opinion, it is more important to recognize this than to verify exact numbers.

[100] Detainees in UMAP camps included homosexuals, dissident writers, Catholics, Jehova's Witnesses, and others deemed to be unfit for socialist society (Reed 85).

[101] I do not mean to deny the positive accomplishments of the Castro regime from 1965 to 1969, such as the establishment of free health care, universal education, guaranteed employment and the like. However, since such concerns do not relate to an analysis of *El tiempo de la plaga* (1968), I have chosen not to emphasize them in this context.

freedom of expression was alive and well in Cuba" (Reed 73). However, as Reed observes, things were not what they seemed:

> On the face of it, this appeared to be a period of liberalism comparable to 1957 in China, when Mao exhorted intellectuals to "let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought compete." However, it would be a big mistake to conclude that the mid-60s in Cuba was a Golden Age of Intellectual Freedom. […] [B]oth the *Salon de Mai* and the Cultural Congress of Havana were colossal propaganda shows for foreign consumption. […] The Potemkin circuses in Cuba have always succeeded in dazzling "revolutionary tourists" who are not curious enough to look behind the façade. The fact is that, at the same time these shows were being performed with great pomp and ostentation, Cuban non-conformists were being repressed on a huge scale. (74-76)

For example, the publishing house El Puente was liquidated in 1965, largely as a consequence of its association with the "homosexual and highly unconventional" American poet Allen Ginsberg, its association with *Lunes de revolución*, Carlos Franqui, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and as a result of printing material deemed "immoral" by Fidel Castro because of its "criticism of military service" (Reed 76-79). As mentioned earlier, UMAP camps, where large numbers of dissident intellectuals (among other so-called undesirable elements of the population) were detained, commenced operations in 1965. Printing for the novel *Paradiso* (1966), written by Cuban writer Lezama Lima, and regarded by Spanish novelist Juan Goytisolo as "one of the most important Cuban novels" of the 1960s, was, as a consequence of the book's supposedly "pornographic" nature and "frank discussion of homosexuality," limited to only 4,000 copies, and was "even retired from bookstores and libraries for awhile" (Reed 86-87). Finally, *Fuera del*

juego, a book of poetry presented in 1968 by Heberto Padilla, was condemned by official government channels, such as the army magazine *Verde olivo*, as "garbage," "frankly anti-revolutionary" and "corrupt merchandise" (Reed 104-106). Those writers associated with Padilla—such as César López, José Rodríguez Feo, Virgilio Piñera, and José Triana—were also smeared in the government press. In an effort to reestablish his own revolutionary credentials, Padilla attacked Cabrera Infante by accusing him of being a "counterrevolutionary" (Reed 106-107). The latter calmly responded by saying: "I know that I can make jokes for the pleasure of playing with words, while Padilla uses words because it is his life at stake." He added:

> I recommend to my friends that they camouflage their historical freckles with cosmetic excuses and the make-up of contrition—but that they follow as soon as possible the wise advice of Machiavelli's friend Francesco Guicciardini, given 500 years ago: "No rule is useful for living under a bloody and beastly tyranny, except perhaps one, the same as in times of pestilence: *flee as far as you can*." (quoted in Reed 108).

El tiempo de la plaga

It is quite possible, although I have been unable to confirm it, that Cabrera Infante's reference to "times of pestilence," made in early 1969, inspired Estorino to write *El tiempo de la plaga*.[102] Although the author states, in the play's prologue, that he began to write it in 1968, he did not offer his final version until 1990 (199), after having rewritten it "dos veces, inconforme con las primeras versions" (Cancio Isla, "Abelardo" 21). In any case, Estorino, like Guicciardini,

[102] On the other hand, since *El tiempo de la plaga* is structured around the Oedipus myth (in which a plague upon the general population is the natural consequence of Oedipus's unpunished murder of his own father, the former king), one might also argue that the title of Estorino's play primarily alludes to the ancient Greek legend. I think it quite possible that the title refers both to the Oedipus myth and to Guicciardini's telling statement.

equates "tyranny" with "pestilence" in his disturbing drama. In many ways similar to *Los mangos de Caín* in terms of style and presentation,[103] this work nonetheless surpasses its predecessor with regard to the boldness and intensity of its assault upon the leadership of Fidel Castro. Even though, as before, the Cuban dictator is not mentioned by name, it is once again evident that his personal essence is present in the drama as a central character.

Very little critical commentary has been written about *El tiempo de la plaga*. This is unfortunate, since it is one of the most ideologically audacious works produced by Estorino, is conceptually daring, is redolent with incisive black humor, masterfully combines nonsensical elements with tragic ones, and for these reasons deserves a place among such Twentieth-Century classics of absurdist Hispanic theater as *El hombre y la mosca* (1968) by José Ruibal, and *El arquitecto y el emperador de Asiria* (1967) by Fernando Arrabal. I list these works because, similar to *El tiempo de la plaga*, they both ridicule and deconstruct the warped mentality upon which dictatorial regimes are based, and both allude to an actual political figure to whose chafing authority—in this case, that of Spanish *caudillo* Francisco Franco—their *patria* is subjected. Perhaps because it evidences such strongly contestatory qualities, Estorino's play has yet to be represented upon the Cuban stage. At the present time, no single article has been written

[103] The chief stylistic similarities between *Los mangos de Caín* and *Tiempo de la plaga* are their abundant use of black humor, their contexualization in a fantastic and mythical (yet at the same time highly familiar) setting, and a liberal dose of absurdity, for which both might be classified as examples of absurdist theater. However, there are some significant differences between the two plays as well. Cancio Isla describes the aesthetic as well as ideological aspects of *Tiempo de la plaga*: "[Es] una farsa trágica, con fuertes tonalidades grotescas y efectos paródicos. Véanse al respecto las acotaciones del preámbulo: 'Debe encontrarse la forma de convertir la pieza en un hecho exageradamente teatral.' Los dramáticos acontecimientos de Tebas se truecan en visiones esperpénticas. Las coordenadas espacio-temporales se desdibujan, aunque la trama pudiera ubicarse en un país latinoamericano durante las tercera-cuarta-quinta décadas del siglo XX. […] Para consumar su 'sacrilegio' al clásico griego, Estorino ensaya con soltura recursos que desarrollará luego más eficaz y ampliamente: profusión de personajes, rejuegos con el tiempo y el espacio, distanciamiento de la representación e insistencia en nuevos significados de la imagen escénica. *El tiempo…* se inscribe dentro de las preocupaciones del autor por un teatro político social que, en esos momentos, suma no pocos títulos y cultores en Latinoamérica. ("Abelardo" 21-22). Thus, in *Tiempo de la plaga*, as opposed to *Los mangos de Caín*, the use of Brechtian distancing is more noticeable, there are more characters, and there are more "rejuegos con el tiempo y el espacio." These aesthetic tendencies would find their fullest expression in the author's next play, *Milanés*, in 1973.

exclusively about the work, although some limited—but important—critical commentary about it has appeared in "Estorino: Decir la verdad y no engañarnos" by Rosa Ileana Boudet, and "Abelardo Estorino en la guerra del tiempo" by Wilfredo Cancio Isla. As with *Los mangos de Caín*, existing reviews of *El tiempo de la plaga*—in this case both penned by Cubans living on the island—fail, for obvious reasons, to openly and fully acknowledge the subversive nature of the play.

According to the methods established for this study, the original horizon of expectations is determined by the year intended for a play's premiere. Owing to the two revisions done to *El tiempo de la plaga* sometime between 1968 and 1990, it is impossible to say exactly when—if ever—Estorino hoped to first present this work upon the stage.[104] Nevertheless, one may reasonably guess that the author had originally purposed to premiere the play in the late 1960s, which is when he must have written the original version. In any case, he gives 1968 as the year in which the work was initially created.[105] As for the revisions to the play, it is not known for certain whether they involved fundamental alterations to the dramatic and ideological content, or whether they simply consisted of some topical changes to style and format. Since the author has never adequately clarified the issue, and since one cannot otherwise verify any speculation with regard to the full extent of the changes to the play's content, one cannot determine just how ideologically different the first version of the work is from the final one. However, there is a

[104] During a brief e-mail correspondence with the author in November, 2005, I asked him for some clarification on this point. In his response he implied that he had already sufficiently clarified the matter in published personal interviews. However, in my investigations of his published interviews, I have been unable to determine when exactly the author first intended to premiere the play.

[105] Significantly, this is the same year that Antón Arrufat's *Los siete contra tebas* was first presented to the public. Although widely acclaimed among Cuban intellectuals at the time, Arrufat's daring play was poorly received by the Cuban cultural authorities, and no doubt contributed to the playwright's growing problems with the revolutionary leadership.

significant difference between the words *revisión* and *refundición*.[106] The former term implies a much less fundamental alteration to an original version than the latter one. Since Estorino has chosen the first term with relation to the play, one may reasonably suppose that the final version of *El tiempo de la plaga* does not radically differ from its original one. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I have established 1968 as the year for the original horizon of expectations.

Although clearly referring to the brutal and fearful years on the island in the late1960s, the dramatic action is set in an "imaginary" Latin-American nation[107] at some time during the middle part of the twentieth century. To complicate matters, the storyline is loosely and farcically structured around the legend of Oedipus Rex. Cancio Isla notes:

> Estorino se inspiró en *Edipo rey*, pero su versión no se somete a las reglas de la tragedia pura; en todo caso tendríamos que hablar de una farsa trágica, con fuertes tonalidades grotescas y efectos paródicos. […] Edipo se transfigura en un dictador pequeño y pomposo que reparte órdenes en una ciudad azotada por el terror, la mentira y la muerte. La maldición que pesa sobre su estirpe la ha provocado él en un acto consciente por alcanzar el poder y la gloria: la eliminación de Vandalio [Lalo] Pantoja, que no viaja en una carroza tirada por potros, sino en un Cadillac reluciente. Chungo, una especie de Tiresias que convoca la luz con toques de tambor, caracoles y agua de colonia, sentencia que no hay crímenes olvidados: los muertos esperan. El caos se expande socialmente en la medida que el Presidente

[106] As mentioned earlier, Estorino has said that he made two *revisiones* to *El tiempo de la plaga*. Likewise, critics have recognized that *Vagos rumores* is a *refundición* of *Milanés*. Although *Vagos rumores* is radically different from *Milanés* in terms of organization, length, and casting, it is still in many ways—particularly in terms of ideological intent—simply an alternate version of its predecessor. Therefore, if a *refundición* of an Estorino play does not entail a marked ideological departure from the original, how much less would a *revisión* differ in terms of message from an original version.

[107] Still, the constant references to *santería* and other specifically Cuban cultural elements, make it difficult to suppose that this "imaginary" nation could be any other than Cuba itself, or at least an "imaginary" kind of Cuba.

> no está dispuesto a reconocer sus culpas y las encubre condenando a los demás, imponiéndoles dictámenes y caprichos. Así, a diferencia del héroe de Sófocles, pasará de la falsa prosperidad a la catástrofe final sin despertar compasión en el espectador, pues sus reales pecados son la ambición, la arrogancia y la ruindad moral. (21-22)

This method of mixed contextualization is very similar to the one used in *Los mangos de Caín*. In both plays, the dramatic action is ostensibly set in relatively modern times in some indeterminate—yet at the same time unmistakably Cuban—setting. Also, both works are structured around an ancient myth,[108] and both allude to Fidel Castro. However, in *Los mangos de Caín*, the character that represents the Cuban *comandante* (God) is not the principal character (which in this case is Caín), whereas in *El tiempo de la plaga*, Castro (El Presidente) is indeed the main figure. In *Los mangos de Caín*, the imminent murder of Abel (the sycophantic servant of the regime) is the focus of dramatic tension, whereas in *El tiempo de la plaga*, the chief element of suspense is the impending assasination of El Presidente (Castro). Therefore, *El tiempo de la plaga* represents a more audacious attack upon national authority than its predecessor.

Nonetheless, I do not wish to deny the possibility for other types of readings of this play. Were Estorino to say that *El tiempo de la plaga* is principally a general indictment against all kinds of dictatorial leadership, I would have no reason to doubt his sincerity. The circumstances described in both *Los mangos de Caín* and *El tiempo de la plaga*, may be applied to any number of situations throughout the world and the ages. However, the fact remains that both plays deal with matters highly relevant to events taking place in Cuba at the time the works were written.

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[108] Undoubtedly, the inspiration for this type of contextualization owes much to *Electra Garrigó* (1944) by the Cuban playwright Virgilio Piñera.

Since such matters would have been experienced firsthand by the author, it is hard to believe that the two plays only refer to situations outside of the island. Rather, it seems infinitely more credible that Estorino intended to allude to the world that he knows best.

It is apparent that El Presidente, as a representation of Fidel Castro, is not, despite many significant similarities, an exact image. There are certain important differences between the two that cannot be overlooked. For example, El Presidente is of low socioeconomic origins, whereas Castro comes from a bourgeois family. El Presidente has set up a ruling order for the benefit of the elite class and in direct opposition to the interests of the masses, but Castro claims to have overthrown the bourgeoisie for the purpose of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat. El Presidente kills the leader of the nation in order to replace him, while Castro simply causes him (Fulgencio Batista) to flee to the United States.

Curiously, some of the personal qualities of El Presidente that may not seem to correspond to Fidel Castro, do indeed pertain to Fulgencio Batista, who did have a humble background, and who clearly supported bourgeois interests over those of the majority of the Cuban people. Also, Batista's overthrow of the corrupt and self-serving Carlos Prio Socarras in his 1952 coup, and the former's subsequent perpetuation of the latter's venal and fraudlent leadership, is apparent in El Presidente's usurpation of Lalo Pantoja's office, and the former's consequent furtherance of his predecessor's perfidious ways. However, neither Batista nor Castro killed the men whose leadership they supplanted. Thus, the assassination of Lalo Pantoja—in a symbolic sense the political "father" of El Presidente—is simply in keeping with the Oedipus myth, much in the same way that the murder of Abel in *Los mangos de Caín*, is merely included in accordance with the Biblical legend, and in no way implies a call to kill sycophantic Cubans.

The chief similarities between El Presidente and Fidel Castro are their extreme paranoia, their relentless persecution of enemies both real and perceived, their insistence upon exercising total control over the population and their dismal failure to do so, their excessive attachment to power and authority, their refusal to permit genuinely free elections (235), their unwillingness to accept helpful counsel, their habitual denial of personal responsibility for society's problems, their evident inability to maintain order in the face of growing opposition, and the plague of death and persecution surrounding and caused by their leadership. Interestingly, these characteristics are equally applicable to the rule of Fulgencio Batista from 1952 to 1958.

A second look at the supposed differences between Castro and El Presidente (and thus between Castro and Batista), reveals that such differences may not be as pronounced as one initially might think. For instance, although Castro was born into a relatively wealthy and influential family, similar to El Presidente, he was obligated to depend upon the financial assistance of others for many years prior to his rise to power. Also, despite the fact that Castro has claimed to have established his government for the benefit of the Cuban people as a whole, it has been apparent since 1959 that certain sectors of the population have been more favored than others, and none more than the revolutionary vanguard, which consists of those government officials deemed to be most loyal and essential to the interests of the regime. Meanwhile, most other Cubans, such as blacks, have been obligated to bear the brunt of economic hardship, especially so in the 1960s. These circumstances are reflected in the government of El Presidente, whose coterie of preferred advisors and assistants enjoys a lavish lifestyle while the vast majory of the population suffers material deprivations and seethes with resentment.

For all these reasons, El Presidente, as a dramatic character, embodies, in a most ironic way, the essential qualities of both Fidel Castro and Fulgencio Batista. Likewise, Lalo Pantoja,

as the political "father" of El Presidente, and thus his mirror image, could refer to either Carlos Prío Socarras (with Batista as his usurper), or to Batista himself (with Castro as his conquerer). If one follows this line of logic, it may even be asserted that Lalo Pantoja symbolizes Fidel Castro, and that El Presidente embodies Castro's eventual replacement.[109] Therefore, one may conclude that Estorino has created a dramatic universe in which the finer distinctions between one kind of modern dictatorial rule and its successor are purposely blurred. This is alluded to in the play itself:

> HISTORIADOR: Cuando el actual Presidente llegó al poder reinaba el caos. […] ¿Tú no sabes que el difunto Lalo Pantoja llevaba el país al desastre?
>
> BANQUERO: ¡Falso! En tiempos de Lalo Pantoja la economía estaba estabilizada.
>
> BARBERO 1: Yo no tenía ni donde caerme muerto. […]
>
> HISTORIADOR: Pero imperaba el caos. Y lo sostengo. Un gobierno corrompido que costó sangre, vidas, dinero. […]
>
> BANQUERO: Dejen a Lalo en su tumba. Los sucesos tuvieron lugar ayer.
>
> HISTORIADOR: Pero las cosas no surgen de la nada. Si la violencia ha llegado a su clímax es que comenzó antes […] no hay efecto sin causa. (214-215)[110]

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[109] In keeping with the tendencies of absurdist theater, the theme of repeating essences is also employed in both *El hombre y la mosca* (1968) by José Ruibal, and *El arquitecto y el emperador de Asiria* (1967) by Fernando Arrabal. In the former, the dictator creates a double to rule after he is gone, whereas in the latter, the dictator reemerges as part of an endlessly self-reproducing cycle. Although no successor to El Presidente is specifically indicated in *El tiempo de la plaga*, one may assume that, immediately following his assasination, another dictator or dictatorial governing body (such as a military junta) will take his place.

[110] In the context of the play, the "causa" is, in conformity with the Oedipus Rex myth, the murder of the leader's "father" or predecessor. However, in a metaphysical sense, the "murder" of the predecessor simply signifies the replacement of the old regime with the new. In the case of an armed revolution or a *golpe de estado*, political violence is present whether or not people are actually killed. Thus, the "murder" or supplanting of the old order by the new is, in effect, the violent usurpation of the "father" by the "son." In other words, the continual and violent replacement of one regime for another is itself the cause of the plague, or wave of violence and repression.

If, in the late 1960s, a Cuban theatergoer had had the opportunity to listen to this dialogue, she undoubtedly would have asked herself a number of questions. Was society more stable under Batista or is it more stable now? Was the economy better during the Batista years or is it better now? Is Castro's government really better than Batista's, or is it just as corrupt, bloodthirsty, and financially irresponsible? Is the current wave of violence and repression peculiar to Castro's government, or does it have its origins in the Batista regime, and is it hence part of a longstanding tradition of oppressive leadership? In summary, is there any real difference between Castro and Batista, or are they simply two slightly different variations on the typical Latin-American *caudillo* or *jefe político*? One may also well imagine that the Cuban spectator of 2006 would make similar inferences, which may say a lot about why this play has yet to be staged on the island.

In terms of plot, *El tiempo de la plaga*, a one-act play, is exceedingly simple. El Presidente denies that anything is wrong with his rule of the nation, even though people all around him are dying from acts of violence. His main concern is his personal safety—constantly threatened by assasination attempts—and the preservation of his power. During a photo shoot, one of El Presidente's generals poses in his place for the camera, and is shot by an unidentified gunman. This event, although failing to make him aware of the resentment that his rule inspires among the people, nonetheless serves to heighten El Presidente's paranoia, and spurs him on to take even more repressive measures against those around him. His personal counselor, trusted confidant, and brother-in-law, Pepé, who holds a distinguished and powerful position in the government, warns El Presidente about the population's unrest and dissatisfaction, and announces that the cause of all society's ills is the unsolved murder of Lalo Pantoja. Pepé announces that he will launch an investigation to discover the identity of the assassin. El

Presidente, who is fully aware that he himself is Lalo Pantoja's killer, becomes immediately suspicious of Pepé, and is convinced that his brother-in-law means to usurp him. So, he has him pushed off a building. Next, El Presidente consults with the *santería* god Chungo (here, a kind of Tiresias), who warns him that his end is imminent. Furious, El Presidente arrests Chungo and all those who dare to tell him the truth. Then, in a post-mortem confession, Pepé admits his disgust with El Presidente. Following this, a group of generals, who no longer have any confidence in El Presidente's rule, decide to kill him and form a military dictatorship. Although they think that they have shot him, in reality they only murder his double. The real president emerges and arrests the generals. Finally, the common people rise up against El Presidente and stab him to death.

Even though *El tiempo de la plaga* does indeed make use of dramatic tension, the audience cannot empathize in the least with El Presidente, who is a thoroughly detestable character,[111] and for this reason the dramatic suspense and climax are largely ironic. Several other characters in the play, such as the generals and Pepé, are portrayed as self-serving and cynical. Thus, one can feel no sympathy for them either. In this work, only the characters that represent the common people can inspire any concern in the spectator. Therefore, when the general population kills El Presidente at the end, it is a truly climactic victory, although by no means a final one. Rather, it is just one revolt among an endlessly repeating succession of historical ones. The Amolador, who ominously appears throughout the play at regular but brief intervals, refers to this perpetually recurring phenomenon:

[111] This is a notable example of Brechtian distancing common to absurdist theater. According to this concept, the traditionally heroic figure is converted into an anti-hero, so that the audience can no longer identify with him. The purpose of this is to enable the spectator to judge the dramatic action intellectually rather than emotionally. Thus, the spectator is emotionally distanced from the main character.

> Desde el momento en que se inventó la rueda, mis antepasados se dedicaron a este arte. […] ¡Y nunca hemos estado sin trabajo! […] Mis antepasados hicieron trabajos que los situaron en la cima de la profesión: la espada de Orestes entró en el vientre de Egisto sin que la sintiera; el puñal de Bruto encontró el ventrículo izquierdo de César gracias a la pureza del filo; uno de mis abuelos fue el amolador preferido de César Borgia; durante la Revolución Francesa nos dedicamos al trabajo en serie o no hubiéramos podido atender todos los pedidos de hojas de guillotina. (244)

Consequently, and in accordance with the circular (as opposed to linear) construction common to absurdist theater, the dramatic action of *Tiempo de la plaga* is contextualized within a series of infinite historical repetitions, and for this reason it is the ideological matter at hand, rather than the resolution of dramatic tension, which is the at the center of the play. Also common to absurdist drama, Estorino prescribes no solution to society's ills, and offers no explicit moral message. Still, the work does contain a definite ideological statement, which is manifested in the title: dictatorial leadership is a plague upon humanity. To many in 1960s Cuba, this would have been painfully obvious.

The drama begins with the appearance of the Amolador, who is followed by an anonymous man who asks him to sharpen his knife. The encounter between these two men quickly establishes an atmosphere of simmering revolt:

> HOMBRE 5: ¿Qué le parece este cuchillo?
>
> AMOLADOR: *(Examina el cuchillo.)* Buen acero. De Toledo.
>
> HOMBRE 5: Herencia de la familia.
>
> AMOLADOR: Se lo dejo afilado para penetrar un pecho sin el menor crujido.

HOMBRE 5: Lo tendré en cuenta.

AMOLADOR: ¿Se lo afilo?

HOMBRE 5: No. No es tiempo todavía. (202)

What at first seems to be a mundane street conversation, abruptly takes on sinister overtones with the words "para penetrar un pecho." This places the preceding dialogue in a very different light. The "buen acero," which is "[h]erencia de familia" from "Toledo," brings to mind popular revolts in Spain—country of origin for so much Cuban heritage—from centuries past. Accordingly, the imminent uprising represents the continuation of longstanding tradition. It is not "tiempo todavía" for the people to kill their despised leader. This establishes, from the play's beginning, the dictator's inevitable demise, and serves to diminish the audience's emotional involvement with the unfolding of the plot. One must first attend to the personal characteristics of the anti-hero, since his ultimate fate is of minimal importance. This is affirmed at the play's end, after El Presidente has been stabbed to death by the people: "HOMBRE 1: ¿Lo reconoces? HOMBRE 2: Ahora no parece tan terrible. HOMBRE 1: Ya empiezo a olvidarlo" (256). Therefore, El Presidente himself is not important. Rather, the endlessly repeating cycle of dictatorial leadership is the play's central concern.

Following the previously noted brief exchange between the Amolador and Hombre 5, two more nondescript men, Hombre 1 and Hombre 2, "[*p*]*asan por encima* [*de un*] *cadáver sin darle importancia*" (202), then begin to argue in a vaudeville style[112] about exceedingly trivial and meaningless matters,[113] and finally come to violent blows against one another. This scene

[112] The vaudeville theatrical style is characterized by short, rapid exchanges of dialogue and exaggeratedly absurd mundanity. Examples of this style would be The Three Stooges, Laurel and Hardy, Groucho Marx and other comic acts from the United States during the first half of the Twentieth Century. Vaudeville also tended to make use of slapstick, which commonly included preposterous and gratuitous violence.

[113] Interestingly, these two characters disagree about whether or not an unspecified baseball player is right-handed or left-handed. This is what ostensibly leads them to strike one another. Undoubtedly, Estorino means to draw attention to the absurdity of arguing over the finer points of political orientation (right-wing or left-wing): "HOMBRE 1: Si

serves to draw attention to the misdirected energies of the community. Instead of preoccupying themselves with the plague of death that is decimating the population of their country, some individuals prefer to bicker amongst themselves over issues devoid of any transcendence. This brings to mind Cuba's situation between 1965 and 1969, when members of the national vanguard—and, to a lesser extent, the people in general—bitterly debated the finer points of revolutionary doctrine, while at the same time summary executions and arbitrary arrests were rife, and UMAP camps were in operation. Thus, the play may very well suggest that such people are nothing more than vaudeville stooges who are utterly unconcerned about the fate of their fellow human beings.

After the ridiculous argument between Hombre 1 and Hombre 2, a Vendedor appears, offering to sell bleach as a solution to society's ills: "Desapeste su calle, su casa, su baño, su cabeza, su boca, su sobaco. ¡Cloro! Compre cloro y olvídese de la peste. […] Límpiese de culpas con cloro" (204). Of course, the idea of using bleach on one's hair (which the bleach will turn white) or in one's mouth (bleach is highly toxic) draws attention to the absurdity and irresponsibility of the Vendedor's claims. In any case, it is a topical and ultimately insignificant proposal for remedying a grave problem. It calls to mind the Castro regime's unwillingness to fully acknowledge and accept responsibility for the plague of violence that, in the 1960s, it has unleashed. In other words, Cuban society cannot be "cleaned up" with a simple dose of bleach.

Following the announcement of the Vendedor, a couple enters upon the stage. After a quick dialogue, in which Mujer accuses Hombre of being unfaithful, she stabs him to death. Two policemen find his body and remark that there is not enough space in the municipal deposit (which is filled to the top with corpses) for it. Accordingly, they prop the cadaver up in a chair

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ése es zurdo, mi madre es la emperatriz del danzonete. HOMBRE 2: Será una emperatriz zurda. HOMBRE 1: Las emperatrices son de derecha. ¡Siempre! HOMBRE 2: Deja la política. El hombre era zurdo" (202).

and place a newspaper in its hands: "POLICÍA 3: ¿Qué va a leer, la página deportiva? POLICÍA 4: No, el editorial. Le interesa la política" (206). Then, two other policemen, unaware that the man is dead, arrive and attempt to give him orders. Finally, El Presidente, "*pequeñito y pomposo*," appears and notices the corpse: "PRESIDENTE: *(Mira a su alrededor y suspira satisfecho.)* ¡Qué paz! Me enorgullece gobernar este país: aire limpio, ciudadanos laboriosos… *(descubre el cadáver)* …intelectuales preocupados" (207). From these exchanges, one may infer that "la política" is for the dead, that the regime gives orders to dead men, and that "intelectuales preocupados" are corpses.

Such references may be interpreted in a number of meaningful ways. By stating that politics is for the dead, Estorino may imply that those who become involved in politics are morally dead,[114] or perhaps that those who become politically involved are likely to be killed. Likewise, those who unquestioningly follow the regime's orders may be considered to be ethically dead, or, conversely, maybe they are as dead men (completely humiliated) because they are always obligated to obey commands. Finally, the "intelectual preocupado" as a dead man, can either suggest that the regime's pseudo-intellectual vanguard is morally dead, or that genuine intellectuals may be killed because of the threat they pose to the national leadership. Significantly, all of these interpretations can be applied to Cuban society in 1968.

El Presidente is utterly unconcerned about the plague of death surrounding him. All his thoughts and energies are bent upon the preservation and perpetuation of his own power. For

[114] Since Estorino makes so many allusions to religion in his plays, it is quite possible that he is here, at least in part, alluding to the idea of moral (spiritual) as well as physical death. Several references to death in the New Testament of the Bible call attention to the concept of spiritual life and death as opposed to physical life and death. For example, Christ states in Matthew 8:22: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." Christ also says in Matthew 16:25: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." Thus, some who are physically alive may be considered as "dead," whereas others who are physically dead may be considered as "living." Since Estorino is not a Christian in the formal sense, his understanding of "spiritual" has no direct relation to organized religion nor to the idea of the existence of non-physical entities. Rather, for Estorino, moral or ethical principles constitute moral life, whereas the lack thereof entails moral death.

him, the key to accomplishing this is the establishment of order in society. According to El Presidente, order is the supreme goal of the nation, and he himself is the embodiment of this sacred quality: "¡Ciudadanos! Hoy nos reunimos […] para celebrar un nuevo aniversario de la derrota del caótico régimen que asoló nuestra patria. Elminado el caos, reina el orden. ¡El orden soy yo!" (210). However, he himself does not entirely believe his own demagogic speeches: "Es el desorden, el desorden. ¡Ay, cuándo asimilarán mi rigor! […] ¿Creen que puede gobernarse un país en estas condiciones?" (207). The difference between political rhetoric and actual conditions is absolute. Although the past regime was indeed "caótico," the present one is the same, and is doing just as much to destroy the nation.

It would be exceedingly difficult for an unbiased mind to conclude that such references can have no relation to Castro's leadership in the late 1960s, a time during which the Cuban leader resorted to draconian measures in order to preserve his unchallenged authority over a nation that had become increasingly disillusioned with his leadership.[115] In effect, Castro was himself the embodiment of order in a chaotic and unstable society,[116] and the chief method employed for maintaining such order was fear. Those who were punished—whether through

[115] See Reed, pages 90-97, for an enumeration of documented examples of politically-motived persecution against prominent persons in Cuba in the late 1960s. Castro arrested, imprisoned, and probably executed several high-ranking individuals whose political philosophies, such as those of the so-called "old" Communists, he could not accept. Several of those who dared to criticize or question the Cuban leader were grouped together, regardless of whether they had collaborated or not, as members of "microfractions" and tried as conspirators against the nation. Others who displeased Castro were attacked by him in the state press and subsequently arrested. Reed notes: "These cases show that, to avoid censorship, it was not enough to be 'within the Revolution' in the sense of supporting the Revolution, believing in Marxism-Leninism, or belonging to the Communist Party. Something else was required: obedience. Even a hard-line Communist would be called a 'counterrevolutionary' if he was against Castro, because 'the Revolution' was Castro himself" (97).

[116] The economic and social instability in Cuba in the late 1960s undoubtedly owed much to the negative effects of the US economic embargo as well as to "[p]oor sugar harvests in 1967 and 1968" which "increased Cuba's need for Soviet economic aid." There were reasons for political instability as well: "The Soviet Union announced a delay in petroleum shipments in January 1968. The island needed petroleum and this announcement reminded the Cubans of their dependence on the Soviet Union. The presidential election of Richard Nixon in 1968 also led Castro to a closer and more cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union" (Staten 105). Thus, the persecution of "old" Communists only a year or two earlier would seem extremely ironic as Castro began to make urgent efforts to reestablish a favorable relationship with the Soviets.

public censure, arrest, interrogation, imprisonment or execution—were to serve as examples to others who might choose to repeat their actions. Hence, the island's population was meant to fear the wrath of a displeased leadership. By making references to a fear-controlled society, *El tiempo de la plaga* alludes to Cuban reality in the late 1960s: "HOMBRE 4: Nadie se atreve a hablar. Las ciudades viven en silencio" (212). "GENERAL 2: ¿Tienes miedo a decir lo que piensas? MENSAJERO: Nunca, nunca pienso. GENERAL 2: Pero hablas mucho. MENSAJERO: Yo no soy nada, no quiero nada. Quiero vivir tranquilo y que haya orden" (243).

Likewise, a nation of individuals dominated by fear can hardly be thought of as controlling its own destiny. When the generals plan to kill El Presidente, they consider the role that the people will have to play in their military coup: "GENERAL 3: ¿Y qué hacemos? ¿Prenderlo y entregarlo al pueblo? GENERAL 2: No hay que meter al pueblo en esto. Sería el caos" (247). Thus, neither El Presidente nor the military is sincerely interested in giving the people any real say in the government. Similarly, it was evident in Cuba in the late 1960s that the Cuban leadership, despite an ostensible commitment to creating a democratic society,[117] was only willing to allow the general population to have a relatively restricted and largely nominal role in its own administration.[118]

However, from Estorino's point of view, this does not mean that the anonymous individual has no significant connection to the dictatorial figure. Rather, the spirit of tyranny is something that potentially exists within the soul of everyone, yet only finds its fullest expression in the political tyrant. The author shows that El Presidente, rather than being a strange and

[117] I mean that Cubans were expected at that time to vote in elections for local governing bodies such as the CDRs (*Comités de Defensa de la Revolución)*, as well as to participate in regulated discussions and meetings about issues important to the local community.

[118] Although CDRs, which are locally elected and governing organizations, were quite widespread throughout the 1960s (Kapcia 112), their authority has always been limited, and any decision made by a CDR is subject to revision from higher organizational levels, which tend to be filled by appointed rather than elected officials. As might be imagined, Fidel Castro has the final word in all political appointments, and any government decision is ultimately dependent upon his approval.

aberrant phenomenon, is actually an integral part of the very society that is rising up to destroy him. This occurs when El Presidente has a private conversation with his Escolta:

> PRESIDENTE: ¿Pero hay algo que deseas?
>
> ESCOLTA: Sí. […] Quiero llegar a ser como usted. […]
>
> PRESIDENTE: Te verás señalado, te envidiarán, tu integridad estará en peligro. Años enteros de sacrificio se vienen abajo en un santiamén. ESCOLTA: Vale la pena pasar por todo y saber que una vida depende del movimiento de su dedo pulgar. (234)[119]

Hence, the desire for power is concealed within every heart, and for those who crave it, power can only be an end in and of itself. This means that society itself is largely to blame for the ruthless dictator who rules it, since he is an indication of the psychic illness that has infected the nation. For all these reasons, the popular revolt against El Presidente is largely meaningless because it only addresses a symptom of the country's collective malaise and not the disease itself. In the same way, perhaps Estorino means to demonstrate that *Comandante* Castro is not exactly the source of Cuba's problems, but rather their result. In accordance with this interpretation, blame for the plague of carnage cannot be assigned exclusively to El Presidente (Castro). Violently deposing yet another dictator will not lead to a better society, but will rather further the repeating cycle of fear, suffering, and mayhem.

In conclusion, Estorino demonstrates in *El tiempo de la plaga* that dictatorial leadership—a defining characteristic of pre-revolutionary society and a symptom of its

[119] The essential connection between El Presidente and the common people is also demonstrated when the Mensajero and the Coro recall the history of El Presidente's moral downfall, which began when he was an elementary school student and refused to defend an innocent boy from a classroom bully. This memory is followed by a series of anecdotes, all of which show how El Presidente has consistently protected his own selfish interests in opposition to those of the unfortunate or the persecuted. All of these circumstances could have been experienced by any member of society. Thus, the guilt of El Presidente extends to anyone guilty of such acts (253-254).

fundamental ills—has no legitimate place in his vision of *cubanía revolucionaria*. Therefore, according to the author, Castro's regime—nothwithstanding all of its populist rhetoric—still represents a continuation of the regressive tendencies that have historically plagued the nation, and can thus have no valid claim to embody the highest values of *cubanía*. Cuba must recover from a longstanding pestilence of authoritarian government in order to truly realize its dream of being a free and just nation.

La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de don José Jacinto Milanés

Estorino's next work, *Milanés*, akin to its predecessor, also concerns itself with the negative consequences of ruthless leadership. However, as will be shown, *Milanés*, which dramatizes the life of one of Cuba's most celebrated poets, and is arguably one of the author's most important dramas, expresses Estorino's ideas about *cubanía* in a distinctively different way from that of his previous play, and delves into issues not addressed in *El tiempo de la plaga*.

Between 1968 and 1973 (the years in which *El tiempo de la plaga* and *Milanés* were respectively written), Cuban society underwent a number of important transformative changes. For reasons previously noted, the regime found it necessary, in the late 1960s, to develop a closer relationship—both ideologically and in terms of trade—with the Soviet Union. This led to a more "orthodox" revolutionary outlook,[120] and resulted in a greater degree of economic stability on the island. As Staten notes:

[120] Kapcia refers to two different kinds of revolutionary discourse in Cuba: inwardly and outwardly oriented. The first emphasizes the essential Cubaness of the island's revolutionary ideology, and its disregard for certain aspects of Marxist orthodoxy, such as the idea that armed revolution should not be exported to other countries. The second indicates the tendency to look to other nations, in particular the Soviet Union, for models worthy of emulation, but not necessarily of imitation. Kapcia notes that, "by the late 1960s, *cubanía revolucionaria* could be said to be explicitly Marxist in inspiration and direction, and thus capable of accepting both interpretations of the hegemonic intellectual ideology, unconsciously gravitating towards the 'inwardly oriented' perspective, but more consciously attracted by the 'outwardly oriented' discourse, which offered protection, security and stability. Thus, as we shall see, when circumstances in Cuba changed to make stability seem even more attractive, as an alternative to

> Revolutionary idealism, spirit, excitement and fervor eventually gave way to the realities of everyday living. […] After the failure of the radical experiment and the move to closer relations with the Soviet Union, […] Cuba was forced to turn to a more pragmatic strategy of development. From 1970 to the mid-1980s, the Cuban revolution moved to adopt a more institutionalized model of socialism somewhat closer to that in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Yet, it was clear that Cuba under Castro could never imitate this model. […] Castro now emphasized that workers must have material incentives to improve production in addition to the moral, idealistic and revolutionary incentives that had characterized the radical experiment. (107-108)

This move was no doubt inspired by the failure of the highly-anticipated 10-million-ton sugar harvest (which was supposed to have occurred primarily as a result of dedicated revolutionary effort unsupported by material motives), for which Castro accepted personal responsibility on July 26, 1970 (Staten 108). All of these changes promoted the further institutionalization of the revolution on the island, and led, in comparison to the preceding decade, to a relatively more stable time in Cuban government and society.

Nonetheless, the early 1970s were not without serious problems and concerns. Despite the comparative economic wellbeing of that decade, it was a time of unequalled political repression. Roger Reed refers to the years between 1968 and 1976 as "the dark age" (99).[121] The regime's intolerance and brutality against dissident intellectuals was put on shocking display in

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exhausting radicalism, there was a natural willingness to shift toward the alternate pole of Marxist discourse" (140). In other words, by the 1960s, Cuba's revolutionary discourse was becoming more outwardly oriented because of the promised benefits of a closer relationship with the Soviet Union. Staten observes: "The death of Guevara in Bolivia in 1967 ended Castro's dream of Cuban-led revolutions throughout Latin America. The Soviet Union had opposed Cuba's revolutionary policies in Latin America and this event removed a major area of disagreement between them" (105).

[121] Among many Cuban intellectuals, the popular expression for those years is the *quinquenio gris*, and refers to the period 1971-1976. The *decenio negro* signifies the years 1971-1982.

January 1971, when writer Herberto Padilla once again found himself in trouble with the authorities, this time for giving a public recital from an unpublished book, *Provocaciones,* in which he "spoke of disillusionment with Marxism-Leninism and the imprisonment of poets, […] referred to homosexual rape and homosexual prostitution, and he portrayed himself going to bed with a woman instead of paying attention to revolutionary slogans posted all over the city." Padilla was also working on a novel titled *En mi jardín pastan los héroes,* which "was a swipe at Cuba's cult of revolutionary heroes, including Castro himself" (Reed 111-112). Padilla and his wife were arrested on March 20, 1971. He was "told that he had to write a confession detailing all his 'activities with the enemy,'" then instructed to "memorize his letter of self criticism and recite it at an UNEAC[122] assembly." After undergoing 38 days of extreme physical, psychological and emotional pressure, he was released on April 27, 1971. Just hours after his release, he "made a pathetic self-criticism" in which he denounced himself and other prominent intellectuals, including his wife. Four writers that he had named then arose "and made their own self-criticisms." The international intellectual community, which clearly saw the so-called self-criticisms for what they really were, reacted with outrage at this persecution against a fellow artist. Although the Padilla case "hurt the Cuban Revolution's reputation abroad, it was at home a stunning victory for Castro. Padilla himself was neutralized, and all other non-conformist Cuban intellectuals were terrorized. The lesson was clear: if they wrote or said anything critical of the government, they too could be arrested" (Reed 115-122). Thus, it is little wonder that Estorino chose not to submit his script for *El tiempo de la plaga* during those difficult years.

From 1971 until 1980, many writers who had run afoul of the Cuban authorities found themselves either blacklisted (especially if they had made so-called self-criticisms) or simply

[122] UNEAC stands for *Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba.*

marginalized (for other kinds of contestatory actions)[123] (Reed 123-130). As mentioned earlier, Estorino himself was undoubtedly marginalized during these years as a consequence of the premiere of the strongly subversive play *Los mangos de Caín* in 1965.[124] Like many other Cuban writers, he would not be "rehabilitated" until after "years of silence" (Reed 123).

In 1972, the government took particularly harsh measures against many Cubans involved in theater. Several actors who were deemed to lack the necessary "moral and ideological qualifications," were summarily dismissed from their jobs and told to seek employment elsewhere. Also, two theater directors were fired for purely ideological reasons. (Reed 131). As a consequence, several Cubans participated in a struggle to overturn the dismissals, and they were ultimately successful. However, the government abolished the Court of Constitutional and Social Guarantees in June of 1973, which precluded the possibility of overruling such government decrees in the future (Reed 134). This further strengthened the institutionalization of censorship in Cuba, which was officially inaugurated during the First National Congress on Education and Culture on April 30, 1971. At this event, a declaration was issued that "essentially codified Castro's Words to the Intelectuals […] Castro made it clear that an unambiguous standard of political utilitarianism would be used to judge all literary production" (Reed 135). Thus, it is hardly surprising that Estorino would refer to those years as "los años jodidos."

Aside from the repressive actions taken against dissident intellectuals in the early 1970s in Cuba, there were other subjects of contemporary concern which would be reflected in the Nineteenth-Century dramatic universe of *Milanés*. One of these is the issue of race, or more

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[123] Many writers must have also practiced self-censorship in order to avoid clashes with the Cuban authorities.
[124] At some undetermined moment in the 1970s, Estorino himself became aware that he had been officially blacklisted: "Una vez viajamos a Matahambre a hacer unas funciones de *La discreta enamorada*. Allí nos encontramos con un director, […] de pronto un día recibió una comunicación en la cual había una lista de autores que él no podía montar. En esa lista junto a nombres como Ionesco y Pinter estaba el mío. Así que era algo que me llenó de alegría, estar en esa lista con nombres tan famosos, aunque de todas maneras durante algún tiempo no escribí ninguna obra" ("El dramaturgo" 8).

specifically, the matter of Afro-Cuban racial identity. Although the revolutionary regime had, from its beginning, openly championed the rights of Afro-Cubans,[125] and even though blacks had experienced notable improvements with regard to employment, health care, and education, it was nonetheless plainly evident in 1973 that full equality had yet to be attained with the white sectors[126] of the population. Cuba has a long history of mistreatment of its blacks, most of whom were enslaved for centuries, and all of whom were widely regarded as second-class citizens after slavery was officially abolished on the island in 1886. Regardless of the revolution, traditional attitudes towards blacks have been slow to change. However, the Cuban government has only recently begun to officially acknowledge that, in spite of the many successes of a new socialist society, racial discrimination has continued to be a serious problem on the island. Evenson notes:

> There is a paucity of literature on race, race relations and racial discrimination in Cuba, both pre- and post-revolution. Nor are there recent published studies which measure the depth of racial cleavage or the progress towards equality that has actually been achieved as a result of the revolution. Only since the mid-1990s have Cuban researchers and institutions begun to pay significant attention to these issues.[127] […] What can be stated unequivocally, however, is that the revolution did not merely pay lip service to the goal of racial equality as previous

[125] Fidel Castro made the following speech on March 22, 1959: "One of the battles we must prioritize more and more every day […] is the battle to end racial discrimination at the work place […] There are two types of racial discrimination: One is the discrimination in recreational centers or cultural centers; the other, which is the worst and the first one we must fight, is racial discrimination in jobs" ("Discurso del 22 de marzo de 1959" 24-27). Translation to English by Debra Evenson, *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba*, page 126.

[126] Since Cuba is a racially mixed society, the terms "white" and "black" are rather arbitrary. For the purposes of this study, one might think of these concepts as extreme poles. Between these two extremes one would find those individuals of "mixed" racial origin. In accordance with traditional prejudices, "mixed" individuals are judged on their relative degree of blackness or whiteness, so that the lighter one's skin color, the most social prestige and benefits one might enjoy. Unsurprisingly, the highest positions in Cuban society, whether before or after the revolution, have tended to be occupied by whites, whereas the lowest positions have commonly been taken by blacks.

[127] Evenson refers to the journal *Temas*, No. 7, July-Sept. 1996 "which contains a number of articles on race and race relations in Cuba" (123).

> governments had done. The socialist government immediately set about to dismantle institutional racism and actively pursued a policy of racial equality. For a variety of reasons, however, it has not been able to eradicate the vestiges of historical racial stereotypes and bias. (123)

Nonetheless, through *Milanés*, Estorino intends to do more than simply remind Cubans of the terrible past injustices against blacks, and of the need to continue to address racial prejudice in contemporary national society. Rather, his intention is also—and principally—to make associations between the suffering and injustices experienced by Nineteenth-Century blacks and abolitionists, and those endured by political dissidents in revolutionary Cuba. The persecution and killings unleashed against slaves and their supporters in Milanés's time, can only elicit the condemnation of the Castro regime, since such heinous actions were obviously taken with the intent of preserving the elite *status quo* and of furthering a system of undisguised economic exploitation. However, when such brutality and slaughter occur under Castro's leadership, it is presumably—according to that same leadership—justifiable. Thus, Estorino invites the spectator to reflect upon this fundamental contradiction. If torture and execution were inexcusable in the past, how can they be acceptable today?

The gross unfairness and cruelty of nineteenth-century Cuba is witnessed from the perspective of the reknowned poet don José Jacinto Milanés, whose very "consciousness" as a dramatic character is manifestly[128] guided by Estorino himself. Hence, the Twentieth-Century dramatist and the Nineteenth-Century poet, both of whom are natives of Matanzas province and devoted lovers of the same, fuse together to create an entirely new and original (yet simultaneously historic) literary entity. The author explains that *Milanés*, rather than simply

[128] In the play, Milanés the character refers to the existence of the author who has given him words to speak. More will be mentioned later about this type of contextualization in the work.

referring to a distant past, has something to say about the time period during which it was written: "[B]usco […] datos sobre Milanés. Descubro algo que necesito decir y tiene que ver con el momento que estoy viviendo: la relación entre el intelectual y la política. […] Entonces no es buscar la intertextualidad por la intertextualidad, sino que eso tiene un sentido para lo que estoy escribiendo" ("El dramaturgo" 12). Therefore, the play's investigation of the relationship between the intellectual and politics in a previous century, simultaneously and inevitably sheds light upon the same relationship in early 1970s Cuba. Several literary critics have recognized this. For example, Martínez Tabares notes:

> El recuento no persigue un propósito historicista, sino que, por el contrario, está guiado por una clara voluntad de actualización. Personalidades políticas y literarias reales de la época se muestran a través de un prisma cuestionador de actitudes contradictorias, y descubren un mosaico multifacético de una etapa esencial en el desarrollo de la nacionalidad cubana. ("La dolorosa" 351)

In similar fashion, Cancio Isla writes: "El amor a la ciudad y la patria, el ideal libertario, la dignidad inflexible, el significado del hecho artístico, el sentimiento de decepción y desasosiego, la soledad y hasta la vida íntima, adquieren una connotación sígnica que supera todo reduccionismo epocal y se comunica activamente con el presente" ("Abelardo" 23). Likewise, Montes-Huidobro observes: "Las correlaciones con la realidad histórica cubana contemporánea son tan marcadas, que casi todo comentario resulta superfluo" ("El discurso" 256). Finally, Febles states: "Se crea […] una figura insólita, un Milanés peregrino que contradice el retrato convencional. La estampa excéntrica en el sentido romántico del término deviene ex-céntrica en su valor contemporáneo de marginalidad, de ente en conflicto con la ideología dominante"

(92).[129] Also, *Milanés*, besides constituting an investigation of the life and work of one of Cuba's most important writers, and in addition to drawing relevant comparisons between Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century realities, explores the essential qualities of the national character as it was being formed and developed in the celebrated poet's era. Febles affirms: "Habiéndose armado de una sólida base documental, Estorino dialoga con esa textología que ha configurado la imagen oficial del poeta tanto para urdir un retrato inusitado como para hurgar en el origen y el desarrollo de la identidad patria" (79-80). Thus, by examining the essential qualities of *cubanía*, or national identity, in the Nineteenth Century, Estorino invites the reader or spectator to reflect, by means of comparison, upon the contemporary state of *cubanía revolucionaria*.

Perhaps with the exception of *Los mangos de Caín*, more critical commentary has been written about *Milanés* than any another one of Estorino's works. Since *Los vagos rumores* (1992) is a *refundición* of *Milanés*, one should also take into account all reviews written about the former when considering the latter. However, I will limit myself here to only mentioning articles written exclusively about *Milanés*. In "Teatro de la memoria trunca," Rosa Ileana Boudet provides important information about the history of the play itself (in particular, its initial rejection by the authorities and its subsequent revival), and traces its decisive impact upon later works by Estorino. "La dolorosa búsqueda de los recuerdos" by Vivian Martínez Tabares, offers a relatively brief but penetrating analysis of the historical, ideological, and technical aspects of *Milanés*. Matías Montes-Huidobro contexualizes *Milanés* within contemporary Cuban theater,

[129] Curiously, Salvador Arias, writing in Cuba in 1984, appears to deny the possibility of any "voluntad de actualización" in *Milanés*. However, if one reads between the lines, it appears that, while avoiding censorship, Arias is actually confirming the opposite of what he has written: "[E]sta obra se centra en la reconstrucción histórica de un personaje y una época, ubicados en la primera mitad del siglo XIX cubano. No parece tratarse de la utilización de éstos como pretexto para planteamientos actuales, sino de la indagación acuciosa en mometos importantes del desarrollo de nuestra nacionalidad. Pues apenas transcurrido siglo y medio de aquellos acontecimientos, hoy se nos presentan tan llenos de dramáticas contradicciones que nos cuesta trabajo aceptar que sean antecedentes no tan lejanos de nuestra realidad actual" (Arias, "Prólogo" 17). The last sentence sounds particularly ironic, perhaps even sarcastic.

analyzes the structural, conceptual, technical, and intertextual aspects of the work, and considers the play's subversive content. In "Recontextualización poemática en *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de don José Jacinto Milanés*," Jorge Febles compares the original texts by Milanés with the ones inserted into the play, and discovers that Estorino has made significant alterations and revisions to them. Febles explains the ideological significance of these changes.[130] Finally, one should consult Abilio Estevez's critique of the first public presentation of *Milanés* in 1986. The title is: "Una impresión oscurecida por la metáfora." Estevez's review calls attention to the many technical difficulties involved in staging such an ambitious production, which includes more than fifty actors and a huge number of stage props and costumes.

According to published accounts, Estorino seems to have had every expectation of staging *Milanés* in 1973. Rehearsals for the play had been well underway when it was suddenly decided that the work's premiere was to be shelved indefinitely. Estorino, interviewed by Boudet, describes what happened:

> Con la obra casi montada, se invitó al público a asistir y aquellos ensayos eran casi funciones, un *work in progress*. Cuando el teatro estuvo listo nos trasladamos al escenario con el vestuario y la escenografía realizados, pero no había forma de montar en un escenario a la italiana lo que se había ensayado en un espacio abierto y sin fronteras. […] [N]o se acordó nunca más de mi *Milanés* porque

[130] Febles notes: "[L]os versos [de *Milanés*] quedan desvirtuados por su recontextualización y por el tono circundante. (83) Again, he writes: "Al redactar un texto propio en base a fragmentos buscados con pericia detectivesca, Estorino cuestiona implícitamente el credo decimonónico de que se hizo eco Milanés y que postulaba al 'autor' como divinidad capaz de hacer obra original" (91). With regard to the metatheatrical performance of Milanés's *El conde Alarcos* within Estorino's play, Febles observes: "[L]a índole historiográfica de la pieza se manifiesta en pugna con su ficcionalidad teatral. […] Lo metapoético, por lo tanto, está en función de sustanciar lo metahistórico" (86). On pages 90 and 91 of Febles's study, one can find an enumeration of the various changes made to inserted portions of Milanés's work in Estorino's play.

> consideraba que bastaba con el público que la había visto en los ensayos. ("Teatro" 41)

Although none can deny that *Milanés* is a technically daunting work, it seems unlikely that this was the only reason for cancelling the premiere. For one, the Cuban cultural authorities had certainly not forgotten the scandal that had accompanied the opening of *Los mangos de Caín* eight years earlier. Secondly, *Milanés* features content that would have offended orthodox political sensibilities in 1973.[131] Finally, Estorino's sexuality[132] was unquestionably at odds with a regime that considered alternative forms of sexual conduct "not just deviant behavior but against socialist morality and linked with counter-revolutionary activities" (Evenson 186). Boudet alludes to these issues, as well as to the evident conflict between Estorino and Vicente Revuelta, who was supposed to have directed the play:

> [E]n un libro inédito de Lailí Pérez Negrín sobre Vicente Revuelta, leí que hubo discrepancias entre Revuelta y Estorino. Como intuí, la brillantez, la absoluta transparencia y el llamado de Estorino por respetar la diferencia, la "mancha" y la otredad del poeta del XIX no sólo impugnaban la política teatral del momento, signado por la fobia homosexual y el forcejeo por imponer un teatro socialista al estilo oficial, sino que hubo otros elementos interpuestos en el camino. (Boudet, "Teatro" 41)[133]

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[131] Arias notes: "Uno de los aspectos del personaje que el autor aborda con cierto atrevimiento es su compleja vida sexual. Atrevimiento relativo, pero que puede chocar a algunos, dado que se trata de una figura ya 'oficializada' en los textos de nuestra historia literaria ("Prólogo" 19). Other matters, which would have offended Cuban authorities, will be addressed further ahead.

[132] Estorino recalls: "Mi teatro había estado prohibido durante un tiempo por la sexualidad, no la de Milanés sino la mía" (quoted in Boudet, "Teatro" 43).

[133] *Milanés* was also denied publication when it was first submitted. Estorino, in an interview with Boudet, explains what happened: "Sufrió la censura cuando quise publicarla, en ese momento Magaly Muguercia opinó que era demasiado sicologista, supongo que eso quería decir que no hacía énfasis en lo social" (Boudet, "Teatro" 43).

However, it was not Estorino, but rather the Cuban public, who had the most to lose from the postponement—until 1986—of the play's initial presentation. Although exceedingly long and at times overly wordy (a problem that the author would later remedy with the considerably shorter *Los vagos rumores*), *Milanés* is "una obra de singular coherencia" (Martínez Tabares, "La dolorosa" 348), and succeeds on many levels. In fact, there are so many critical angles from which to approach the work (whether in terms of dramatic technique, ideological content, intertextuality, historical analysis, etc.), that only an extensive and thorough study of the play—apparently yet to be written—could possibly do justice to every important aspect of it. Hence, this study, in conformity with its own established parameters, will simply focus on Estorino's vision of *cubanía* and his use of historical context in *Milanés*.

In one sense, *Milanés* is a play about the famous *poeta matancero*, but in another, it is a work about Cuba itself. More exactly, Estorino shows how the writing and personal life of Milanés were inextricably linked to the historical reality in which the poet wrote and lived. Although Milanés is at the center of the drama, he himself is not the drama's center. Rather, the island and its people—and hence the national identity—are the primary focus of the author's investigation. Milanés, as the revered national poet, "deviene hasta cierto punto en antihéroe, figura en todo sentido paradójica," as a consequence of Estorino's "afán [de] desmitificar o desacralizar tanto al poeta como a su palabra para que el lector-espectador cuestione no sólo la historia oficial sino la propia biografía de Milanés" (Febles 81). This Brechtian distancing serves to strip away the traditional, romantic image of the poet as a "ser enfrentado con su tiempo, con la circunstancia política, social y económica de la Isla, con su propia psicología amatoria" (Febles 79-80), and allows the reader or spectator to see him more as a suffering and imperfect human being who is just as deeply and tragically affected as anyone else by the injustice,

prejudice, corruption, misery, and oppression that characterized Nineteenth-Century Cuba. So, instead of being the play's focus, Milanés, whom Estorino transforms into a fully human entity, is rather the lens through which a bygone age and culture is scrutinized. Consequently, in this particular context, the desecration of Milanés's traditional image, assists the reader or spectator to distance herself from customary ways of looking at the nation's past. In other words, the humanization of the poet implies the humanization of the island's history.[134] Cancio Isla alludes to this in his summary of Estorino's representation of Milanés:

> La pretensión de Estorino no es construir un drama histórico acomodando al discurso teatral la biografía y la lírica de Milanés, sino indagar las motivaciones del hombre en la búsqueda de verdades esenciales. Estorino se vale de una minuciosa investigación, pero evita encerrarse en la objetividad de los datos o en la referencia "fotográfica" de la época. Su mirada tiene mucho de testimonio personal, pues el autor no esconde que la escribió pensando en cómo se hubiera comportado su familia ante una situación similar. La historicidad del texto es más perceptible como experiencia vivencial, anímica, introspectiva. ("Abelardo" 22-23)

As Cancio Isla notes, the author wrote the play while puposely reflecting upon contemporary realitites ("la escribió pensando en cómo se hubiera comportado su familia ante una situación

[134] Febles explains the significance of Estorino's representation of Milanés: "El dramaturgo matancero no persigue el objetivo de burlarse de su personaje ni mucho menos de su obra poética. Su afán consiste en desmitificar o desacralizar tanto al poeta como a su palabra para que el lector-espectador cuestione no sólo la historia oficial sino la propia biografía de Milanés" (81). Similarly, Febles notes: "Al poetizar la biografía del poeta matancero José Jacinto Milanés […] Estorino asume una visión cuestionadora postmoderna por medio de la cual el héroe deviene hasta cierto punto antihéroe, figura en todo sentido paradójica. Los biógrafos han solido representar a Milanés como ser enfrentado con su tiempo, con la circunstancia política, social y económica de la Isla, con su propia psicología amatoria. […] Habiéndose armado de una sólida base documental, Estorino dialoga con esa textología que ha configurado la imagen oficial del poeta tanto para urdir un retrato inusitado como para hurgar en el origen y el desarrollo de la identidad patria" (Febles 79-80).

similar"). Therefore, as previously mentioned, *Milanés*, despite its Nineteenth-Century setting, has plenty to say about Cuba in the 1970s. In the following pages, this will be demonstrated through a selective analysis of the play's content.

It is difficult to say whether *Milanés* is a one-act or a seven-act play. It is a one-act drama insofar as there is no interruption in the stage action from beginning until end. However, Estorino has divided the work into seven divisions, each of which pertains to a general line of dramatic action. Still, these divisions seamlessly blend into one another, and the uninformed spectator could hardly be expected to notice the fundamental transition points. Nevertheless, such divisions are significant, since they separate the life of the poet into six distinct time periods (the first division serves as a prologue to the investigation of Milanés's life). As is common to many biographical dramas, *Milanés* does not exactly employ a classic line of dramatic action characterized by development, climax and resolution. Rather, the key events of the poet's life—presented in accordance with the aforementioned divisions—are used to structure the unfolding of the story.

Briefly, the scene divisions are as follows. PRÓLOGO (184-190): Milanés and Mendigo appear. They inform the audience that they have only a phantasmal existence. Mendigo assists the poet to begin an investigation of the latter's past. LA FAMILIA (191-205): Milanés is presented as child and his other family members are introduced. EL VIAJE (205-211): The poet accepts a menial job in La Habana. Disillusioned with the city, he longs to return home to Matanzas. MATANZAS (211-225): After returning to Matanzas, Milanés begins to associate with the important writers of his day. TERTULIA (225-248): The poet and his fellow writers heatedly debate their ideas about the writer's proper role in national society, and become actively involved in the abolitionist cause. EL AMOR (248-262): Milanés falls in love with his fourteen-

year-old cousin, Isa, but is rejected by her wealthy father, who has a low opinion of his destitute nephew. A slave rebellion is planned then brutally crushed by the authorities as the poet goes insane. DELIRIO (262-283): Milanés meets the spirit of the dead mulatto poet Plácido. Slaves are interrogated, tortured, and killed. The poet is beaten and cross-examined by a slave in a highly surrealistic scene. Milanés converses with the writer del Monte, whom he accuses of hypocrisy. The poet dies and is remembered by his sister and brother, Carlota and Federico.

The play's prologue begins with an empty stage. Estorino specifies that the stage will gradually be filled up with props, each of which is to remain there for the duration of the play. The actors should have "*cierto romántico aspecto fantasmal*," and "[*t*]*odo debe parecer como cubierto de polvo y telarañas*" (184). Mendigo, the personification of a nightmarish image from one of Milanés's poems (188-189), approaches the coffin of his creator and leads him out of it. Milanés reveals to Mendigo that he is able to hear bells and smell flowers. The former then recites one of his own poems. However, Mendigo reminds him that he no longer has an independent existence:

> MENDIGO: ¿Quién estará recordando esos versos?
>
> MILANÉS: Yo los recuerdo.
>
> MENDIGO: *(Suelta una carcajada.)* No recuerdas ni versos, ni flores, ni campanas, ni sollozos. Nada.
>
> MILANÉS: Escucha: es la Mayor, la oigo.
>
> MENDIGO: Sí, alguien la oye. Alguien recuerda que tú dijiste una vez que ibas por las tardes al Yumurí. […] Debe de ser Federico quien recuerda los versos. (186)
>
> MILANÉS: ¿Por qué estás conmigo?

> MENDIGO: Alguien piensa que debo acompañarte. (189)

In this way, Estorino quickly establishes that the characters are simply emanations from the mind of a living person, presumably that of the author himself. As such, they dwell in a dimension where "[n]ada nuevo puede suceder," and where they can only "[r]ecordar y repetir, nada más" (187).

However, this does not mean that the audience is to be presented with a completely standard and familiar version of the life of the poet. When Mendigo reminds Milanés of the success of the latter's play, *El conde Alarcos*, the poet flatly contradicts him: "No hubo ningún éxito" (187). This is to be the first of many instances in which the official version of Milanés's life is called into question. Therefore, although the history of the poet remains unchanged, the way in which the audience interprets that history is altered to a significant extent. As mentioned earlier, Estorino challenges the prevailing notions about Milanés for the purpose of de-romanticizing and humanizing the latter's image.

Mendigo promises that everyone from Milanés's past will soon appear, but the poet only wants to see his sister Carlota, and tells Mendigo to go away. Suddenly, Milanés (and presumably also the audience) is shocked by the abrupt appearance of a black man's head impaled upon a stake: "*Un actor del cortejo se acerca con una estaca en cuyo extremo está clavada la cabeza de un negro. Da vueltas alrededor de Milanés. Los otros personjes del cortejo restallan látigos. El actor clava la estaca junto a él* […] *Milanés abre los ojos y al ver la cabeza grita: '¡Sálvame!'"* (189). Milanés tries to make sense of this extremely disturbing memory, and Mendigo offers advice:

> MILANÉS: […] ¡Qué espanto! ¿Y ésos son mis recuerdos? […] Quisiera encontrarle un sentido a esos recuerdos.

> MENDIGO: Búscalo. Si alguien recuerda otros momentos y los aprovechamos puede que todo cobre una significación. Yo sólo digo las palabras que otros ponen en mi boca. Tú sólo recordarás lo que otros recuerdan de ti. Pero la historia puede hacerse de distintas maneras y hay tantas historias como recuerdos […]. Todo sirve para buscarle un sentido. Y tú debes encontrarlo. (189-190)

Immediately following this dialogue, Milanés begins in earnest his exploration of his past. Hence, the unexpected manifestation of the severed black head, for which Milanés feels compelled to "encontrarle un sentido," serves to establish the ideological focus for the remainder of the play. In other words, all that is remembered by the poet, therefore every significant aspect of his personal and public life, must be considered in its relation to the slaughter perpetrated against the black inhabitants of the island in the Nineteenth Century. Likewise, it is not just Milanés the fictional character, but also Estorino himself, as well as the reader or spectator, who must realize that: "Todo sirve para buscarle un sentido. Y tú debes encontrarlo" (190). That is to say, the play's purpose is to help the reader or spectator to actively consider the signficance of Milanés's work and life in relation to the brutal atrocities being inflicted upon Cuban slaves during the poet's era. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the reader or spectator should reflect upon what *Milanés* has to say about Cuba in the early 1970s.

At the play's beginning, blacks first appear—and continue to appear throughout the play—as the stagehands who bring in props. As the drama progresses, the brief but significant intervals during which blacks are onstage, create an ominous kind of foreshadowing.[135] After the aforementioned incident with the staked head, "*aparece un grupo de esclavos atados a un cepo*"

[135] "Los esclavos no sólo están siempre en el escenario, enferman de cólera, cargan canastas, pregonan, bailan, venden en los mercados, sufren en los barracones, el cepo o los latigazos, sino que marcan con su presencia el gran debate moral entre la cultura colonizada y la finalidad de la poesía. […] Nunca antes la esclavitud con su rigurosa trama (hechos reales y personajes históricos) había sido teatralizada con tanta fuerza a través de un destino que rebasa el color de la piel" (Boudet, "Teatro" 42).

(194). Not long afterwards, "[*s*]*obre una tarima venden una negra;* […] *el vendedor muestra los senos de la negra; los jóvenes le levantan la falda y se alejan entre carcajadas*" (206). A few pages later, Josefa remarks: "Yo profetizo: en esta ciudad [Matanzas] se cometerá la mayor matanza de negros en nuestra historia. Los perseguirán como fieras, los atarán a una escalera y los azotarán hasta desangrarlos" (212-213). Finally, in a word association game between Milanés and Mendigo, the two characters refer to the impending carnage: "MENDIGO: Látigo. MILANÉS: Negro. MENDIGO: Escalera. MILANÉS: Látigo" (227). Nineteenth-Century blacks are shown living under a virulently racist social order, according to which they are assigned the worst jobs (204), are prostituted and sold as slaves (207), and are hypocritically thought to be obsessed about having sex with white women (240). Their ownership—and thus their lives—are sometimes decided upon in games of chance (222-224). Their lives are filled with relentless and backbreaking labor, and their foremen—also subjugated blacks, but falsely convinced of their own superiority—whip and curse their fellow slaves (233). By representing these unjust conditions, Estorino justifies the planned rebellion by the slaves, as well as the involvement of Milanés and his fellow intellectuals in the abolitionist cause.

The poet's discussions and debates with his fellow writers, serve to outline the contradictions existing between differing ideas about the artist's place in the larger world. Although set in a distant era, the concerns of Milanés and his companions are entirely relevant to those of the writer living in Cuba in the early 1970s. When Estorino directly quotes Milanés with regard to the latter's views on the playwright's proper role in society, it is as if the former were speaking directly to every Cuban dramatist living in 1973: "El drama no sólo debe pintar el exterior del hombre sino también su interior. Y entre nosotros debe expresar una deducción moral que nos saque de la impasibilidad en que vivimos" (228). Palma responds to these words

by saying: “No podemos tener teatro: somos un pueblo sin historia” (228). The mere existence of *Milanés* as an historical play proves the falsity of Palma’s assertion, and thus lends credence to the poet’s statement.

Other observations about the significance of the writer to Cuban society in the Nineteenth Century, are equally applicable to the island’s situation in the early 1970s, which, as I have demonstrated, was a time when the government showed little tolerance for literature that did not blindly serve the dominant interests of the revolution.[136] For example, in *Milanés*, literature is shown to be a noble calling and profession, despite the fact that society as a whole may not recognize the real value of good writing (201).[137] Also, even though intellectually stimulating literature may not be as socially or materially rewarding as boilerplate writing created for mass consumption, it is ultimately more worthwhile (217).[138] Finally, the impact of literature upon society is undeniable, therefore it is an undertaking of great importance and responsibility: “MILANÉS: Yo estoy persuadido de que las letras ejercen una influencia: bien para mejorar o bien para pervertir” (230). Hence, the writer’s moral obligation to participate in the abolitionist cause cannot be denied. Likewise, the artist is equally and morally bound to speak out against injustice—and, significantly, in favor of freedom—in Cuba in the early 1970s.

The parallels between the role of the artist in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Cuba, are not the only ones in the play worthy of attention. In particular, the mistreatment of blacks in Milanés’s time calls to mind the labor situation of the 1960s and 1970s, whether in UMAP

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[136] As might be expected, literature written simply as propaganda for the Castro regime has tended to be of doubtful literary quality.

[137] The poet’s father, when informed of Milanés’s desire to be a poet, responds: “Sucede que el hombre vive también del pan. […] La poesía no llena la barriga” (201). Likewise, the majority of Cubans in the early 1970s, many of whom had only recently learned to read, and all of whom had been bombarded with literature of questionable value, were unlikely to have had a very high estimation of writing as a profession.

[138] Palma, refuting the idea that the writer must dedicate himself to matters of substance, exclaims: “La seriedad no produce cajas de azúcar ni pipas de ron. Leer mis versos es contemplar el vuelo de un pájaro, sin otras consecuencias” (217). Similarly, many writers in Cuba who have refused to produce the low-quality propagandistic literature demanded by the government, have, like Estorino, found themselves without work.

camps, in microbrigades, in back-breaking cane-cutting assignments, or, in the most general sense, in the entire system of poorly remunerated labor forced upon the population according to the precepts of a so-called "moral economy" under the leadership of Fidel Castro.[139] Thus, at the time *Milanés* was written, Cuba still had "slaves," but they were of every possible skin tone. Although by 1973, the government, as previously noted, had taken steps to somewhat increase material incentives for workers, it was nonetheless evident that there remained abundant cause for dissatisfaction. Unfortunately, as in Milanés's day, one could only express one's discontent at great personal risk.

The vicious backlash against the rebelling slaves calls to mind the repressive measures taken by the Castro government against those who have threatened—or have simply been perceived as threatening—its hegemony. *Milanés* is filled with scenes in which torture and interrogation take place (265-273).[140] Such scenes unavoidably call to mind the forced confessions and names extracted from unfortunate revolutionary-era prisoners who have run afoul of the socialist *status quo*. Although it is true that the context in which such events take place in the play, is decidedly different from that in which they have occurred under Castro's rule, the essential motive behind the imprisonment and abuse of society's so-called subversives

[139] As noted earlier, in the UMAP camps, society's "undesirables" were, for all practical purposes, sentenced to years of hard labor: they were effectively converted into slaves, or perhaps worse than slaves. The microbrigades, begun in the late 1960s, "were an attempt to solve the growing housing shortage by encouraging enterprises to release or second volunteer workers to form 'brigades,' which would […] construct new residential blocks" (Kapcia 198). The classification of microbrigade workers as "volunteers," indicates that such workers receive no material compensation for their labors. Cane-cutting assignments, calling to mind the chief task of millions of Nineteenth-Century slaves, formed part of the so-called "moral economy," based upon "[Ché] Guevara's concepts of subjective conditions and the ideas of voluntarism and revolutionary consciousness." It involved "the application of 'moral,' rather than material, incentives, on the grounds that the use of the latter would ensure the survival of a capitalist mentality and mechanisms" (Kapcia 137).

[140] Estorino can personally relate to the interrogation scenes from the play: "Milanés es matancero como yo, escritor como yo y además todas las escenas de interrogatorios a los negros me recordaban mi experiencia con *Los mangos de Caín* cuando una profesora de la Universidad llevó a sus alumnos a ver la obra y logró que la repudiaran, y un laureado narrador fungió como fiscal en el juicio que tuvo lugar en mi casa, con otros jueces, secretarios y testigos, algunos de los cuales ya no viven en la Isla" (quoted in Boudet, "Teatro" 43).

remains unchanged. Whether in the Nineteenth or Twentieth Century, such atrocities occur for the sake of defending and preserving power, be it economic or political. One particular conversation between El Español, who is the embodiment of established order and vested interests on the island, and El Fiscal, his chief accomplice in defending the ruling class, could—if taken out of context—easily be imagined as having taken place between Fidel Castro and one of his trusted officials:

> EL ESPAÑOL: Hay que lograr el esclarecimiento de esta situación y castigar a los culpables. Que la Comisión Militar se encargue del proceso. Su presidente tiene mano abierta para emplear los medios que estime conveniente. […]
>
> EL FISCAL: […] Como presidente de la Comisión Militar encargada de escalarecer todo lo concerniente a la conspiración, […] declaro: cuando se trata de la seguridad del país y de un delito de Estado, cualquier medio es legal y permitido si de antemano existe la convicción moral de que ha de producir el resultado que se desea y es exigido por el bien general. (267)

Likewise, El Español's extreme paranoia, his insistence upon exercising absolute control over the populace, and his call for invasive surveillance, bring to mind obvious similarities with Fidel Castro. In the following citation, I have italicized words that do not belong to a Twentieth-Century context, and have placed next to them, in brackets, words that might replace the italicized ones in order that revolutionary-era conditions might be imagined:

> EL ESPAÑOL: ¿Quién puede creer que son *tertulias* [reuniones] literarias? Cuevas de conspiradores enemigos de *la España* [Cuba]. ¿A quién reciben allí? […] Y en el fondo no hay más que una sola idea: separatismo. ¿Creéis que vivo con los ojos cerrados? Tengo miles de ojos que vigilan por mí. ¡Ah! *España*

> [Cuba], qué hijos tan ingratos tienes en esta Isla. […] Que no se publique ni una sola palabra ambigua. Ya lo sabéis, ni una sola palabra que pueda poner en peligro el dominio de *la España* [la revolución] sobre esta tierra que nos pertenece. Porque nosotros la pusimos en el mundo y nos hemos sacrificado durante *trescientos* [cien][141] años para hacerla rica, civilizada y *cristiana* [socialista]. (241)

By implicitly comparing Castro with El Español, Estorino demonstrates, in a masterful way, that the Cuban dictator's brutal methods for dealing with the populace amount to a continuation of those employed by Nineteenth-Century colonial rulers. Since Castro's regime is supposed to represent the utter antithesis of imperialistic domination, the dramatist's comparison is extremely ironic. What makes this implied analogy so masterful is the utter impossibility of proving that Estorino intended a comparison between the revolutionary leader and his Spanish counterpart. The historical facts, which are a matter of public record and hence cannot be denied, speak for themselves.

Similarly, the playwright shows that Cuba has a longstanding tradition of writers who find ways to *burlar la censura*. This is evident in a conversation between del Monte and Palma, in which the former tries to convince the latter to make known the injustices suffered by the slaves:

> DEL MONTE: Estas cosas deben ser conocidas. El mundo tiene que enterarse de lo que sucede en la Isla.
>
> PALMA: El lápiz rojo impedirá que se publique una palabra.

[141] The first Cuban war for independence (Ten Years' War) began in 1868. Although the rebels were not officially communists nor socialists, it is common, according to the present-day Cuban revolutionary perspective, to designate 1868 as the beginning of a long struggle to realize the full promise of the nation. Thus, by 1968, one hundred years had passed since the beginning of Cuba's first fight for independence.

DEL MONTE: Encontraremos la forma de divulgarlo. Siga escribiendo así. Siempre hay un juego, una argucia, un traspié para burlar la censura. (235)

Of course, as I have noted, *Milanés* is itself an excellent example of the type of writing to which del Monte refers. It requires little imagination to envision the aforementioned conversation taking place between Estorino and another contestatory Cuban writer of his day.[142] As *Milanés* approaches its end, Estorino reveals, in a series of surrealistic scenes, the full significance and grave responsibility of the subversive writer to national society.

The play's final division (DELIRIO), although not exactly providing a classic resolution for the dramatic action, is nevertheless particularly significant, since it serves to answer the fundamental questions posed by Milanés and Mendigo at the drama's beginning, and those explored throughout the body of the work. It begins with a meeting between Milanés and Plácido, the former's mulatto counterpart in the Nineteenth-Century world of Cuban letters, and now the spirit of a dead man. Milanés had earlier spoken out against Plácido for having written frivolous and unctuous literature. Plácido defends his actions by explaining that he had "ruidos en la barriga y había que llenarla, si no el estruendo cubriría la Isla" (263). Plácido also points out that Milanés, as a white man, had options that were not open to the mulatto writer: "MILANÉS: Vivir con decoro o enloquecer. PLÁCIDO: Tú pertenecías al mundo, era un mundo blanco. […] En ese mundo blanco tú podías elegir. Yo no" (263-264). He also notes that, unlike the white men who had ready access to arms, he can only rely upon his pen: "Mis armas son las palabras. No tengo otras" (272). Although principally treating the perennial matter of race in

[142] Montes-Huidobro alludes to the subversive intent of *Milanés*: "[A]l construir su 'discurso teatral hegemonónico' con el 'discurso subyugado' de Milanés, funciona de una manera sinuosa que acaba por parecer encubridora de un 'mensaje latente' que no se atreve a resultar explícito" ("El discurso" 254). He then adds: "Todo discurso histórico-teatral es sospechoso de una contemporaneidad subversiva, que es un recurso típico del 'discurso subyugado.' La evidencia está en el propio texto poético de Milanés en *El conde Alarcos* (incluido en *La dolorosa historia*), que transferido al siglo XX puede tener la misma función subversiva que tuvo en el siglo XIX" (Ibid. 254-255).

Cuba, the final encounter between Milanés and Plácido, also addresses the moral dilemma of the committed writer living in a totalitarian society, whether of the Nineteenth or Twentieth Century. The playwright demonstrates that the contestatory Cuban man of letters must not only find ways to remain true to his own moral conscience, but he must also do what is necessary to survive: "MILANÉS: Había que ser inflexible, no ceder ante la corrupción. PLÁCIDO: No, no, Milanés, había que vivir. La Isla entera convidaba a vivir" (263). As time has shown, Estorino, still writing in Cuba as of 2006, has proven to be a formidable survivor.

After Plácido's execution has been reenacted for Milanés, Negro 2 appears upon the stage, and begins to interrogate the poet. This surrealistic scene constitutes a symbolic representation of the burden upon Milanés's conscience. It appears that he has been driven mad not just by the failure to consummate his love for his cousin, but also by the agonizing realization that the suffering borne by black supporters of the abolitionist cause, was much greater than for white ones:

> NEGRO 2: ¿Por qué escribiste contra la esclavitud?
>
> MILANÉS: Porque tenía ideas humanistas y no podía soportar la crueldad de unos hombres contra otros.
>
> NEGRO 2: Si no has probado el látigo no sabes lo que es crueldad. MILANÉS: Conozco otra crueldad. Yo había sido humillado.
>
> NEGRO 2: Nosotros también, pero hasta un extremo que tú no eres capaz de imaginar.
>
> MILANÉS: Aquí estoy. Despiértame la imaginación.
>
> *El Negro 2 lo azota.* (275)[143]

[143] This dialogue is immediately followed by several lines from a poem by Milanés, in which he describes Christ's crucifixion. Febles notes that the preceding conversation between Milanés and Negro 2 subversively colors the

Thus, the whipping and interrogation are meant to serve as a compensatory mechanism, operating within Milanés's deluded mind, that helps him to come to terms with the painful understanding that he has escaped torture and execution while others less fortunate have not. Undoubtedly, Estorino also intends to allude to the fact that he, as a subversive Cuban writer who—like Milanés—protests against social injustice and has paid a price for doing so, has nonetheless not experienced the more excruciating sufferings inflicted upon those individuals who have aroused, to its fullest measure, the wrath of Castro's regime. This implied allusion expresses Estorino's solidarity with and respect for such individuals. Likewise, the modern Cuban reader or spectator—although she herself may not be a writer—would, by reading or witnessing the previously noted scene, be led to reflect upon the fate of those who—perhaps unlike herself—have undergone indescribable agonies at the hands of the revolutionary leadership.

In a larger sense, Milanés—and hence, Estorino—not only expresses his solidarity with the victims of the dominant order, but also—and more importantly—with his *patria*. Consequently, the individual Cuban is important, but the collective national reality, or the essential values of *cubanía* itself, demand the undying loyalty and devotion of the committed citizen. This issue is poignantly dealt with in Milanés's final encounter with del Monte. Both men have served the abolitionist cause. However, del Monte, unlike Milanés, abandoned the island in order to escape from the persecution of the authorities. Milanés arraigns his fellow writer for the latter's hypocrisy: "Estoy asqueado. Es muy cómodo incitar a los demás, proponerles un tema, una misión, hablar de sacrificarse por una causa social y después… ¡adiós

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meaning of the aforementioned poem: "Se configura de este modo un episodio ambiguio de índole sádico-masoquista que desacredita la integridad ideológica del poema citado […] se establece un paralelo sorprendente entre el 'Cristo crucificado' que idea Milanés y el bate mulato martirizado después de la Conspiración de la Escalera" (87).

palmas!" (277).[144] If these words are considered outside of their historical context, and are situated within Cuba in the early 1970s, it is evident that they refer to those intellectuals who, despite having expressed their commitment to *la patria* and to the betterment of national society, have opted for exile instead of continuing struggle under totalitarian rule. The writer Montes-Huidobro, who is himself a Cuban exile living in the United States, acknowledges the full ideological implications of the previously noted scene between Milanés and del Monte: "[E]l diálogo que tiene lugar entre Milanés y Domingo del Monte es un mensaje intencional de Estorino hacia aquéllos que lo dejaron solo en medio de la realidad cubana y se despidieron con un "¡adiós palmas!" planteamiento que no se atreve o puede hacer de otro modo" ("El discurso" 256). He also points out that:

> El conflicto entre partir o quedarse, como parte de un acto de responsabilidad histórica y ética, ha sido, desde el siglo pasado a nuestros días, uno de los problemas más intensos de la conciencia cubana. El planteamiento del problema a través del discurso histórico, le permite al texto alcanzar una contemporaneidad en la que la condición subversiva del "discurso subyugado" no destruye la supervivencia del "discurso hegemonónico." (254-255)

Therefore, both Abelardo Estorino and Fidel Castro disagree with those who have fled Cuba, but for different reasons. The latter unconditionally equates voluntary exile with the abject betrayal of the exalted values of *cubanía*, whereas the former can sympathize with the reasons that might make one consider leaving the island, yet cannot condone the actual decision to do so. Likewise,

[144] Febles notes: "[La presencia de Domingo del Monte] tiene el objeto de alumbrar una serie de motivos histórico-políticos con los que la obra dialoga paródicamente. Estos se resuelven en los siguientes: la discriminación racial por parte de las clases ilustradas de la Isla que, no obstante, promovieron ideales abolicionistas; el falso criterio independentista que se quiere detectar en personajes como Del Monte; el exilio como medio de escape para quienes no sienten un verdadero compromiso con su tierra" (88).

from a revolutionary—and thus hegemonic—point of view, the reader or spectator can safely empathize with del Monte's dislike of Cuba's imperialist—and thus necessarily totalitarian—ruling order in the Nineteenth Century, while at the same time condemning the writer's abandonment of his homeland. In this way, the dominant ideological discourse of the revolutionary regime is not ostensibly threatened. Nonetheless, although the "discurso subyugado' no destruye la supervivencia del 'discurso hegemonónico,'" it does indeed call it into question, since, as demonstrated earlier, there are so many obvious similarities between the government of El Español and that of *Comandante* Castro. In any case, both Milanés and Estorino choose to stay on their beloved island, regardless of the tyrannical regime that rules it, and both strive to keep alive the "discurso subyugado" in spite of the "discurso hegemonónico." In a sense, both are like lighted candles for the true values of *cubanía* surrounded by the darkness of the dominant paradigm.

Milanés would mark the end of an era for Estorino, since it is his last play—unless one counts the premiere of *Vagos rumores* in 1992—to present a strong challenge to the revolutionary government. After many years of silence, the playwright would finally find his original work upon the Cuban stage with the premiere of *Ni un sí ni un no* in 1980. It would be the beginning of an eventful decade for the author, during which he would see four new plays represented. Revolutionary government and society were experiencing important changes, and Estorino, as an artist, was undergoing a process of transformation. His new plays would, in many ways, be significantly different from those that he had written before. "Los años jodidos" were coming to a close, and the time for "rehabilitation" was at hand.

CHAPTER FIVE:

1980-1989: Political rehabilitation and artistic growth.[145]

After undergoing so many years of professional difficulties in the second half of the 1960s, and during the entire decade of the 1970s, Abelardo Estorino would experience, in the 1980s, a complete reversal of fortune. During that decade, he would see four of his own original plays represented upon the Cuban stage. One of these, *Morir del cuento*, is regarded by several critics as his greatest work. With the publication and presentation of *Ni un sí ni un no* in 1980, a play which—unlike *Los mangos de Caín*, *El tiempo de la plaga* and *Milanés*—does not call into question the hegemonic political order, Estorino seems to have effectively redeemed himself in the eyes of the national leadership. The controversial premiere of *Los mangos de Caín* in 1965, and the immediate government order forbidding all further representation of that work, likely caused Estorino to be blacklisted as a playwright for a period of no less than fifteen years. Nonetheless, since 1980, the Cuban cultural authorities have appeared willing to forgive the author for his past "transgressions," and have permitted him to publish and represent[146] all of his important original works. It cannot be denied that Estorino has, since 1980, largely refrained from manifesting the "subversive" ideology that characterized plays like *Los mangos de Caín*, *El tiempo de la plaga*, and *Milanés*. The author's political rehabilitation is a direct consequence of

[145] By "political rehabilitation," I simply refer to the relative ease with which Estorino, since 1980, has been able to publish and stage his plays. Since, as established earlier, one's ability to publish and stage drama in Cuba is greatly dependent upon one's reputation among the political leadership, it is clear that Estorino's four published and premiered plays during the 1980s (none of which caused any significant controversy among Cuban officials), testify to his political rehabilitation. The significance of the author's growth as an artist during the 1980s will be discussed further on.

[146] The only possible exception to this might be *El tiempo de la plaga*, which, although first published in Cuba in 1990, has yet to be premiered. I have not been able to ascertain if this is simply because nobody has ventured to stage the work, or because attempts to represent it have been suppressed by Cuban cultural authorities. However, I think it more likely that nobody has offered to take on the production of the play owing to its implicitly contestatory message. Although the Cuban artistic climate since 1980 has been considerably less restricted than it was in the 1960s and 1970s, self-censorship has continued to exist on the island, as will be discussed in greater detail further on in this study.

his decision to address topics less likely to provoke the ire of Cuban officials. Also, an adjustment in cultural conditions on the island resulted in improved circumstances for Estorino as a writer. In the period between 1973 (the year *Milanés* was written and efforts to stage it disallowed) and 1980 (the year *Ni un sí ni un no* premiered), significant changes occurred in national society and government that would lead to a cultural environment relatively more favorable to the author's growth and development as a dramatist. However, in order for Estorino to benefit from the new conditions in the 1980s, he was obliged to scrupulously avoid the kind of contestatory commentary—whether implied or direct—that had defined much of his earlier work. Beginning with *Ni un sí ni un no,* the author evidently chose to abandon his former preoccupation with the abuse of power by government officials, and began to focus more upon the realities of everyday individuals living within a revolutionary context.[147] After fifteen years of silence, Estorino had learned a difficult lesson. He would either have to work within the artistic parameters set by the oppressive regime under which he lived, or he could never prosper as a playwright on the island. It is a testament to his creativity, inventiveness, and skill as a writer that he has been able to do so without seriously compromising either the artistic or the ideological value of his dramatic production.

Cultural conditions on the island in the 1980s were in large measure the end result of what had taken place during the preceding decade. As noted in Chapter Four, the 1970s were characterized by the increasing institutionalization of the Cuban revolution according to the Eastern European design. Also, Castro's regime, seeking the economic and geopolitical stability that could be provided by the Soviet Union, established stronger ties with that country, as well as with the Eastern Bloc in general. Thus, the progressive formalization of Cuba's international

[147] As will be demonstrated, Estorino's new ideological direction, although now avoiding any direct or implicit confrontation with the revolutionary *status quo*, nonetheless continued as before to draw attention to reactionary tendencies existing among the Cuban population.

relations paralleled similar developments on the domestic front. Actually, closer relations with the USSR made it necessary for the national leadership to adhere somewhat more to traditional models of Marxism-Leninism, since the Kremlin expected Castro to make an effort to conform to a more orthodox version of socialism in return for the aid, assistance, and support the Soviet Union provided. Of course, one important aspect of Soviet-style administration is official government regulation of all cultural activity.

One evident result of this strengthening tendency towards standardization was the creation of the Ministry of Culture in 1976, which was hailed by many as a milestone for freedom of expression in Cuba, but in reality increased government control by making the implementation of Cuba's cultural policy more efficient. Although the new institution promised "to establish a running 'dialogue' with writers and artists," who were to be consulted and "drawn into the decision-making process," it was "clear that Cuba's hard-line cultural policy would not be changed"(Reed 144).[148] Three years later, in Article 108 of the 1979 Penal Code, Castro's famous "Words to the Intellectuals" were finally codified into a new law, which "prescribed up to 15 years in prison for anyone who 'incites against the social order, international solidarity or the socialist State, through oral or written propaganda or any other means'" (Reed 143-146). Therefore, despite certain concessions offered to the intellectual community through the formation of the Ministry of Culture in 1976, it was clear that the Cuban government actually tightened control over artistic production at that time:

> [T]he repression of non-conformist intellectuals continued and even accelerated. Furthermore, more writers and artists made a pact with the Devil. Imitating their

[148] Reed notes that the regime had its reasons for making certain concessions to Cuba's artistic community: "By throwing a few bones at hostile intellectuals, the government hoped to pacify them. Writers and artists had suffered under a Great Purge that had lasted eight years, and their resentment of the cultural commissars was palpable. The authorities were simply trying to defuse a situation that threatened to blow up in their faces" (144).

> brethren in other communist countries, they entered into a kind of "partnership" with the government. In return for more privileges, they accepted censorship and agreed tacitly to "police" themselves. They had entered a "velvet prison." […] [T]hose who dared to venture beyond the invisible bars of the velvet prison were likely to end up in *another* prison, this one made of cold steel and concrete. (Reed 143)

In any case, at some point prior to 1980, Estorino must have realized the futility of continuing to write plays that would either remain unrepresented or lead to his incarceration. He had already said a great deal about what he thought of totalitarian government, so perhaps he concluded that there would be little to gain from continuing to express such views after the enactment of Article 108 of the 1979 Penal Code. Likewise, Castro's regime, whose stability seemed much more uncertain in the 1960s, had firmly and formally established its control over almost every aspect of Cuban society by the 1970s. Thus, by the end of that decade, Cuba's dissident artistic community must have largely realized that artistic protest against their totalitarian government could do little to reform that government, would be largely ineffective for discrediting the regime in the eyes of the general populace, and could only bring hardship upon the artist. Considering all of these factors, it is not surprising that Estorino chose to refocus the ideological content of his dramatic production.

Aside from the ever-tightening government regulation of artistic production, another important cultural development in Cuba during the 1970s, was the passing, in 1975, of the Family Code. This law officially decreed the equality of men and women within the context of Cuban matrimony. In many ways, the enactment of this important law represented the vindication of Estorino's progressive views on relations between the sexes. The author had, prior

to 1980, already manifested such views—whether directly or implicitly—in *El peine y el espejo*, *El robo del cochino*, *Las vacas gordas*, and *La casa vieja*. As previously noted in this study, Castro's government had, from very early on, drawn attention to the transformed role of women in revolutionary society, although at first, there was no firm legal basis to support this ideological initiative. With the implementation of the Family Code, the highest level of official recognition was finally given to women's rights. In many ways, the Family Code represents a sharp break with Cuba's cultural traditions, and reflects the prerogatives of revolutionary society:

> Where the 1975 Family Code diverges most from the past is in its express promotion of equality in the family relationship, a departure compelled both by ideology and practice. The growth of women's participation in the economic and political life of the country after the revolution represented an abrupt change from their established role as housewife and imposed enormous strains on family relations for women who chose to participate. […] At the same time, however, all women continued to be bound by traditional household and child-care responsibilities. […] Since Cuba did not socialize household tasks, the continued feminization of household responsibilities remained a formidable barrier to women's advancement. […] [I]mproved material conditions could not and did not provide an adequate solution. If women were to be fully integrated into productive work as well as leadership roles, family relationships would have to be restructured and family responsibilities shared. The Family Code of 1975 attempted that reordering. […] [T]he Code eliminated features of the past patriarchal model that reinforced the subordination of women. Its major provisions declare the equality of men and women in marriage and the duty of

> both husband and wife to share in household chores and in the raising and support of their children. Equality between husband and wife in marriage became a constant theme in the media, in educational materials and in popular discussion. (Evenson 144-145)

However, it would be naïve to imagine that centuries of *machista* tradition on the island might simply vanish overnight thanks to the establishment of new legislation. Likewise, although the Family Code did indeed clearly indicate a new model and direction for relations between the sexes, the enforcement of its provisions would prove to be highly problematic:

> [O]ld habits die hard. Practices and customs persist that undermine equal sharing of household responsibilities. Women themselves often are accomplices in the perpetuation of sexist customs by not socializing children, particularly male children, into sharing household chores. A number of Cuban observers have pointed out that in many cases, even if the woman resented the unshared burdens of housework, she lacks the will to demand her rights. As a result, even today, woman may decline promotion or public office because they cannot bear more responsibilities. Even women in high positions may not challenge tradition and try to both excel in their career and shoulder all the housework. (Evenson 146)

Ni un sí ni un no

By 1980, five years had passed since the Family Code's establishment, and it was clear that this radical legislation had made a signficant—although not entirely decisive—impact upon realtions between the sexes in Cuba. At any rate, it had evidently become impossible to fully return to traditional models of interaction between genders. Still, it was apparent that the

transition from old, firmly-rooted *machista* patterns of living to a new existential paradigm based upon the equality of the sexes, would be a long, involved, and not uncommonly painful process. It is this very process that is so skillfully and empathetically analyzed in Estorino's *Ni un sí ni un no*, which considers the impact of a constantly changing revolutionary society and of the Family Code upon a hypothetical Cuban couple living on the island in the 1970s.

Although *Ni un sí ni un no* is an unquestionably funny and entertaining play, it is also, in its own right, an invaluable cultural and historical investigation. It is one thing to pore over legal documents, statistics, and academic studies in an effort to find out more about the effect of revolutionary society and the Family Code on Cuban gender relations in the 1970s. It is quite another thing to have lived on the island during that time period, to have witnessed firsthand such social transformation, and to have incorporated one's personal experience—informed by an incisive understanding of government, society, and law—into a work of drama that thoroughly explores the messy, complicated, and not infrequently agonizing process of cultural adaptation that was taking place then. In this sense, *Ni un sí ni un no* is an effective window into the not-so-distant past.

There has been relatively little critical investigation of *Ni un sí ni un no*. Perhaps two of the most extensive critiques of the play can be found in "Prólogo: Machismo, historia y revolución en la obra de Abelardo Estorino" by Salvador Arias (Abelardo 20-26), and *From the House to the Stage* by Camilla Stevens (316-328). Both of these studies give careful consideration to the social and cultural aspects of the work. They also examine the transformation of gender roles as presented in the play. As noted earlier, such transformation implies, in this context, the replacement of traditional models of behavior with newer ones. Although Arias and Stevens investigate some important aspects of historical context in *Ni un sí*

ni un no, and the latter considers Estorino's presentation of *cubanía* in the play, there is still more that can be said with regard to those topics.

Ni un sí ni un no is the first play by Estorino to present dramatic characters as actors. In other words, his characters sometimes act as if they are following a script (whether word-for-word or through guided improvisation), and at other times behave as if they were simply actors talking among themselves in a completely spontaneous and natural way. Thus, in the case of *Ni un sí ni un no*, the audience is purposedly led to believe that it is attending a rehearsal—filled with numerous interruptions—rather than the actual performance of a particular play. However, there is no truly unplanned dialogue in the representation. Hence, Estorino creates the illusion of non-theatrical stage activity, which, when presented in context with acting guided by what is supposedly the true script, serves to affectively distance the audience from the dramatic characters and action. In other words, the audience sees such characters as nothing more than embodiments of abstract—although socially relevant—concepts interpreted by actors, who are assumed to be real individuals that occasionally stop acting and speak with their companions on the stage, and even occasionally allude to the audience. This dramatic technique might be compared to the one used by British playwright Michael Frayn in *Noises Off* (1982), which is a play about a group of actors who stage a play. However, the actors in *Noises Off* never explicitly acknowledge the real audience that is witnessing them, whereas in *Ni un sí ni un no*, they do. Thus, Estorino goes further than Frayn in his efforts to suspend audience disbelief.[149] One might even conclude that the play represented by the actors within *Ni un sí ni un no* is metatheater,

[149] It is common to refer to the audience's implicit acceptance of dramatic action as the "suspension of disbelief." In other words, the audience chooses to forget that it is witnessing actors whose actions are guided by a script, and momentarily chooses to believe that what it sees and hears is "real." A convincing script and quality acting can make it easier for the spectator to do this. Estorino, however, has chosen to facilitate the suspension of disbelief in a more direct manner by creating the illusion of non-acting actors who openly acknowledge the presence of the actual audience.

whereas the supposed non-acting constitutes the play's actual script. If that is the case, then *Ni un sí ni un no* is a play which largely consists of metatheater. Estorino would make similar use of this dramatic technique in three following plays: *Morir del cuento, Que el diablo te acompañe,* and *Las penas saben nadar*.

Ni un sí ni un no, which is an example of both immediate and remote drama,[150] consists of two acts. The first explores the meeting of Él and Ella, a typical young Cuban couple living in the 1970s, and the development of their relationship over the years. The first act ends when Él and Ella's relationship is on the brink of a serious crisis. During the second act, Él and Ella pass through grave difficulties, almost divorce, and are finally reconciled at the play's end. The couple's parents, Padre (father of Él) and Madre (mother of Ella) complicate matters by trying to influence and direct the behavior of their respective children. El Otro and La Otra tempt Él and Ella to end their marriage by holding out the illusory promise of fulfilling their deepest intimate desires. The dramatic action is constantly interrupted when the actors abruptly abandon their roles and discuss the progress and development of the play amongst themselves. These regular disruptions serve to prevent the audience from slipping into a habitual state of suspended disbelief. In this way, the spectator is helped to focus on the social issues instead of the characters. The actors have distinct personalities, which, curiously, closely correspond to the characters they represent.

[150] The play is an example of immediate drama inasmuch as the actors are ostensibly performing before a Cuban audience for the play's premiere in 1980. However, the metatheatrical scenes are historically contextualized within the decade of the 1970s. So, *Ni un sí ni un no* is immediate drama containing metatheatrical scenes which may be categorized as remote drama.

The play actually begins with the actors rehearsing the end of the first act. Él walks into the kitchen reading aloud a Spanish translation of the *Anti-Duhring*[151] and absent-mindedly begins to prepare dinner. He reads:

> "Cuando sometemos al examen del pensamiento la naturaleza o la historia de la humanidad […] o nuestra propia actividad mental, se nos ofrece en primer lugar el cuadro infinito de un tejido de relaciones, de acciones y reacciones en las que nada queda como era…" ¿Cómo era? Era como si hubiéramos nacido el uno para el otro. […] "…nada queda como era, donde estaba, como estaba, donde todo se mueve, se transforma, deviene y pasa." (*Coge un grano de arroz.*) Este macho lo siembro, se hincha, nace una planta, crece, crece, florece, da frutos y muere. (*Arroja granos al piso*.) Este macho crecerá, éste no se transformará, machos desperdiciados […] no tendrán oportunidad de cumplir el proceso dialéctico de la naturaleza. (290)

This monologue aptly summarizes the ideological concerns manifested throughout the drama. By reading from the *Anti-Duhring*, an important socialist text, Él calls attention to the perpetual state of transformation that is meant to characterize revolutionary society. He then contextualizes his marriage within this process, and implicitly expresses his existential frustration by suggesting that he will not have the "oportunidad de cumplir el proceso dialéctico de la naturaleza." Later on in the play, it becomes evident that Él is disappointed by his wife's miscarriage and their childlessness, but by placing the final scene of the first act at the play's beginning, the spectator or reader is enabled to interpret Él's words in another sense. In the new revolutionary Cuban

[151] Volkov describes this book, first published in 1878, in the following terms: "Basing himself upon *Capital*, [Friedrich] Engels analysed new phenomena in capitalist society that were to become clearly evident in the twentieth century. […] In his *Anti-Dühring*, Engels summarises his own and Marx's views on the development of society and presents them in a clear, journalistic style. This major work became the encyclopedia of Marxism, and millions of workers in every country have learned and are learning from it" (84).

society, which is now subjected to the legal standards of the Family Code, perhaps the traditional *hombre machista* ("macho desperdiciado") is ultimately doomed. In other words, maybe he will be unable to perpetuate his accustomed way of life.

During the tense initial scene, it is apparent that the relationship between Él and Ella has been strained to the breaking point. Él has assumed certain domestic responsibilities, and Ella is employed, but old models of behavior still persist not far beneath the surface. Although Él has accepted his new role as cook, he seems to have only done so grudgingly. Ella appears to be uncomfortable with Él, and rejects his efforts to call her by her old nickname (293). Finally, the situation comes to a head:

> ÉL: Pero, Chini… Perdone usted, gardenia, gardenia china. No volveré a ser tradicional.
>
> ELLA: ¿Tú estás buscando una discusión?
>
> ÉL: ¿Yo? Yo soy humilde esposo que acata el Código de Familia porque ha entendido la igualdad de derechos y deberes de ambos cónyuges. […] ELLA: ¿Tú me quieres explicar por qué estamos irritados?
>
> ÉL: ¿Tú me quieres decir por qué has venido de la calle tan cabrona? […]
>
> *Una pausa. Ella pela papas; Él trajina en la cocina. Repentinamente Ella explota y tira una papa al suelo.*
>
> ELLA: No aguanto más.
>
> ÉL: Recoge esta papa.
>
> ELLA: No me des órdenes. […]
>
> ÉL: Ya me tienes muy cansado.
>
> ELLA: Qué diré yo. (293-294)

However, when Él angrily throws dishes to the ground, the spectator discovers that they are made of cardboard. Then, when Él pursues Ella, she collides with a stage wall, which moves, "*haciendo evidente que es escenografía*" (295). The actors briefly stop playing their roles and speak to one another: "ELLA: ¿No ves cómo se mueve la escenografía? ÉL: ¿Y qué, no vamos a seguir la escena? ELLA: El público se da cuenta. ÉL: Vamos, entra en calor. *Sigue la escena*" (295). Each one insists that the relationship is over. They then begin arguing over who owns the house, and Ella threatens legal action (296). They angrily strike the stage walls representing their home, which come crashing to the ground. Finally, Padre and Madre appear, each one taking the side of his or her respective child, and blaming the child of the other. The actors then stop acting, and discuss the scene they have just done: "ÉL: Hicimos bien en echar abajo las paredes. ELLA: Sí, que nada sea falso. ÉL: Ni las paredes ni los personajes. LA MADRE: Que todo sea real, como la vida. ELLA: Como la vida y el arte" (297).

Of course, this commentary is both sarcastic and sincere. On one hand, it is obvious that the characters of the play and their surroundings are nothing more than artificial constructs, and are therefore false. On the other, the actors' deliberate deconstruction of the customary theatrical illusion—an act which calls attention to the unreality of the characters—paradoxically emphasizes the essential relationship between "la vida y el arte." Likewise, the fact that the supposed non-acting of the actors is, in reality, acting, serves to blur the usual distinctions between reality (life) and theater (art). In this manner, Estorino prepares the interpretative faculties of the spectator for the rest of the play. He wants the audience to recognize the contrived nature of the theatrical presentation, yet at the same time, he desires that the spectator reflect upon the evident connections between what is represented onstage and the larger Cuban

reality of the times. Actually, the author's purpose is to facilitate an awareness of such connections by making obvious the constructed quality of the dramatic action.

After the previously mentioned scene, the actors consult about their portrayal of the characters. In the ensuing conversation, the audience discovers that Él and Ella have undergone extensive personal transformations that threaten to tear apart the fabric of their relationship. The actors decide to represent the moment when the couple first met, which marks the effective beginning of the metatheatrical dramatic action. During the rest of the play, the episodes of Él and Ella's life together unfold in sequential order, and continue to be periodically interrupted by discussion among the actors.

These regular disruptions allow the actors to comment upon what they have represented, to share ideas and feelings about the material they will presently enact, and to express their opinions about what direction the drama should take. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that the actors themselves are part of the existential paradigm that governs the dramatic action. In other words, they themselves are obviously far from having overcome the gender issues with which their characters struggle.

For example, Él (actor) argues that he should be given more lines in the play: "Yo soy el hombre aquí y de corto nada. Muy largo. […] Y óigame, estos asuntos se resuelven entre hombres" (317-318). At another moment, Ella (actress) remarks: "Las mujeres no decimos piropos. Todavía" (299). Likewise, El Padre (actor) and La Otra (actress) improvise "una buena escena cubana […] de verdad verdad" (318-319)—having no direct relationship to the main metatheatrical action—in which the two actors manifest the most blatantly stereotypical attitudes characteristic of *hombres machistas* and the women who unquestioningly submit to them. La Otra (actress) praises El Padre (actor) for this: "Cuando tú me haces una escena así me parece

que la cubanidad se te sale por los poros" (319).[152] In another scene, when Ella (actress) notes that El Padre (actor) "se quedó en el personaje," the actor responds: "Yo soy así. Me entrego en cuerpo y alma" (298). The spectator is left wondering if El Padre (actor) is simply being himself, rather than assuming a role. Thus, in a sense, there is no real separation between the actors and the characters they represent.

The story of Él and Ella is an emblematic portrayal which is intended to personify the problematic and incomplete transformation of gender roles that took place on the island during the 1970s. Therefore, the history of this ficticious couple is in its essence the history of the quintessential Cuban husband and wife during that decade. Clearly, many specific details of Él and Ella's relationship cannot be universally applied to all national couples during that era. However, their marriage undoubtedly represents the important changes in gender relations that occurred at that time.

The history of the couple is as follows. Él and Ella meet while the former is engaged in cutting sugar cane for the ten-million-ton harvest (299). El Padre advises his son to test Ella's character by attempting to have sex with her. If she gives in, she is, according to El Padre's reactionary perspective, not the kind of girl Él should marry (306-307). As a consequence of this "test," Ella becomes pregnant, and El Padre counsels Él to refuse to marry her. La Madre comes to her daughter's defense, and takes her to El Padre's house, where the two women demand that Él marry Ella. Él intends to follow his father's advice, but he is really in love with Ella, so he consents to marriage (313).

At the beginning, Él and Ella are a "typical" Cuban couple, since Él, who works, does absolutely nothing at home, and Ella, who is unemployed, assumes responsibility for all

[152] From the script, it is unclear if the actress is meant to speak these words sarcastically or with sincerity. Evidently, this would depend upon the performance of the actress as well as the discretion of whoever might direct the play.

domestic chores. Also, Él, who constantly gives orders to his wife, and Ella, who meekly submits to her husband's commands, behave according to the customary *machista* model for gender interaction (319-321). The couple's dream of a typical existence is shattered by Ella's miscarriage (321), which leads her to accept employment at a hospital in spite of Él's protests (324). Él is then called up for military duty, and is obligated to spend a considerable period of time without his wife, who is terrified of being alone.

When Él returns, he has learned to wash his own clothes, and he discovers that his wife has decided to study, which is a decision that he angrily resists, since he feels that his wife's primary responsibility is to attend to his needs at home (328-331). El Padre and La Madre become involved in the controversy, each one supporting his or her respective child (331-333). Ella ignores Él's disapproval and persists with her studies. The incipient transformation of the couple reaches a higher stage of development when Ella successfully convinces Él to study so that he might become eligible for a job promotion (335-338). Él has now accepted certain domestic responsibilities, but he is unhappy and uncomfortable about his radically changed relationship with his wife, who is now employed and politically active, and who is ill-at-ease with a husband who seems like a stranger to her. Finally, the situation reaches the point of crisis, and the couple separates (296, 346).

Él and Ella appear to move even further apart when they take lovers (El Otro and La Otra) who, in a superficial sense, represent each spouse's "ideal" version of the opposite sex. El Otro is the traditional *machista* male, and La Otra is the embodiment of the stereotypical pre-revolutionary Cuban female who willingly allows herself to be treated as a sex object (349-354). In reality, El Otro and La Otra are simply grotesque parodies of how Él and Ella were at the beginning of their relationship. Curiously, El Padre, who has developed a certain amount of

respect and admiration for Ella, opposes his son's decision to divorce her (360-362). Nonetheless, Él announces his intention of marrying La Otra, and Ella does the same with regard to El Otro. It appears that the division of property may prevent the divorce from occuring, since both spouses claim that the house belongs to them. Also, El Padre, immediately prior to dying from terminal cancer, repents his reactionary ways, and asks for his son to reconcile with Ella. In spite of these developments, the couple finally begins the "repartición de bienes gananciales" (379-387).

While going through their personal property, Él and Ella start to reminisce about the happy times that they shared together in the past (387-389). When El Otro and La Otra jealously react to this behavior, they are driven off, and Él and Ella are suddenly reconciled. La Madre appears and announces that she will marry at her advanced age, and that she plans to leave town with her fiancé (390-392). Thus, with La Madre departing and El Padre dead, both Él and Ella must at last learn to make decisions independently of parental influence. In a wider sense, Estorino means to show that Cuban couples must also leave behind traditional models for gender interaction, and forge a new path into the future.

The evolving dynamic between Él and Ella, and the decisive effect it has upon their parents, constitute a dramatic representation of Cuban relationships at a time when the dominant traditional paradigms of gender interaction began to give way to new and progressive models for behavior between the sexes. The struggle and resistance between the characters, highlight the various motives and influences that directed relations between men and women in those years.

For example, Él, habituated to blindly adhering to the traditional code of male conduct, is continually misled by the *machista* advice of El Padre, who represents reactionary resistance to the new revolutionary standard of comportment. However, Él is also compelled to adopt the

emerging existential paradigm, partly by a desire for professional advancement (which induces him to study), and perhaps in larger measure by the need to accommodate his wife and her new direction in life, which has to a great extent been made possible by radical legal and cultural inititatives.

As for Ella, she is initially motivated to spoil Él and to passively accept his selfish behavior, since she is intent upon keeping him, and also because, owing to her conservative upbringing, she has never attempted to interact with a man in any other way. However, La Madre, despite belonging to an earlier generation, has been inspired by revolutionary philosophy, and helps to spur her daughter on to greater personal accomplishments. She accordingly assists Ella to break away from her exploited existence.

The crisis that brings about the couple's separation is complex in nature. Él, for obvious reasons, pressures Ella to conform to his outdated ideas about what her proper role should be, and Ella, intoxicated with the personal freedom and advancement now within her grasp, begins to see Él as an impediment to her progress. However, at the same time, Ella paradoxically finds herself unable to come to terms with the positive changes that her husband has undergone. She irrationally longs for the *machista* Él of the past whom she has worked so hard to transform into someone else.[153] For his part, Él grows tired of trying to please his ambitious and demanding wife, and wishes to bring back the meek, helpless, and obedient woman she used to be. These regressive tendencies lead to the couple's separation and to ultimately empty and meaningless relationships with El Otro and La Otra, who seemingly embody the desired older versions of Él and Ella, but in reality only constitute their soulless and cynical counterparts.

[153] Likewise, La Madre, whose personal situation forms a kind of symbolic parallel to that of her daughter, longs for the *machista* husband who passed away years ago, and unhealthily clings to his memory.

Hence, the couple is caught between two paradigms. On one hand, they are drawn to traditional and thus familiar models of gender interaction, which Él and Ella—insecure and uncomfortable in an increasingly unfamiliar culture transformed by the Family Code—deludedly believe capable of providing them with an idealized security and comfort that they nostalgically associate with their past. On the other hand, they find themselves strongly attracted to the possibilities that a changed society now offers them. Ella has been eagerly exploring her work and educational opportunitites outside of the home, and Él, stripped by his liberated wife of the opportunity to live according to the same *machista* existential model as his father, and given by revolutionary society the chance to further his professional and educational development, as well as to master domestic duties formerly only performed by Ella, can no longer be satisfied with the limited horizons that characterized his previous life. Frightened of the future, the couple clings to false images of the past (El Otro and La Otra), but allured by the promise of a better tomorrow, they flee from the confining dimensions of yesterday. Their inability to reconcile these conflicting tendencies is what precipitates the breakup.

As noted previously, El Padre, who gradually comes to accept and then admire Ella, begins to see his son's marriage in a new way, and is so moved by what he witnesses, that he finally confesses his total disillusionment with his own *machista* conduct and attitude. During this confession, El Padre also admits that, in spite of his continual protests throughout the years, a long time ago he secretly gave up caring about the loss of his economic status as a consequence of the revolution. Similarly, La Madre, undoubtedly inspired by the growing independence of her daughter, finally lets go of the memory of her deceased, chauvinistic husband, and, significantly, decides to marry a humble bricklayer. In this manner, La Madre definitively ceases to evaluate

men in terms of their economic origin or status, and finally experiences a deep and satisfying intimacy that her animalistic first husband was incapable of providing her.

Hence, both parents, thanks to the example provided by their children, simultaneously reject the *machista* and capitalistic existential models that had guided the former's behavior. Of course, it is Estorino's intention to equate these two codes by showing them to be two sides of the same coin. Therefore, as he had previously demonstrated in *Las vacas gordas*, the author calls attention to the essentially exploitative tendencies inherent in *machista* attitudes.[154] By doing so, he once again indicates the basic incompatibility between the chavinistic mindset and the true spirit of socialism, which he sees as absolutely essential to the values of *cubanía revolucionaria*.

Finally, Él and Ella's rejection of El Otro and La Otra, and the couple's reunion, are shown to be motivated by the deeper affections that the two share, which transcend all consideration of the personal changes that they have undergone over the years. In this way, Estorino shows the audience that, regardless of the instability and turmoil caused by the transformation of gender roles on the island, there is hope for Cuba's couples, who are in no way obligated to stop being, for the sake of the revolution, who they have always been, but rather, in the name of *cubanía revolucionaria*, are called to more fully become, by means of adhering to the precepts of the Family Code, who they really are.

As has been demonstrated, all four of the principal figures—Él, Ella, El Padre, and La Madre—are essentially dynamic, since they experience fundamental changes in character during the course of the play. Unlike them, El Otro and La Otra are absolutely static figures, but that is not to say that they lack depth or complexity. For his part, El Otro is more than a simple

[154] It should be noted that women can also be responsible for perpetuating *machismo*. This is made abundantly clear in this and in several of Estorino's plays.

chauvinistic lothario. A man of some intelligence and plenty of ambition and cunning, he appreciates Ella's professionalism and drive, and has no qualms about moving into her home should she divorce Él. Hence, El Otro is, to a certain extent, capable of accommodating Ella as an equal, but his motives are entirely cynical. In reality, El Otro wants all the benefits—material or otherwise—promised by a society based on the principles of gender equality, but actually has no intention of altering in the least his *machista* manner of interacting with women. As for La Otra, she initially seems to be a rather dimwitted and two-dimensional figure. However, as the dramatic action progresses, Estorino shows that her cloying behavior is really impelled by cold calculation based on a callous assessment—learned from her case-hardened mother and, in a greater sense, from traditional Cuban society—of her physical charms and their usefulness in allowing her to ensnare a man who will provide for her material needs (362-364). So, although both Él and Ella initially imagine that they see in El Otro and La Otra the longed-for image of who their respective spouse used to be, in reality, they only rediscover the detrimental aspects of a superseded existential paradigm.

For these reasons, the reconciliation of Él and Ella at the play's end, and their repudiation of El Otro and La Otra, who represent the regressive tendencies of the couple's former selves, constitute an optimistic statement of hope for the future. Estorino shows that, in spite of the difficulties occasioned by the enactment of the Family Code, the changes it has brought about are absolutely necessary, and Cuban marriages can and will survive the long and painful process of personal transformation made necessary as a consequence of the new legislation.[155] In particular,

[155] Some encouragement for Cuban marriages was obviously—and clearly still is—needed, considering the skyrocketing divorce rates evident on the island at the end of the 1970s, and the large number of failed marriages still apparent today. Evenson notes: "The divorce rate in Cuba more than tripled in the first three decades after the revolution and, in 1988, Cuba's divorce rate ranked third highest following the United States and the former Soviet Union. Perhaps due to the stresses of the economic crisis, the divorce rate almost doubled again between 1990 and 1996. The increase in divorce has been attributed to a number of factors including changes in the law that make it

the author intends to demonstrate that the fundamental identity of individuals in relationships is not threatened, but rather greatly strengthened and enhanced, by abandoning *machista* models for gender interaction, and by embracing progressive and equitable codes of behavior between the sexes. There is nothing wrong with couples treasuring their pre-liberated past, provided that they know how to differentiate between those aspects of that past that are worth cherishing, and those parts of it which are best left behind forever. Likewise, as Estorino has shown in previous plays, in order for one to truly live according to the exalted values of *cubanía revolucionaria*, one must purge from oneself all reactionary traces of yesteryear.

Morir del cuento

Similar to *Ni un sí ni un* no, the author's next play, *Morir del cuento*, also explores Cuba's past for the purpose of throwing light upon the present. However, *Morir del cuento* is a considerably darker and ideologically more complex piece than its predecessor, and deals with an entirely different subject matter. It is a play which takes an unflinching and at times painful look at pre-revolutionary realities, and associates them with the island's present. The author's intent is to show the historical basis for reactionary attitudes in contemporary Cuban society.

Ostensibly, *Morir del cuento* is an investigation into the untimely death of a Cuban youth in 1930. It is known that the young man committed suicide, but the reasons that led him to take his own life are poorly understood. Several of his family members and associates—non-actors—have supposedly been called upon by their local cultural authority to appear onstage before the public. They are meant to share their memories and views about this murky event, and to speak of the circumstances leading up to it. They are to be assisted by local actors who have been

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relatively easy and inexpensive to obtain a divorce, changed societal conditions that give women more social and economic opportunities and the increasing number of marriages of couples under the age of nineteen" (150).

assigned to spontaneously interpret the roles of remembered individuals that are not present onstage. These actors may also at times represent younger versions of the non-actors. Of course, everyone present onstage is, in the strictest sense, an actor, since the performance of each individual is guided by Estorino's script. This is quite similar to the theatrical technique employed in *Ni un sí ni un no*, but in *Morir del cuento,* the intention is to go even further by attempting to convince the audience that all stage activity—some of which is presented as spontaneous dramatic invention, and the greater part of which is feigned non-acting—is strictly improvised.

I have not seen a staged version of the play, but from the script, I can only imagine that the illusion of non-theatrical activity, must be very compelling. This type of presentation might be termed as hyperrealism, since, instead of simply trying to offer a convincing rendition of reality within the customary parameters of stage activity, according to which the spectator—despite a habitual tendency to suspend disbelief—is ultimately aware that all dramatic action is unreal or contrived, Estorino once again attempts, as he did in *Ní un sí ni un no*, to convince his audience that what it witnesses is unrehearsed and, to a great extent, not acted. Thus, if one is not aware of the playwright's trick, one might easily find oneself tricked into thinking that one has attended a most unusual and signal event. Actually, *Morir del cuento* is indeed such an event, but it is of course not reality itself. Then again, in a certain sense, perhaps it is, which is clearly the whole point of the play. Estorino's skillful manipulation of the very fabric of perceived reality is what has moved several critics to suggest that this work is the author's greatest artistic accomplishment.

Nonetheless, *Morir del cuento* is clearly much more than a clever ruse. Likewise, it is about much more than the investigation of a suicide. At the play's end, the motives behind the

youth's death are still not entirely clear. However, what is indeed clearer is the complex and highly problematic nature of the relationships among the family members and associates of the young man, and the impact still exercised by the events of a distant past upon such individuals' present-day reality. Therefore, the drama is not so much about clearing up the reasons for a suicide, but rather constitutes an exploration of the often contradictory, controversial, and tragic Cuban past, and that past's undeniable and important relation to the nation's revolutionary present.

When *Morir del cuento* premiered in 1983, only three years had passed since the first showing of *Ni un sí ni un no* in 1980, but they had been momentous ones. Partly in reaction to the election of the strongly anti-communist U.S. President Ronald Reagan in the Fall of 1980, Fidel Castro permitted 125,000 Cubans to leave the island through the port city of Mariel in the weeks leading up to Reagan's inauguration in January of 1981. Castro did this because he "knew that if Reagan were to be elected president any meaningful accommodation with the United States would not be possible" after the militaristic Republican's swearing in. Although this group of migrants, consisting largely of émigrés and political prisoners, was significantly different from the mostly "elite professionals and middle- and working-class immigrants" who had left prior to 1973, the psychological impact of its departure upon the national population was undeniably just as significant. Many Cubans involved in the Mariel exodus were disillusioned with the island's faltering economy in the closing years of the 1970s, discouraged by mounting problems with housing availability, and unnerved by the visits, made possible by an accord established between the Castro and Carter governments, of prosperous Miami relatives. To a significant degree, the Mariel boatlift gave Castro "a clear opportunity to get rid of some of those who opposed him." However, shortly after the exodus, the Cuban economy began a period of several years of

sustained expansion. In 1980, Castro "created a militia made up of nonmilitary personnel […] that numbered almost 1.5 million people" in his efforts to "mobilize and reinvigorate popular support for the revolution." Finally, in the early 1980s, steps were taken to liberalize the economy, which helped to fuel economic growth, but also led to black market corruption, created growing inequalities among the general population, and "undermined the state's efforts to maintain the economic safety net for its poorest citizens" (Staten 116-118).

In particular, *Morir del cuento,* similar to *Milanés,* calls attention to the matter of whether one should remain in Cuba or depart for the United States, which, as I have shown, would have been an issue of pressing concern for the play's original audience in 1983. Nonetheless, the play's metatheatrical journey to the past, also entails an extensive exploration of the Machado years. For these reasons, *Morir del cuento,* like *Ni un sí ni un no,* is immediate drama within which metatheatrical scenes of remote drama are enacted. Estorino's signal accomplishment is to bring to light unsuspected and highly significant existential connections between Cuba in 1930 and in 1983. Importantly, unlike in *Ni un sí ni un no,* he links the past with the present in a decidedly non-didactic way. However, *Morir del cuento* does indeed have a propagandistic thrust, as well as a clear moral message.

Considering the artistic and cultural importance of *Morir del cuento,* it is surprising how little critical commentary has been written about it. Although the play is briefly considered—and universally praised—in a large number of articles, only one, "Morir del cuento" by Liliam Vázquez, offers an extensive analysis. One other fairly thorough exploration of *Morir del cuento* can be found in "Prólogo: Seis obras en busca de un teatro" by Rine Leal (Seis 7-14).

A first reading of the play is likely to create a sense of bewilderment, since the relationships between the many characters—whether referential or non-acting—are highly

complex, and are revealed in a seemingly haphazard fashion. However, upon second consideration, it is evident that Estorino, in his efforts to fully realize his goal of creating the complete illusion of non-acting, was obliged to avoid the kind of carefully ordered theatrical exposition that would have made the dramatic action apparent as such. In contemporary Cuban life, relationships between families and their associates are often very complicated. In an informal setting such as the one simulated in *Morir del cuento*, and with the involvement of everyday individuals much more caught up in describing personal experiences than in clarifying details for an audience, one could hardly imagine that complex matters would be outlined in an orderly way. Basically, such individuals, engrossed in their own memories and feelings, would frequently forget that the audience does not fully understand the exact nature of the relationships existing between the family members and associates to whom these individuals refer. Estorino cleverly uses this to his advantage. Dramatic tension is to a significant extent created by the reader or spectator's desire to more completely understand how the characters relate to one another.

The cast of *Morir del cuento* consists of five non-actors—Siro, Ismael, Adela, Antonia, and Anciana—who simply represent themselves. Other family members—Sendo, Tavito, Delfina, Lucinda, and Piro—are represented by actors. There is also a large group of actors who assume the roles of other individuals associated with the family's past, and there are various stage hands that frequently appear in order to assist with the production. Significantly, the advanced age of the non-actors suggests the span of time that separates 1930 (the year of Tavito's suicide)[156] from 1983 (the year of the play's premiere),[157] whereas the actors who play

[156] Ismael notes that he was six years old when Tavito killed himself (43). Since the former was born in 1924 (43), the year for Tavito's suicide is 1930.

[157] Nonetheless, if one assumes that the non-acting occurs in 1983, there is a mathematical problem with regard to the ages given for the characters. For example, Ismael notes that he was born in 1924 (43), yet Estorino gives his age

the roles of absent family members and associates, are as youthful as their real-life counterparts would have been in 1930.

Family relations in *Morir del cuento* are, indeed, highly complex, and, as noted earlier, are not revealed to the reader or spectator in a clear and ordered manner. According to his usual custom as a dramatist, Estorino does not outline relationships between characters at the beginning of the play, so I will do so here. Siro is the father of Ismael, whose mother (unnamed) died when Ismael was only a few years old (46). After his wife's untimely death, Siro feels unable to handle the burden of raising his many children, so he moves with them to the house of Sendo, the husband of Siro's sister Lucinda, who accepts the responsibility of caring for Ismael and his siblings (46). Also living in Sendo's home are Piro, Sendo's brother, and Piro's wife Adela. In the 1920s, Piro and Adela were forced to sell their home and all personal belongings, and to take up residence with Sendo, a relatively prosperous farmer, as a consequence of the laboral and economic conditions existing at the time of—and by implication largely caused by—the Machado dictatorship (83). A frequent visitor to the family home is Sendo's sister, Antonia. Tavito is one of Lucinda and Sendo's children. Delfina is Tavito's fiancée.

The representation of those family members who are not present is highly problematic. The non-actors—in particular Antonia—frequently call into question the manner in which the

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as 46 years (39). This would imply that the non-acting occurs in 1970, and not in 1983, the year of the play's premiere. One possible interpretation is that Estorino perhaps wrote an initial draft of the play immediately prior to 1970, which would explain the mathematical discrepancy. A more radical inference would be that the author desires for the audience to imagine that it is living in 1970. Finally, one might assume that Estorino has simply taken certain artistic liberties for the purpose of comparing one historical era with another. In any case, with the passage of time, all audiences for *Morir del cuento* must, to a progressively greater extent, imagine that they are living in a previous era in order to make allowances for historical inconsistencies in the ages of the characters. It is of course impossible to predict exactly how this factor will impact—whether positively or negatively—future audience reception of the play.

actors interpret the roles of absent individuals.[158] Towards the play's end, it is revealed that it is Siro who has, prior to the performance, actually given the actors the information needed to represent their respective parts (82). Thus, in most cases, disagreement with the acting constitutes an implied rejection of Siro's interpretation of the past. In other cases, as in the discussion of differing perspectives between Anciana and the actress who assumes the role of Delfina,[159] it is the actress or actor's own personal interpretation that is criticized. Therefore, when the actors are not acting, they are of course non-actors, and are shown to have distinct personalities and philosophical viewpoints.[160] For these reasons, *Morir del cuento* not only deals with the conflicting memories—and hence ideologies—of family members, but also explores the differences in outlook existing between older generations (represented by the non-actors) and younger ones (signified by the actors).

One of the most interesting characteristics of *Morir del cuento* is the fact that no single character serves as the work's principal protagonist or dramatic focus. Although an investigation of Tavito's suicide—and hence of Tavito himself—is the stated purpose of the dramatic exercise, in the final assessment, the nature of the non-actors' memories of the young man, and not Tavito himself, assumes primary importance in relation to the play's ideological message. Each non-actor feels strongly about her or his manner of perceiving the past. So, the play is characterized by numerous and frequently conflictive interpretive foci. As for the family members represented by actors, Sendo and Tavito stand out as the two most important characters, but the interaction

[158] It should also be noted that Anciana—who is the real Delfina—makes her first appearance when the play is already well underway (87). Apparently, she is finally moved to intervene in the dramatic activity because she cannot accept the representation of herself that she has been witnessing.
[159] More will be said about this particular example further on in this study.
[160] To a significant extent, the actress or actor's interpretation is a reflection of her or his ideological makeup. Again, more will be written about this issue in the following pages.

between father and son can only actually be known through the memories of the non-actors.[161] Thus, the metaphysical relevance of Sendo and Tavito as actual persons, is ultimately subordinate to the ideological concerns raised by the clash of viewpoints among non-actors.

As noted earlier, some dramatic tension results from the audience's desire to more completely understand the nature of the relationships between characters, but this is not the principal focus for suspense in the play. As for the drama's investigation of the past, there is little sense of anticipation with regard to Tavito's suicide, since it is revealed early on that the young man killed himself.[162] In reality, the chief source of dramatic conflict in *Morir del cuento,* stems from the progressive unveiling of the circumstances surrounding Tavito's death. This continuous discovery, in turn, drives the heated ideological debate between both actors and non-actors. Therefore, the clash of irreconcilable viewpoints with regard to the past, is the main cause of contention in the work. The climax of this dramatic tension, and its resolution, occurs at the play's end, when the collective weight of evidence finally and decisively demonstrates Sendo's guilt, the fateful impact of his selfish and immoral behavior upon Tavito, and the undeniable role the father played in his son's suicide. Likewise, this moment also signifies the complete discrediting of Antonia's rose-colored vision of her brother Sendo, and in this manner indicates the triumph of the revolutionary existential paradigm (chiefly represented by Siro and Ismael) over the reactionary one (embodied by Antonia and, in a more problematic sense, by Adela).[163]

The events of the past are not presented in a sequential fashion. Rather, the non-actors' memories begin with commonly known and accepted facts, then by degrees progress towards those events whose nature is increasingly subject to dispute. Hence, Estorino organizes the

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[161] It should be remembered that, as clearly demonstrated in the play, the actors' interpretation of Tavito and Sendo, ultimately has its origins in, and must be subjected to, the memories of the non-actors.

[162] Admittedly, some dramatic tension is likely created by the audience's anticipation of witnessing a reenactment of Tavito's suicide. True to form, Estorino does not actually represent the violent act upon the stage.

[163] More will be said about Adela's ideological ambiguity in the following pages.

memories of the non-actors according to dramatic principle rather than historical order. For example, Tavito's suicide and funeral are remembered—and enacted—numerous times, and are thus converted into a kind of dramatic motif that frequently serves to contextualize other memories of yesteryear.

It is evident that Estorino's ideological intent involves more than a desire to compare one particular family's past with its present. Rather, as noted previously, he also means to reinvestigate the years of the Machado dictatorship, and in this way to reveal unexpected connections between the general realities of yesterday and today. Since neither the actors nor non-actors appear to be historians, and owing to the probable fact that the original Cuban audience would have already had a reasonable enough understanding of the Machado years, there is relatively little discussion in the play as to the wider Cuban reality of 1930. Nonetheless, the family's circumstances at that time, personally experienced and recounted by each non-actor, are in themselves elements of history, and as such constitute a representation of a particular moment in the nation's past. Also, the family's personal experiences in that distant epoch, can in no wise be considered separately from the collective historical reality of the time. Indeed, such experiences both perpetuated and were influenced by overall trends of the day.

Clearly, the Machado years were a time of great social upheaval and turmoil. Winning fraudulent elections in 1924 and 1928, Gerardo Machado proved to be a ruthless and corrupt military dictator who banned all opposition parties, violently repressed protesting student groups and labor leaders, operated a secret police called the *porra*, and presided, in the late 1920s, over a collapse in the Cuban economy brought about by the onset of the Great Depression and the subsequent precipitous fall in sugar prices. As the economic situation on the island progressively worsened, opposition to Machado by organized groups grew, and was characterized by "strikes,

work stoppages, demonstrations, assasinations, gun battles, bombings, riots and propaganda." A large demonstration held by the student group DEU[164] in September of 1930 turned into a riot and resulted in the death of DEU leader Rafael Trejo. The student leader's murder led to outrage among the general Cuban population. This collective anger and resentment coalesced into an opposition movement known as the Generation of 1930. Also, in March of that year, around 200,000 workers went on strike. Three years later, in 1933, Machado, abandoned by a United States government that had lost faith in his ability to protect American investments on the island, and no longer supported by the Cuban military, would finally resign his post and leave the country carrying seven bags of gold. Thus, the previously noted events of 1930, would not only prove to be a precursor to the eventual ousting of Machado, but more significantly, they would mark the beginning of a nationalistic political movement dedicated to the ideas of José Martí (Staten 56-59). After several years and changes, this movement would finally find expression in Fidel Castro's socialist revolution.[165] With regard to the period of Machado's rule, Kapcia notes: "Indeed, the *machadato* was when the inchoate values of a 'pre-*cubanía*' were converted into the definable codes of the eventual ideology" (71).

Since *Morir del cuento* evidently alludes to the political and social turmoil of 1930, and owing to the play's condemnation of Sendo as the embodiment of the corrupt and repressive qualities of the *machadato*, one may fairly infer that Estorino intends to return his audience to the modern origins of Cuba's socialist revolution. By disproving the sentimental and misleading outlook of Antonia, the author reaffirms the reader or spectator's faith in the essential integrity of

[164] The acronym means: Directorio Estudiantil Universitario. It was formed in 1927 in reaction to Machado's decision to seek another term (Staten 57).

[165] Staten notes that "The Confederación Nacional Obrera Cubana (CNOC), the first national labor organization, was created in 1925 and had 71,000 members by 1929. The CNOC included the newly created communist party of Cuba known as the Unión Revolucionaria Comunista (URC) which in 1944 was renamed the Popular Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Popular; PSP)" (58). Thus, the late 1920s and early 1930s—the metatheatrical historical frame in *Morir del cuento*—would also be a time during which the antecedents of key revolutionary political institutions would take shape.

the historical revolutionary process. In other words, he shows that there was nothing justifiable about those who supported—whether openly or implicitly—a government that stood in opposition to socialist values. Therefore, according to the dramatist's perspective, the key to eliminating anti-revolutionary attitudes among the island's population, is to reinvestigate the past in a completely honest and open way. Hence, the drama's audience is implicitly invited to fully and fearlessly explore its own family's history. By doing so, it will uncover the hidden motives behind its own reactionary tendencies and ideas. Importantly, *Morir del cuento* does not involve a process of interrogation, but rather of voluntary self-expression. For this reason, the play suggests that the preferred way for reactionary individuals to be ideologically reformed, is for such individuals to openly share memories and perspectives with those persons—such as close family members—who understand them best. In any case, since *Morir del cuento* pointedly denounces the violence and coercion that existed in 1930, it clearly does not advocate the application of such methods in a revolutionary context.

As mentioned before, the non-actors do not recount the past in sequential order. However, by the play's end, a complete story has finally emerged. If Estorino had presented the work's metatheatrical events in chronological fashion, they would have unfolded—more or less—as follows. Some time before her marriage to Sendo, Lucinda is sleeping one night when Sendo, her boyfriend, knocks upon the window. She sees that he is covered in blood and is injured. Sendo explains to her that he killed a black man who had sent his livestock to graze on land that Sendo, as *mayoral*, had been assigned to protect. Sendo excuses himself by saying that his *padrino* had told him that he could use any means necessary to prevent unauthorized individuals from using the land. Siro, Lucinda's brother, secretly witnesses Sendo's confession.

Owing to the protection given to him by his wealthy and influential employer, Sendo, after being brought to trial, is found innocent.

Shortly afterwards, Sendo is obligated to marry Lucinda, since he has gotten her pregnant, and Tavito is born. Over the years, Sendo begins to amass capital and land through hard work and ruthless business practices. Economic collapse following upon the onset of the Great Depression forces Piro and Adela to take up residence in Sendo's home. They are shortly afterwards followed by Siro and Ismael, whose mother has died. Both Piro and Siro work for Sendo, although the former receives preferential treatment.

Tavito, still largely unaware of his father's true nature, begins to romance Delfina, and declares that he will marry her one day. Meanwhile, Sendo is busy with less savory romantic activity of his own in a local brothel. During one of his visits, in which he makes clear his penchant for the young daughters of the men that work for him, he is interrupted by the rural guard, which is looking for an anti-Machado student protester. As a result of this search, several people see Sendo with La Gallega, the head prostitute. News of this reaches Lucinda, and worsens the couple's already strained marriage.

A local family by the name of Benítez, is heavily in debt to Sendo as a consequence of the hard economic times, brought about in large measure by extremely low sugar prices. Sendo heartlessly initiates the necessary legal process for collecting the debt by forcing the foreclosure of the Benítez property, which will be turned over to him. When the Benítez family resists the order to vacate their property, the rural guard, led by Sargento Pedroso, kills young Eusebio Benítez. Although it is alleged that the guard shot Eusebio in self-defense, Siro, who is with Sendo when Sargento Pedroso explains what happened, instinctively realizes that the guard—as

a servant of the bourgeois *status quo*—has committed the terrrible deed without any justifiable provocation.

One night while playing cards, Tavito is informed that his father is a murderer,[166] and that he forces himself upon young girls. This information spurs Tavito on to a frenzy of compulsive gambling, drinking, and sex with prostitutes. To fund his lavish lifestyle, Tavito begins to embezzle the funds from his father's store, and also runs up huge bills. Sendo finds out what his son is doing at the store, and is also made aware of Tavito's enormous debts. Sendo is finally driven to pawn the store in order to bail out his son. He angrily denounces Tavito, who responds by grabbing his father's pistol and announcing that he will kill himself. Despite Piro's efforts to talk him out of it, Tavito commits suicide shortly thereafter. His procession and funeral follow.

Some events that occur after Tavito's funeral are mentioned but not explicitly dramatized. For example, a few years after Tavito's death, Delfina, who had resisted her fiancé's sexual advances, finally yields to another man, but the experience is so repugnant to her that she swears to never again repeat it. Likewise, the audience is informed of the deaths of Piro and of Antonia's unnamed husband, and is told of Lucinda and Sendo's migration—shortly after the revolution—to the United States. Relatively few details are given about these events.

Since dramatic tension in *Morir del cuento* is to a great extent fueled by the clash of ideological perspectives, and owing to the fact that such perspectives are embodied by certain characters, a detailed study of the principal figures in the play, is essential for gaining a full understanding of the metaphysical matters upon which the work is based. Although, with regard

[166]The gambler who tells Tavito this, refers specifically to Sendo's murder of the black *guajiro* several years earlier, for which he was tried and found innocent. As for the time frame for the killing of Eusebio Benítez, it is simply given as "[e]n la época en que murió Tavito" (99). It is logical to suppose that Eusebio Benítez was assasinated immediately prior to Tavito's death, since Estorino clearly means to link Sendo's responsibility for the martyrdoms of the black *guajiro* and Eusebio Benítez, with his son's suicide. The play does not clarify as to whether or not Tavito was ever made aware of his father's role in Eusebio Benítez's death.

to the non-actors, Estorino takes particular care to avoid stereotypical characterization, the eschewal of which is completely necessary in order to convincingly create the illusion of non-acting, it is nevertheless evident that each of the non-actors encarnates a particular philosophical mindset common to a specific sector[167] of the Cuban population. For this reason, the conflicting viewpoints of the non-actors, comprise the wider debates on important issues relative to national society as a whole. Likewise, the family's investigation of its own history in *Morir del cuento*, entails in a larger sense the island's exploration of its own collective past.

Calling to mind the narrator of the same name in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), Ismael also comments upon past events that he personally witnessed, but in which he did not play a key role. He is the first person to appear upon the stage. When he walks out, it is apparent that he is cognizant of the audience's presence, since he begins talking in a manner that indicates as much. He marvels at the theater, with its high ceiling that "no tiene fin," which is like "el cielo mismo" (40).[168] He then expresses his reservations about the improvisational exercise he has been called upon to perform:

> Y aquí quieren representar esa historia. Sin un techo, sin muebles, ni siquiera una silla. ¿Qué tiene que ver esto con aquella casa? La historia no es sólo la gente y lo que pasó, es también la casa, la finca… ¿Cómo pueden representar la historia sin la casa? (*Se dirige a alguien en el público.*) Bueno, yo contaré lo que sé, lo que recuerdo. Ustedes deciden. (40)

[167] In this context, I use the word "sector" to refer to a set of individuals who share common traits with regard to ideological outlook. This does not necessarily imply that all members of such a sector share the same social and economic characteristics. Nonetheless, the role of such factors in the formation of one's own personal views, should not be ignored.

[168] The sacred nature of the theater is referred to later on when Siro compares it to a silent church without altars (42). Ismael then comments that it could be "un tribunal o el lugar donde se celebra una asamblea" (43). Both of these images invoke the exalted quality of the theatrical activity, as well as the solemn nature of the judgement to be rendered by the audience (jury) with respect to the information presented.

The play's philosophical tone is established by Ismael acknowledging that, ultimately, it is the individual theatergoer who must render the final verdict with regard to the events represented. Importantly, Ismael establishes that the stage action is not in itself what really took place in the past, but only an interpretation of particular incidents. He emphasizes that such an interpretation is nothing more than what he or the other non-actors know or remember.

Such an assertion, which suggests a relative degree of objectivity, does not, however, imply ideological neutrality. Although Ismael and the other non-actors may agree about the fundamental details associated with a certain event, each non-actor's evaluation of that event, must necessarily be colored by her or his distinctive ideational makeup. Ismael himself clearly and determinedly manifests a strong socialist viewpoint throughout the drama. In fact, he and his father Siro are both firmly revolutionary in outlook, and as such, the two of them serve as spokesmen for the Castro regime's political values.

However, what distinguishes the father from the son, is the foundation of each one's respective beliefs. Whereas Ismael has learned, in accordance with the ideological indoctrination he has undergone during the revolution, to interpret the significance of Tavito's suicide years after the fact, it is clear that Siro's understanding of that event, stands in no need of Marxist doctrine. Rather, it is communist philosophy itself which is vindicated by the insight—gained through experience—of individuals such as Siro. Of course, Ismael was only six years old in 1930. This explains why it is Siro, and not Ismael, whose memories are used to direct the performance of the actors. Thus, Estorino calls attention to the view that, in revolutionary society, lived experience should carry more weight than mere political credentials.

Siro is a hardened yet also gentle man who does not outwardly evince the same intensity of revolutionary vision as his son. For example, when Ismael bristles at the memory of his father,

employed as a menial laborer by Sendo, being forced to take his dinner in the kitchen, Siro laconically replies: “No me humillaban. Yo era un trabajador de la finca, cortaba caña y estaba lleno de tierra. Comía en la cocina. Yo sabía cuál era mi lugar. No podían humillarme. Se humilla al que quiere estar donde no debe” (51). Ostensibly, Siro’s explanation simply suggests that, since he would have had soiled clothes and smelled strongly after a hard day’s work, it was only appropriate for him to eat dinner in the kitchen. However, his true intention is to explain, albeit indirectly, that he had no desire to seat himself at the table of the man who was cruelly exploiting his labor. Thus, his avoidance of the table is—paradoxically—a matter of pride, not humility. Hence, the spectator can sympathize with Ismael’s revolutionary indignity, but must also acknowledge the preeminence of Siro’s homespun wisdom. In order to further emphasize the point, Estorino, in the following dialogue, makes an implicit comparison between Siro and Piro, Sendo’s brother: “ISMAEL: Tenían que sentarte a la mesa. SIRO: Deja eso. Había cosas peores. ISMAEL: ¿Cosas peores? ANTONIA: […] Adela, ¿dónde se sentaba Piro? ADELA: El pobre Piro, ¡qué atracones se daba! ANTONIA: Ese marido tuyo no tenía para cuándo acabar” (51). Thus, the “cosas peores” are shown to be the shameless gluttony and miserable servility of Piro, who, robbed of his dignity by his abject dependency upon his abusive and domineering brother Sendo, has taken on the despicable characteristics of the hog he so voraciously devours. Accordingly, for Piro it is small comfort indeed that his brother permits him to sit at the dinner table.

As previously noted, the opposite end of the political spectrum is taken by Antonia, who, despite her reactionary views, is determined to remain in Cuba and die there (82). In reality, her anti-revolutionary outlook is based upon nothing more than a sentimental attachment to the memory of her brother, who seemed to have showed a special fondness for her. For this reason,

when she feels compelled to defend Sendo, she repeatedly reminds everyone of his seemingly positive personal qualities, and simply chooses to avoid any meaningful analysis of the issue at hand. Even when unable to deny damning statements against Sendo, she nonetheless attempts to deflect the accusations by appealing to what she considers to be the fundamental need to preserve family unity:

> ANTONIA: […] Están discutiendo la vida de mi hermano y no voy a permitir que la tergiversen.
>
> ISMAEL: Lo dices como si estuvieras hablando de un héroe.
>
> ANTONIA: Era mi hermano.
>
> ISMAEL: Que no murió en su país, que se fue allá, a esperar que esto se cayera para regresar y adueñarse otra vez de lo que había robado. ANTONIA: (*Dominándose.*) […] [M]i hermano es mi hermano y las cosas de familia son las cosas de familia.
>
> ISMAEL: Eso no es muy consecuente.
>
> ANTONIA: ¡Consecuente! Tampoco es consecuente ese odio que le tienes a la persona que te mató el hambre cuando eras un muchacho (82).

Of course, "las cosas de familia" unavoidably form part of the greater social reality, which is something that Antonia appears either unwilling to accept or incapable of comprehending. Therefore, it is difficult for her to realize that her brother's supposed generosity towards Piro and Siro—made necessary by economic conditions largely brought about by the unjust, corrupt, and exploitative nature of the Cuban *status quo* in the late 1920s—was motivated less by altruistic interests and more by selfish ones.[169] Likewise, Sendo himself forms part of a bourgeois class

[169] In the case of Siro, Sendo stood to benefit from his son-in-law's cheap labor in the cane fields. As for Piro, Sendo had him pamper the latter's fighting gamecocks, which were used in gambling activities.

that is largely responsible for bringing about the desperate dependency of individuals such as Siro and Piro. It is this very dependency that has made the so-called generosity of unscrupulous, ambitious, and ruthless family members like Sendo necessary. As will be shown, the ideological resistance thrown up by Antonia, must eventually be worn down by the relentless and unflinching examination of Sendo's perfidious behavior. By discrediting Antonia's views, Estorino intends to attack the regressive reasoning of those audience members who might have initially felt a degree of identification with her.

Early on in the play, it seems that Adela and Antonia are more or less equal in terms of their political orientation. For example, during Adela's initial appearance onstage, she makes it clear that she has serious reservations about participating in an activity sponsored—or, from her point of view, demanded—by the revolutionary government:

> ADELA: Vine porque me lo pidieron y para que no digan. Si esto se demora mucho me voy. […] ¿Y si me niego a decir lo que sé?
>
> ISMAEL: No lo digas. Niégate.
>
> ADELA: La pensión no me la pueden quitar.
>
> ISMAEL: No te van a quitar nada. Hay leyes.
>
> ADELA: (*Con ironía*.) Sí, ya lo creo. Si lo sabré yo […] Yo contaré lo que me convenga. ¡Total!, para que después le den la vuelta y todo sea burgueses y explotación. […] Lo que [yo] piense es cosa mía.
>
> SIRO: Claro. Nadie se va a meter dentro de tu cabeza.
>
> ADELA: Eso quisieran. (42)

However, these words, rather than constituting a condemnation of Marxist principles as such, instead simply indicate Adela's belittlement of the government's authoritarian nature, her serious

doubts about her financial security, her disapproval of what she considers excessive bureaucracy, and her resentment of invasive state-run surveillance. Such views, although not exactly in accord with the prerogatives of the Castro regime, cannot in all fairness be considered counterrevolutionary.

Nonetheless, it is evident that Adela, like Antonia, disapproves of the prevailing order. Likewise, Adela, similar to Antonia, also has a sentimental reason for resisting the dominant ideology, since her husband Piro was apparently convinced that he owed his brother a debt of gratitude. Still, Adela's supposed praise of Sendo, ironically betrays her profound bitterness towards her brother-in-law:

> Siempre fue un buen hombre. Y con la familia, de oro. […] Muchos problemas que se buscó Sendo por eso de las mujeres. Mujeres y gallos. Piro le cuidaba los gallos, y los gallos le acabaron con la vida de Piro. A veces [Sendo] le gritaba, lo insultaba, y Piro se iba hecho una furia al fondo del platanal. […] Piro se acostumbró a los gritos, yo me acostumbré a Lucinda y fuimos tirando. Un año y otro, sin casa, recogidos. […] Sí, [Sendo] era de oro. Si le destrozó la vida a Piro y lo hizo un inútil la culpa fue de Piro. […] Sí, fue un hombre bueno. Le destrozó la vida a Piro, pero Piro se lo agradeció siempre. Vivió para él y sus gallos. (83-84)

In the final analysis, Adela, despite the ingrained habit of continuously reciting—for decades—the same reactionary platitudes, cannot help but to acknowledge the fatal impact that Sendo's abusive practices have had upon her husband. Thus, through Adela, Estorino means to show that it is not necessary to outwardly confess loyalty to the revolution in order to begin to come to terms with the injustices of pre-revolutionary society. Also, Adela, like Antonia, in reality only

feels bound to defend Sendo as a matter of custom, and owing to superficial feelings of nostalgia. As noted earlier, such tendencies can be overcome by an honest and open assessment of past events. Thus, as in Antonia's case, Adela's example is meant to awaken the moral conscience of those theatergoers who, resistant to accept certain aspects of revolutionary society but not entirely opposed to it either, find themselves relating to her outlook.

The emergence of Anciana in the latter half of the play, introduces metaphysical issues that are situated somewhat apart from—though not outside of—the concerns driving the debate between Siro, Ismael, Antonia, and Adela. Anciana is unique among all the non-actors insofar as she is the only one who has the opportunity of seeing an actor represent her upon the stage. As mentioned before, she has only appeared before the public in order to refute the dramatic portrayal of herself that she is witnessing. Likewise, the politically-motivated discussions that she has probably been listening to from offstage, appear to mean little to her. Rather, her principal interest is the significance of her relationship to Tavito, and the impact of his untimely death upon her life. Like Tavito, she is an enigmatic character. This is evident from the moment she first confronts the actress (Delfina) that represents her. Delfina, Lucinda, and Antonia are reenacting the meeting immediately after Tavito's funeral, when Anciana first intervenes:

> LUCINDA: [...] Al final las mujeres pagamos siempre, porque después ellos se van a la calle, al trabajo, y una sola, en esta casa que ahora me parece enorme.
>
> *Delfina llora. Desde las lunetas la Anciana sube al escenario.*
>
> ANCIANA: No, no, eso no puede ser así. [...]
>
> DELFINA: ¿Usted quién es? (*A alguien en el público.*) ¿Sigo? ANCIANA: Cuando la vi llorar me di cuenta de que no fue así. [...] Me pasé toda la noche sentada al lado de Lucinda sin derramar una lágrima. [...]

DELFINA: Entonces usted es... [...]

ANCIANA: Sí. Delfina.

DELFINA: Y yo quiero ser Delfina.

ANCIANA: Por eso se lo digo: no puede llorar. (87-88)

Anciana then proceeds to tell what really happened to her after Tavito's funeral. It becomes clear that Delfina (actress) has simply projected her own ideas onto the character. The real Delfina of the past was nothing like the one that the actress was about to portray. Initially, Anciana admits that she deeply regrets not having given in to Tavito's sexual advances. However, while remembering an unpleasant sexual encounter that took place a few years after her fiancé's death, she realizes that her chastity had spared her from a physical activity that she finds revolting: "¡Qué asco, Dios mío! Estaba pegajosa, baboseada, llena de saliva. ¡Qué repugnancia! Me di un baño tan largo que por poco gasto toda la agua de la casa. ¿Era eso? ¿Eso era lo que Octavio me pedía? No, eso no podía ser. (*Pausa.*) Me alegro de no haber manchado mi amor por Octavio con un acto tan primitivo" (93-94). Delfina (actress) strongly disagrees with these views:

DELFINA: Tal vez no era el hombre para usted.

ANCIANA: ¿Piensa que debía haber probado por segunda vez? DELFINA: El cuerpo está hecho para eso.

ANCIANA: Yo creo que está hecho para cubrirlo con mucha ropa. DELFINA: Vivimos en dos mundo distintos.

ANCIANA: Como el día y la noche. Aprenda a entender el mío, si no le va a ser difícil hacer bien mi papel. (94)

The ideological conflict between Delfina (actress) and Anciana evidently highlights the stark differences between predominant sexual mores before and after the consolidation of the

revolution. However, perhaps more importantly, also it calls attention to the need for the younger generation to understand and show consideration for the elder one. Anciana is a tragic figure whose eternal devotion to Tavito is somehow worthy of admiration, even though her ideas about sex are reactionary in the extreme. Thus, the efforts of Delfina (actress) to convince Anciana of her modern views on sexuality, are rather pointless and ultimately counterproductive. In this manner, Estorino shows the younger audience that, in some cases, it is more important to strive to understand their elders, than to try to convince them of the validity of newly hegemonic perspectives.

Also, Anciana's rejection of the actress's representation, taking place so late in the play, calls into question the previous performances of all the other actors. Significantly, Estorino casts a pall of doubt on all dramatic interpretations of the past just as the work is coming to a close. The audience is made aware that the real past is only imperfectly filtered through the memories of those who lived it. These flawed memories are then in turn given form in accordance with the political orientation of the director and actors. For these reasons, an analyis of those characters who are represented by actors—Sendo, Tavito, Delfina, Lucinda, and Piro—would in reality only entail an assessment of Siro's views as interpreted by a revolutionary cast. Unsurprisingly, the complexity and three-dimensionality of the non-actors is starkly constrasted by the caricature-like nature and two-dimensionality of the actor-represented characters. For example, Sendo is entirely dishonest and cruel, Tavito is the usual wild and charming young man, Delfina (at least initially) is the stereotypical grief-stricken lover of the deceased, Lucinda is simply downtrodden and bitter, and Piro is just another Cuban male who lives for gamecocks.

Therefore, by calling attention—through Anciana—to the relative inaccuracy of these interpretations, Estorino strips the audience of the comfortable illusion that the real past is

actually appearing upon the stage. The true essence of historical reality is just as enigmatic as Tavito's mysterious and incompletely understood suicide. The values of *cubanía revolucionaria*—inextricably linked to the infinitely complex reality of the past—cannot always neatly fit within easily defined parameters. As Ismael notes at the play's beginning: "La historia no es sólo la gente y lo que pasó, es también la casa, la finca" (40). In other words, history is more than what can be remembered and represented onstage (la gente y lo que pasó). It is also the real essence of the past itself (la casa, la finca) which has been forever lost to us: "ADELA: Ya no queda ventana. Ni casa" (46). Although revolutionary ideology should resolutely confront the nation's past, it should also take care to neither presume too much about that past nor the older generation.[170]

Que el diablo te acompañe

The grave seriousness of tone that characterizes much of *Morir del cuento,* would be utterly reversed in the absurd and grossly exaggerated farcical pathos of Estorino's next play, *Que el diablo te acompañe*, which premiered four years after its predecessor, in 1987. A reworking of the legend of Don Juan, the dramatist sets the action in La Habana in the present day, and replaces the Don Juan of Tirso de Molina with a twentieth-century Cuban *machista ejemplar*.[171] Although not exactly using the versified form common to *El burlador de Sevilla* (1630), Estorino's work nonetheless preserves the original drama's feel, which is characterized

[170] At the end of *Morir del cuento,* the non-actors finally reveal themselves to the audience as real actors. Hence, even the "real" representation is ultimately shown to be imaginary. Actually, when the non-actors reveal themselves as such, they are still reading lines as actors. Thus, Estorino shows how the theatrical world—and by implication our understanding of the real world itself—consists of several layers of illusion that only merely reflect the true essence of reality itself.

[171] Besides acknowledging the influence of Tirso de Molina on the work, Arrufat also emphasizes the impact of Zorilla's interpretation upon Cuban audiences: "Creo que el *Tenorio* de Zorilla es el modelo que Estorino parece haber tenido a la vista, que es, además, el que más influjo ejerció entre nostoros. Aquí se ha representado muchas veces, desde el siglo pasado, ha sido admirado y aplaudido. Y algo más importante: parodiado múltiples veces, convertido en sainete y versión pornográfica" (39).

by rapid exchanges of dialogue, clever wordplay, frequent innuendoes, bawdy metaphors, highly contrived plot complications, unexpected moments of incisive humor, and the constant foreshadowing of a tragic end. The author also makes use of the character Mephisto from Christopher Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus* (circa 1590s), in this case presented as a kind of international intellectual snob who finds that he has business to attend to in revolutionary Cuba. Like his original namesake, Estorino's Mephisto is an eternal entity fated to forever corrupt human behavior by assisting people to gratify their unwholesome desires. Likewise, he directs and guides the action in the play. However, unlike Marlowe's character, who channels all his efforts into damning Faustus's soul to hell, Estorino's personage does not simply dedicate himself to the perversion of one man, but rather busies himself with ruining the lives of several individuals. In any case, *Que el diablo te acompañe* artfully combines the legends of Don Juan and Mephisto in a curious play that, similar to the works which inspired it, cleverly manages to integrate lighthearted entertainment with serious social commentary. Also, the influence of both Tirso de Molina and Marlowe, is clearly manifested in numerous direct references to the earlier works. Thus, in a sense, Estorino's intention is to provide a modernized version of two classic dramas. However, *Que el diablo te acompañe* is an original play in its own right, since its Don Juan and Mephisto are certainly unique creations of Estorino. Similarly, the drama's particular circumstances, as well as their setting in revolutionary Cuba, distinguish this work from its theatrical models.[172]

[172] Likewise, Arrufat notes the influence of Estorino's own *El peine y el espejo* upon the drama: "Y es significativo que en *Que el diablo te acompañe*, ya en plena madurez, reaparezcan no sólo el tema sino los dos personajes principales de aquella lejana piececita. […] La pareja protagonista de *El peine y el espejo* ha crecido y se ha complicado. Y acorde con tal crecimiento y complicación, el naturalismo ha desaparecido dando paso a una forma que pueda expresar tal desarrollo. […] Pese al humor grotesco y desmesurado, al desenfado de sus expresiones, esta casi comedia es más bien un drama" (38).

The predominant theme of *Que el diablo te acompañe*, is the corrosive effect of *machista* attitudes upon the individual and society in general. Although Estorino had already given significant attention to this matter in *El peine y el espejo, La casa vieja,* and *Ní un sí ni un no,*[173] he apparently felt that there was still need for him to say more about a subject that, in 1987, was still far from being irrelevant in Cuban society. This is shown in the stage directions at the play's beginning: "*La acción en La Habana, época actual, aunque ocurría antes y seguirá ocurriendo durante algún tiempo, me parece*" (109). Likewise, the drama's opening dialogue alludes to this perennial national problem, when Mefisto assigns roles to the three actresses who will be romantically linked to Don Juan: "NANI: ¿Pero el tema no es el teatro y la máscara? MEFISTO: No. El machismo. LAS TRES: ¿Otra vez? ¡No! ¿Hasta cuándo? MEFISTO: Mientras exista el problema" (111).

Undoubtedly, during the seven years separating the premieres of *Ni un sí ni un no* and *Que el diablo te acompañe,* the matter of *machismo* remained an ongoing concern in Cuba. The progressive legislation referred to earlier in this chapter, had officially established the government's support of equal rights between men and women, but as previously noted, old attitudes and customs were slow to change. In *Ni un sí ni un no,* Estorino focuses on the struggle of a couple who are caught between two ideological paradigms, one reactionary and the other progressive. However, in *Que el diablo te acompañe,* all characters, despite the fact that none of them outwardly protests against nor fundamentally questions revolutionary society, demonstrate firmly-entrenched regressive tendencies. Juan, like his seventeenth-century counterpart, is irredeemably *machista,* and the women in his life, similar to those in the plays of Tirso de

[173] Although Estorino has chosen to include *El robo del cochino* with *El peine y el espejo* and *La casa vieja* as part of a "trilogía de variaciones machistas sobre familias provincianas," I choose to omit it here, since I do not feel that the play's main ideological focus is *machismo* itself, despite the fact that Juanelo's resistance to chauvinistic attitudes, undeniably plays a key role in his revolutionary personal transformation.

Molina, unwittingly reinforce Juan's deplorable behavior.[174] Nonetheless, towards the end of *Que el diablo te acompañe*, Estorino tantalizingly holds out the promise for redemption, but he then snatches it away and imposes a tragic ending somewhat akin to the one in *El burlador de Sevilla*. Juan is given a chance to redeem himself and remake his family life, but he instead chooses to fulfill the terms of the *machista* code for the sake of satisfying prevailing reactionary public opinion, and as a consequence he kills his wife and is given twenty years in prison.

It should be noted that the tragic pathos of *Que el diablo te acompañe*, does not exactly involve audience sympathy for individual characters. From the beginning of the drama, Estorino makes it clear that the personages are nothing more than theatrical constructs. This is indicated by Mephisto's assigning of roles at the start of the play, as well as by the frequent asides which openly acknowledge the dramatic action as such.[175] Rather, the tragical implications of the work, relate to the qualities and characteristics of Cuban society in general. In other words, Estorino's characters, although little more than mere stylized caricatures,[176] nevertheless incarnate certain retrograde proclivities that characterize so much of the national culture. For this reason, the tragedy that befalls such personages, alludes to the widespread tragedy occasioned by the

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[174] Arrufat, however, points out the essential uniqueness of Estorino's Juan: "El Don Juan clásico es soltero, y se precia de que ninguna mujer, en su larga lista de burladas, consiguió retenerlo. Es, por definición, un enemigo del matrimonio, como lo es del orden social y el sentimiento religioso. Pues lo importante del mito no es sólo el hombre seductor, el misterio de la seducción, sino el del negador de lo establecido, el mito del transgresor. Estorino inicia su obra con un golpe inaudito: su Don Juan está casado. […] Estorino descubre en el donjuanismo lo perenne. La insatisfacción de su protagonista no concluye con la conquista, ni siquiera con el matrimonio. Por el contario, es el matrimonio con su seguridad el que despierta su donjuanismo latente, y lo acucia a nuevas conquistas. […] La esposa, que le otorga seguridad, tras cada nueva aventura, la seguridad del hogar y de la hija, pues este Don Juan no sólo se ha casado sino que es también padre" (39).

[175] Unlike *Ni un sí ni un no* and *Morir del cuento*, in *Que el diablo te acompañe*, there is no clear distinction between non-acting and acting, or theatrical and metatheatrical activity. Arrufat notes: "Estorino ha descubierto la esencia teatral del donjuanismo. *Que el diablo te acompañe* es un teatro dentro del teatro: todos los personajes se saben protagonistas de una obra teatral, y todos, personajes de otras obras. Se citan como protagonistas de Zorrilla o Molière. Se saben, sin duda, personajes teatrales. Esto toca la esencia del donjuanismo: la incansable teatralidad" (40).

[176] This deliberate stereotyping is also apparent in the referential Yamilé, the "uncommon" name for the daughters of Juan, Juan Alberto, Elvira, and Nani. Estorino's intention is to show the universal impact of the adults' misbehavior upon children. That is, Yamilé, as the daughter of all the characters, must suffer as a consequence of the misdeeds of each parent. In other words, all Cuban children are negatively affected by men who follow the *machista* code, as well as by women who in one way or another facilitate *machista* standards.

continuance of those disfunctional social mores which correspond to the situations presented in the play.

Apparently, only recently has any extensive critical commentary been focused upon *Que el diablo te acompañe.* The only example that I have been able to find is "Estorino se encuentra con Don Juan" by Antón Arrufat, published in 2005. Arrufat's article, though brief, is full of insightful commentary on the play. His review does much to suggest the many possibilities for further critical investigation of this socially, historically, and artistically relevant work.

Unlike the organic complexity of character relationships manifested in *Morir del cuento,* the interaction between personages in *Que el diablo te acompañe,* follows a neat, geometric pattern.[177] Mefisto, as noted earlier, guides the action of the play, and intervenes at key moments. Juan is of course the main protagonist. Inés is Juan's wife, Elvira is his lover, Nani is his "pasión," and his *machista* friends are Yeyo and Wichi. Juan Alberto is Juan's competitor, and Chalo is the jealous father of Nani. Also, the mixed chronology of *Morir del cuento,* is replaced in *Que el diablo te acompañe* with the sequencial presentation of events. The storyline is fairly simple. Juan is in pursuit of Nani, a vain, spoiled, irresponsible, and frivolous nineteen-year-old with aspirations of being a celebrated actress. He proposes to seduce her by promising to take photographs of her, which he says he will submit to a movie director. In order to set up his meeting with Nani, he must lie to his innocent and trusting wife Inés, create a false excuse for his suspicious and possessive lover Elvira, and shirk his important revolutionary responsibilities, which is something that he seems to be extraordinarily good at doing. The marriage between Inés and Juan, has become strained, since Juan no longer attends to his wife's needs the way he did at the beginning of their relationship. Likewise, Juan has become bored with Elvira, who feels just

[177] Perhaps by creating such easily understood character relationships (as well as by allowing Mefisto to define several of them at the play's beginning), Estorino meant to respond to the possible comments of those spectators who might have had difficulty in sorting out interactions in *Morir del cuento*.

as neglected and frustrated as Inés. Elvira finds out about Juan's activities with Nani, who has submitted to Juan's sexual advances. Elvira, seeking revenge, then finds a way to inform Inés of Juan's affair with Nani. This causes a desperate Inés to have sex with Juan Alberto, who has ostensibly come to her house to service her refrigerator. Meanwhile, Nani has rejected Juan's photos, which causes him to fly into a rage against her, and brings about the intervention of Chalo, who dies of a heart attack as a result of Juan's verbal challenges to him. Juan then finds out about his wife's infidelity. During their initial meeting, they at first heatedly argue, but then decide to forgive each other and start over. However, as previously noted, public opinion—here manifested by the *machista* taunts and ridicule of Yeyo and Wichi—provokes Juan to publicly beat his wife, and he accidentally kills her in the process. For this, he is imprisoned and hence deprived of the presence of his loving wife and daughter, whose company he had taken for granted and neglected for so long.

Although such characters are rather two-dimensional and cartoon-like, their personal qualities and behavior—though frequently exaggerated—are nonetheless meant to reflect defining aspects common to many Cuban individuals. Therefore, as in *El burlador de Sevilla*, the somewhat frivolous feel of the play, belies its deadly serious and socially relevant ideological message. For this reason, a review of each character's specific characteristics, sheds light upon the moral intent of the drama.[178]

It is evident that Juan, despite his many key similarities to the original Don Juan, is a distinctly Cuban figure, and instead of being an exceptional individual like his predecessor, is rather the image of the typical pseudo-revolutionary *machista* male living on the island in the 1980s: "INÉS: Tanta gente se llama Juan en el mundo. ELVIRA: Sí. Los Juanes se sobran"

[178] This study will focus on Juan, Nani, Elvira, Juan Alberto, Inés, and Mefisto. In my estimation, sufficient mention has already been made of Yeyo, Wichi, and Chalo.

(150). Whereas the Spanish Don Juan is a true *picaflor* in the sense that, after satisfying his desires, he immediately abandons his conquest and never looks back, Estorino's Juan appears to aspire to nothing less than a harem. In other words, he has his wife, his lover, and his "pasión," but he has no intention of sharing any one of them with another man.[179] Don Juan's personal code of honor as a *caballero*, while not constraining him from committing vile acts against women, nevertheless compels him to keep his word to another man. As for Estorino's Juan, his code of *machista* honor obligates his wife and lovers to sexually yield only to him. Should Juan's women violate this code, he is branded a cuckold, and can only restore his reputation by severely punishing those responsible for offending his dignity—hence, the tragic act that closes the play.[180]

Besides Nani, Juan has other passions in his life: "MEFISTO: ¿Y dónde está su don Juan? INÉS: Ay, no me diga nada. Ese carro va a acabar con mi vida. MEFISTO: ¡Claro! Su eterna pasión" (115). For Juan, his automobile is more than a mere method of transport. Rather, his very manhood is tied up in it. His car is where his amorous conquests take place. He notes that, "del carro a la cama no hay más que un saltico" (114). Among Juan and his friends, the type of vehicle is an indicator of a man's sexual potency. In the following dialogue, they speculate about Nani: "WICHI: Prefiere un lada nuevecito. YEYO: Enséñele un convertible y se desquicia" (114). As for Juan's friends, they are in a sense even more important to him than the

[179] For example, when Yeyo makes advances on Elvira, Juan fiercely rebukes his friend: "JUANI: Eso es lo que pasa con los socios. ¿Te das cuenta? YEYO: (*A Juani.*) Tú mismo dijiste que te la quieres quitar de arriba. JUANI: Aunque yo lo diga no lo tomes al pie de la letra. WICHI: Si uno respetara a todas las mujeres que te gustan viviría en castidad porque tú corres detrás de La Habana entera. JUANI: No, señor, Centro Habana y El Vedado. ¡Nada más! WICHI: ¿Entonces no te interesa Miramar, las escuelas de arte? JUANI: Ni se meta ahí. Eso es territorio particular de Juan Celeiro" (132). In this passage, Juan sounds just like a dominant wild male animal going about the business of establishing the limits for his breeding grounds.

[180] Arrufat considers the implications of the *machista* code in the play: "Pero el donjuanismo tiene en *Que el diablo te acompañe* un código social de conducta. Es el cumplimiento de este código, erigido por casi todos los personajes, el que genera la tragedia: Juan Celeiro, casi por azar, ultimará a su mujer adúltera, obligado por el código: los demás le imponen esa muerte" (40).

women in his life, since he can fairly well dispense with what his wife and lovers think of him, whereas his personal identity and self-worth are entirely derived from the opinion of his *socios*. Mefisto observes that all the men in Juan's group share the same essential characteristics: "Todo lo comentan, todo les divierte, no pueden vivir sin verse; la cerveza los une, el carro los ata, las conquistas se comparten. Sólo verbalmente, ¡claro!" (114). In other words, it is a "typical" group of *machista* friends bound together by only the most superficial of considerations, and utterly devoid of any sincere concern for one another. They are as a pack of voracious wolves. When one is injured (cuckolded), the rest move in for the kill (they ridicule him).

Nani can, in a certain way, be thought of as a female counterpart to Juan, only her motives are somewhat different.[181] Whereas Juan desires to seduce her in order to brag about his conquest in front of his friends, Nani intends to use Juan as a stepping stone to a film career. Juan's friends warn him of Nani's true nature:

> JUANI: Está loca por una fotos para entregárselas a un director de cine. Y las fotos las hago yo: Juani.
>
> YEYO: Sí, sí, tú le haces las fotos y el director se la come. [...]
>
> WICHI: Usted se la lleva en el carro, se gasta cuarenta cañas en llenarle las tripas de camarones, la retrata, y cuando le entrega las fotos, ella le da un besito y se las lleva al director de cine que se la come entera. (120)

Juan's vanity cannot allow him to accept such interpretations, true as they prove to be. Nani is just as egotistical and careless of other people as Juan. Only nineteen, she sees her failed

[181] Arrufat considers Nani's role in the play in the following way: "[Juan] [n]o hace el amor a las mujeres, sino que las mujeres le hacen el amor. No las conquista, sino que Nani es quien lo conquista. Estorino parece haber meditado en este grave asunto: su obra es una muestra del donjuanismo general, el de las mujeres y el de los hombres. […] *Que el diablo te acompañe* termina así como una exploración general del donjuanismo: todos intentan *seducirse*. Cada uno de estos seres, de estos entes teatrales, aspira a alcanzar su plena feminidad y su plena masculinidad chocando con su contrario en una verdadera lucha de sexos, como diría Strindberg" (39-40).

marriage of six months as nothing more than a living experience which she can draw upon for her acting (135-136). Since she thinks only of her own misdirected ambitions and misguided pursuits, she has left her daughter Yamilé with her aunt (132), and rationalizes that she is being a good mother since she visits Yamilé every now and then to play with her for a few minutes (133). Like Juan, she has no compunction about immediately becoming intimate with any member of the opposite sex who might tickle her fancy, as happens with Juan Alberto (137). If Juan's weapons of sexual conquest are his automobile, his camera, and his well-rehearsed pickup lines and techniques, Nani's arms of seduction are her exquisite face and physique, and her coldly-calculated flirtations. So, although Nani does not exactly fit in with the *machista* mind set per se, she does indeed embody a very negative and destructive kind of feminine role.

Elvira, unlike Nani, desires to possess Juan rather than simply use him as a means to an end. Fully aware that Juan is unlikely to ever abandon his wife, Elvira has resigned herself to her permanent status as Juan's lover. Her attachment to the illusion of Juan's professed love for her, is what drives her to keep the relationship intact when his interest in Nani causes him to begin to neglect her. Elvira's indignant rage against Juan's betrayal is particularly ironic, since she herself is after all Juan's extramarital paramour. Also, her decision to take revenge on Juan by telling Inés about his affair with Nani, ultimately proves to be an ill-fated choice. For all these reasons, Elvira is a particularly pathetic and hypocritical figure. Unlike Nani, Elvira is totally committed—although in an unwitting manner—to reinforcing the *machista* code of male behavior, since her open acceptance of her degrading role, perpetuates Juan's contemptible lifestyle and selfish personal outlook. Thus, the part she plays is ultimately just as despicable as the one represented by Nani, although for different reasons.

Juan Alberto may be thought of as yet another variation on the Don Juan character. In reality, there are few significant differences between Juan and Juan Alberto. Both are married and have a young daughter, and both have dedicated themselves to the practice of continuous sexual conquest. Likewise, both cling to a reactionary and illogical double-standard for sexual conduct, since they insist that men must be given complete liberty to philander, yet demand that women be strictly bound to maintain absolute faithfulness to their husbands or lovers. However, Elvira, speaking to Yeyo about Inés's affair with Juan Alberto, points out the essential weakness of such a code:

> YEYO: Inesita es incapaz de hacerle eso a Juani. Por muy mujer que sea.
>
> ELVIRA: Mejor me callo. No voy a descubrir los secretos de mi sexo. YEYO: No se puede jugar con la moral de un socio así como así. ELVIRA: ¿Y la moral de ella, chico? ¿O es que las mujeres no tenemos moral?
>
> YEYO: Ella es un espejo que refleja la moral del marido. Y el marido es mi socio y el que me importa.
>
> ELVIRA: Ay, caray, si yo te digo a ti... ¡Quédate con tu socio! Tantas leyes y total... Mejor me voy. (163)

Besides demonstrating the irrationality of the *machista code*, this dialogue also draws attention to Elvira and Yeyo's equally confused and distorted notions of what constitutes "la moral." The sanctity[182] of the marital bond as an honor-bound trust between two equals,[183] seems to have no place whatsoever in Elvira and Yeyo's deliberations. Likewise, Nani, after listening to Juan

[182] Although the word "sanctity" unavoidably implies religious worship, and may thus be considered inappropriate for use in relation to revolutionary Cuban culture, I use it here in a purely secular sense. By "sanctity," I mean the supposedly exalted, highly valued, and revered nature of the marital bond.
[183] In other words, as stipulated in the 1975 Family Code.

Alberto admit his sexual conquest of Inés, reveals the absurd irony of the latter's views with regard to women:

> JUAN ALBERTO: [...] Mujer casada y descuidada se vuelve una descocada. [...]
>
> NANI: ¿Y usted no es casado?
>
> JUAN ALBERTO: Y con una hija. [...]
>
> NANI: ¿Y su mujer está bien atendida?
>
> JUAN ALBERTO: Pregúntele.
>
> NANI: ¿La atiende usted o se la atiende otro?
>
> JUAN ALBERTO: [...] [M]i mujer no se queja nunca, porque yo la mantengo al día. [...]
>
> NANI: Pero descuida a su mujer y "mujer casada y descuidada se vuelve una descocada." Piénselo. (163-164)

Thus, although the reader or spectator is never apprised of what ultimately occurs with regard to Juan Alberto's wife, one may reasonably assume that such a situation would produce consequences similar to those which arise from the crisis between Juan and Inés. Therefore, Estorino presents Juan Alberto as Juan's double, as well as the cause of his cuckolding. So, although Juan Alberto—as Juan's likeness—is largely responsible for Juan's ultimate downfall, Juan is also indirectly responsible for his wife's extramarital tryst, since on a certain level, it is the *machista* essence of being (Juan Alberto = Juan) which has seduced Inés. In other words, it is the archetypal manifestation of the *conquistador machista*, present in both Juan and Juan Alberto, that is guilty of abandoning Inés (Juan's guilt), as well as Inés's adultery (Juan Alberto's guilt). Thus, on a metaphysical level, Juan himself—or rather, the Don Juan archetype—is the initial as well as effective cause of the tragedy which befalls him and Inés.

This makes the attempted defense of his so-called honor all the more ludicrous and absurd, because—from an ideological point of view—he himself is the source of the wrong that he feels he has suffered. In this way, Estorino shows how the *machista* code of existence inevitably spawns disunity, destructiveness, and violence.

Among all characters in the play, Inés is possibly the one with the most redeeming personal qualities.[184] She is a devoted wife and mother, and, unlike her husband, is a dedicated revolutionary worker. Her fatal flaw seems to be her unwillingness to acknowledge the overwhelming evidence that points to her husband's philandering, and her foolish hope that Juan will finally one day turn over a new leaf and give her and her daughter the care and attention that they need. Inés initially resists Juan Alberto's advances, but finally gives in when Elvira informs her of Juan's tryst with Nani. Estorino does not intend for the audience to condemn Inés because of her infidelity. Rather, her adultery is portrayed as an understandable reaction to news of her husband's deception. Inés's willingness to forgive Juan, and her insistence on saving her marriage, make her death all the more tragic. Therefore, Estorino presents Inés as the hapless female victim of *machismo* in Cuban society.

As for Mefisto, throughout the play he demonstrates his ready disposition to assist the characters in their efforts to pursue their selfish objectives. He seeks to facilitate *machista* values, since he sees them as an excellent tool for taking possession of souls and leading them down to hell. Unlike the other characters in the play, Mefisto is not a part of national society, but is rather a cosmopolitan outsider who has found in Cuban *machismo* an ideal tool for corrupting the gullible and for bringing death and misery to those individuals foolish enough to follow his diabolical counsel. Ironically, Mefisto's nefarious pursuits seem to be aided by those individuals

[184] Chalo is also given a rather sympathetic representation, despite his somewhat reactionary tendencies (135). However, he is a character of secondary importance compared to Inés.

who have willfully misunderstood the official revolutionary denial of the traditional Catholic mindset:

> JUAN: […] Sólo tenemos el momento que vivimos. Lo demás, señores, es metafísica.
>
> MEFISTO: ¿Y el infierno, hermano?
>
> JUANI: Superstición medieval.
>
> MEFISTO: Eso cree usted, ignorante. […] Ya aprenderá que hay un infierno.
>
> JUANI: Ojalá. (*Se va*.)
>
> MEFISTO: Ahí lo tienen: un escéptico. […] Ya no creen en el verdadero infierno y por lo tanto yo no existo. (156)

Obviously, Estorino is not advocating here that the Cuban population return to its Christian beliefs and acknowledge the existence of God, Satan, heaven, hell, and the like. Rather, this dialogue constitutes a subtle and thought-provoking exploration of religious terminology. Estorino means to demonstrate that, despite the hegemonic dominance of the revolutionary—and hence atheistic—paradigm, the concept of hell still remains highly relevant. In other words, although no properly-indoctrinated revolutionary Cuban can accept the dogmatic Catholic representation of hell as a distinct physical realm where unrepentant souls are to be tortured for all eternity by demons—such as Mefisto—under the authority of Satan, neither can any rational and unbiased mind deny that there is a "hell" on earth reserved for those—such as Juan—who pursue their own selfish and misguided interests without any real concern for the welfare of others. The inevitable consequences of egotistical decision-making, are tragedy and crushing remorse, which, in a purely secular sense, may be thought of as a kind of hell existing within the individual. The play is filled with several other religious references. The evidently secular

application of the religious terminology, is ironically contrasted with the purely theatrical existence of Mefisto and the theological framework in which he operates. Therefore, even though Mefisto clearly does not exist as a literal entity, he does indeed embody the anti-socialist and reactionary tendencies that continue to bring about avoidable personal tragedies on the island.

In summary, *Que el diablo te acompañe* not only offers a historical window into the issue of *machismo* in 1980s Cuba, but also draws interesting and highly relevant comparisons between the contemporary national reality and the centuries-old literary universes of such classic plays as *El burlador de Sevilla* and *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. As the old adage goes, no matter how much things change, they always stay the same. The author's statement on *cubanía* is evident in the play's portrayal of the tragedy resulting from *machista* lifestyles and attitudes on the island. Although *machismo* has traditionally defined the Cuban identity, it is entirely inconsistent with the values of *cubanía revolucionaria*. Thus, even though Estorino, by placing the Don Juan myth within the context of national culture, may have "descifrado una partícula" of the Cuban soul (Arrufat 40), his intention in doing so has been to discredit those unworthy aspects of that soul, and to implicitly advocate for its reformation.

Las penas saben nadar

Estorino's following play, *Las penas saben nadar*, also suggests the need for cultural reform, but in this case, the dramatist directs his critical eye at a very specific sector of Cuban society: the national theatrical community. In essence, the play is in part directed to those individuals involved in Cuban drama,[185] although any audience member present at the first

[185] Gacio Suárez describes how *Las penas saben nadar* directs itself to the Cuban theatrical community: "Pienso que Abelardo Estorino realiza con este texto un homenaje a todos los teatristas jóvenes y mayores, talentosos o

showing[186] of *Las penas saben nadar*—regardless of ever having had any involvement in the dramatic arts—would have witnessed much with which she might have personally identified. In the most immediate sense, the play deals with the personal frustrations and failures of one anonymous actress who, despite her exemplary dedication and childhood dreams of success, finds her efforts to achieve fame and recognition repeatedly thwarted by her own irremedial lack of acting ability. Although she initially blames her suffering on the favoritism and cronyism that has existed in Cuban theater both before and after the revolution, she finally admits at the play's end that her inability to perform convincingly is the real reason for her profound dissatisfaction with herself. However, while such an admission may soften somewhat the impact of the actress's broad accusations against the national theatrical community, it cannot entirely invalidate those accusations. For these reasons, *Las penas saben nadar* is just as much the story of some very personal frustrations and failures, as it is a review and pointed critique of Cuban theater since the beginning of the revolution.[187]

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medianos, a quienes urgidos por una vocación imperiosa triunfan y fracasan o inclusive una de las dos cosas. A aquellos que dan su vida toda a la noble y a veces ingrata carrera teatral, menos gratificante en publicidad o ganancia económica que las carreras televisivas o cinematográficas" (87).

[186] Apparently, *Las penas saben nadar*, although ostensibly created for only one particular presentation (El Segundo Festival del Monólogo in 1989), has enjoyed numerous representations upon the stage up to the present day. Gacio Suárez notes: "La extensa repercusión de este título debido a sus más de trescientas representaciones tanto nacionales como extranjeras, sus numerosos galardones, lo singularizan como un espectáculo que aún conserva vigencia, se halla vivo y constituye una extraordinaria carta de presentación de este binomio creador" (85).

[187] Gacio Suárez states: "Considero que la obra recoge la problemática subyacente en los actores del teatro, de su importancia social y su opuesto: la subvaloración, los prejuicios y afanes condenatorios que llevaron a considerarlos como muchachos terribles, gente conflictiva plagada de lacras durante las décadas precedentes a los ochenta y a la creación del Ministerio de Cultura, que cambió dicho estado de opinión y promovió acciones de reconocimiento social a los artistas" (87). Likewise, Marrero notes: "De las críticas más agudas, surge el comentario del personaje que condena al sistema burocrático donde los papeles están otorgados en base de amistad personal en vez de mérito artístico. Además hace un fuerte comentario acerca de 'obras premiadas que nunca se ponen ni en París ni en Moscú… Hay que depurar, para eso se hizo la Revolución…' Esta perspectiva necesita contexualizarse dentro de la actual corriente teatral cubana. Sería falsificar si se entendiera como 'disidente' o 'antirevolucionario.' […] Las inquietudes corresponden a las nuevas generaciones nacidas posrevolucionariamente que cuestionan la apoderación y el exclusivismo de la burocracia cultural" (183). Finally, Vázquez observes: "En *Las penas saben nadar*, Estorino establece un juego crítico con su propia producción anterior, al mismo tiempo que utiliza una serie de referencias vivenciales del movimiento teatral cubano, asimiladas desde la óptica de una actriz solitaria, mediocre y frustrada. […] Desde el punto de vista formal este monólogo plantea una indagación en las relaciones actor-público y actor-personaje. Justamente este propósito condiciona la estructura de la obra, al propiciar la asunción de las múltiples

Relatively little critical commentary has been done for *Las penas saben nadar*. Three articles worthy of mention are "*Las penas saben nadar*: un monólogo paradigmático" by Roberto Gacio Suárez, "Un espacio para tres personajes solitarios" by Liliam Vázquez, and "Teatro de Cuba en East Los Angeles" by María Teresa Marrero. The first review provides a fairly comprehensive analysis, and contains invaluable background information on the play. The latter two articles offer very brief but useful synopses of the work. Marrero's review is especially interesting, since it recounts the particulars attending the drama's staging in Los Angeles, California in May of 1990. The monologue was performed by Adria Santana, who had done the premiere performance in Cuba a year earlier. Also deserving of note is *Cuba Teatro* by Ileana Fuentes, which gives a useful summary of the play (45-50).

Continuing his experimentation with and exploration of theatrical techniques, Estorino has created an immediate drama that, similar to *Morir del cuento*, is characterized by the hyper-realistic illusion of non-acting, yet is interspersed with brief scenes in which "genuine" acting—in this case, the opening scene from *The Human Voice* (1964) by Jean Cocteau—is supposed to be taking place. However, *Las penas saben nadar*, unlike *Morir del cuento*, has only one actress, is quite short, and hardly develops its meta-theatrical aspect.[188] In fact, by continuously interrupting and postponing her representation of Cocteau's monologue, which is ostensibly the script that she has chosen for her performance, the actress spins a long, tortured, complex, and

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aristas de un personaje que funciona con una conciencia colectiva, al lograr a partir de una experiencia concreta un bosquejo analítico de problemas de nuestra vida teatral nunca antes abordados en la dramaturgia cubana. […] [S]e trata de una catarsis colectiva, que demuestra la inminencia de transformaciones cualitativas de un teatro que busca cada vez más su sentido de movimiento coherente" (39).

[188] For this context, I define metatheater as dramatic representation within a dramatic representation. Thus, according to this definition, a play performed by characters in a play, would be metatheater. Therefore, with regard to *Las penas saben nadar*, the actress's brief interpretations of Jean Cocteau's *The Human Voice*, would constitute metatheater. However, Gacio Suárez offers another interpretation of metatheater in relation to Estorino's play: "Al finalizar la década de los ochenta tenemos *Las penas saben nadar*, inscrito en las formas denominadas metateatrales, debido a que la materia nutricia que lo compone, su entorno, referentes y proyección, remiten continuamente a la escena, al mundo de los actores en relación con sus directores dentro de un grupo artístico. El tipo de monólogo de Estorino se considera 'reflexivo o de decisión' puesto que la actriz se presenta a sí misma y muestra los argumentos y contra argumentos de su valía como intérprete y del origen de sus constantes fracasos" (85).

finally drunken narrative[189] in which she says so much more about herself and the world in which she lives, than she could have ever conveyed through her interpretation of the French dramatist's play.[190] The few quick moments during which the actress attempts to perform in the usual theatrical sense, seem utterly meaningless and superficial in comparison with her gradually-intensifying unburdening of years of accumulated resentment, remorse, and disappointment. Also unlike *Morir del cuento,* in which the illusion of non-acting is finally dispelled just before the final, the actress in *Las penas saben nadar* never openly acknowledges that her performance has in fact been such. Thus, at the play's end, the original spectator would have found it difficult to realize that she had witnessed the representation of a carefully-rehearsed script, as opposed to a spontaneous and unplanned rant.

Estorino's reflection upon the state of Cuban theater in 1989 came at a time when significant reorganization of national drama was well underway. The actress's scathing condemnation of state of the performing arts on the island cannot but help to suggest how they should be reformed. In *Cuba Teatro,* Fuentes notes:

> 1989 saw the end of the rigid organization of theaters with resident companies (a type of structure which became an obstacle for creativity) and a new type of project was advanced based on the flexibility by which artists could join forces to create an artistic project. […] Is this development an inevitable and systematic

[189] Gacio Suárez observes: "Prácticamente después del tercer o cuarto trago hemos llegado a la conclusión de que es una alcohólica grave. […] El motivo del trago ayuda al autor a intensificar el ritmo del texto. La bebida coadyuva a desatar los estados de ánimo de La Actriz y los colorea, le permite declarar secretos que en un estado normal no haría" (85-86).

[190] Actually, *The Human Voice* is just one of several references made by the actress to predominantly non-Cuban theater or cinema. Marrero notes: "Vemos la polémica psicológica de un personaje cuya vida ha estado permeada por una serie de actitudes estéticas basadas en los clichés del teatro/cine internacional simbolizadas por el leit-motivo textual, *La voz humana*, de Jean Cocteau. Los puntos de referencias de papeles desempeñados por la actriz están ubicados en textos tan variados como *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, *La casa de muñecas* de Ibsen, a personajes de la cultura de medios comunicativos de masa norteamericanos, como Greta Garbo, Maryl Streep y Dustin Hoffman" (183).

> patricide that art must [commit in order] to achieve renewal and development? In some measure, [it is]. But there is also a will to establish a bridge to the experimental attitude of the late 60's, more as a [continuation] than as a nostalgic look at the past. (59-60)

Therefore, the hyper-realism of *Las penas saben nadar*, constitutes the next level of formal experimentation in Cuban theater, which, as Fuentes has observed, had its beginnings in the 1960s. Likewise, the play's pointed critique of the island's theatrical community purposely alludes to the long-overdue process of transformation that had begun to gain momentum among the nation's directors and thespians. However, as mentioned earlier, the actress in *Las penas saben nadar*, despite her insightful commentary, is completely lacking in natural theatrical ability. For these reasons, and by her own admission, the actress's profound sense of personal failure is not, in the final analysis, a consequence of the inadequacies and shortcomings of Cuban drama itself.[191]

In the course of the play, the actress passes through three distinct stages of mental and emotional awareness: 1) pretending that everything is fine; 2) blaming the Cuban theatrical establishment for her problems; 3) admitting that, despite whatever problems may exist among the performing arts community, she is an unavoidably bad actress. Her outlook and mood slowly evolve as she continuously takes sips from a liquor bottle, from which she begins drinking initially in order to calm her frayed nerves, and which she eventually employs as fuel for the blazing fire of internal rage that burns within her. The alcohol loosens her tongue, and causes her to blurt out—at times infuriated and in other moments horribly despondent—her disappointing and frequently miserable personal history. At first, the intoxication emboldens her to justify her

[191] However, according to Gacio Suárez, Estorino does not definitively resolve the matter: "¿Qué sucedió, el limitado o casi nulo talento, o la inseguridad sembrada durante años en su interior debido al rechazo de los directores y los ínfimos papeles que le asignaban? Esta cuestión queda en la ambigüedad" (86).

personal failures by laying the blame on others, whether family, friends, fellow actors, playwrights, or directors. In particular, she singles out Cuban directors for her most vehement condemnation, since it is they who have repeatedly denied her the roles she has coveted. Then, when she has become sufficiently inebriated, she confesses that she was once given the chance to play the starring role of Nora in Ibsen's masterpiece, *Doll's House* (1878), and that when the premiere had finished, she was greeted with unenthusiastic applause (197). This final admission serves to effectively refute her earlier justifications for her personal failures, and somehow brings her back to her original objective, which is to perform Cocteau's monologue. However, after repeating the same scarce collection of lines, she once again decides to postpone her performance of *The Human Voice*: "Seguiré mañana. Sí seguiré mañana. Si cuento hasta doce con el vaso en la cabeza es que me va a quedar genial. (*Se coloca el vaso en la cabeza y cuenta hasta doce.*) El primer premio es mío. Seguro" (198).[192] The wonderful irony of these lines is that *Las penas saben nadar*, premiered at the II Festival del Monólogo, earned the Premio Segismundo al Mejor Texto in Havana in 1989 (Estorino 179). Thus, the fictional bad actress's supposed non-acting marks her greatest personal triumph as a thespian, and, in effect, is a tribute to Estorino's artistic creativity.

In a sense, the actress's coming to terms with her own limitations and shortcomings, parallels the same process with respect to the national theatrical community's growing realization of the need for internal reform. Similarly, and perhaps most significantly, the soul-searching taking place among Cuba's artists in 1989, undoubtedly owed much to the momentous changes taking place at that time in island society and the world at large. Cuba's longstanding

[192] Gacia Suárez explains why the actress resorts to this kind of childish superstition: "Se inventa de nuevo sus apuestas mentales: 'si cruzo aquella puerta… una gran actriz… una gran actriz…' Es el único recurso que le queda para lograr cierta confianza y quizás volver otro día para quejarse de nuevo de los demás y del destino, para lograr la catarsis y así aliviar un tanto su maltrecho ego" (86).

relationship with the Soviet Union was rapidly disintegrating as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, and the subsequent loss of economic support from the Kremlin.[193] Cuba found itself truly alone in the world for the first time in its history. 1989 marks the very beginning of this collective process of transformation which would soon culminate in the so-called Special Period (1990-2000). Staten summarizes the prevailing conditions in Cuban society at the end of the Cold War:

> Although no one, including Castro, predicted the abrupt end of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, it was clear that he knew that any change in the preferential relationship with these countries could threaten his own revolution. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall and of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Castro found Cuba truly independent for the first time in its history. Yet, that very independence threatened his revolution like no other event since 1959. […] Castro, the aging charismatic revolutionary and the ultimate Machiavellian political survivor, was forced to rise to the challenge of a post-Cold War world. (121-122)

However, such concerns, while significant when taking into account the historical contextualization of *Las penas saben nadar*, are neither directly nor indirectly addressed in the play. Rather, as noted previously, the drama primarily concerns itself with the complex and fragile personality of the actress. Her personal pathos reflects in so many ways upon that of Cuban society in general. Her hopes, dreams, failures, and frustrations are those of the audience, although the specific situations may not be exactly the same. As Shakespeare wrote in *As You*

[193] Staten notes: "With the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union during the period 1989-1991, Soviet petroleum exports to Cuba dropped by 25 percent in 1990 and by 1992 oil shipments had declined from a high of 13 million tons in 1989 to 1.8 million tons. Food shipments dropped by more than 50 percent in 1991 and the Cuban economy contracted by as much as 50 percent between 1989 and 1992" (126).

Like It: "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players." In a metaphysical sense, by laughing and jeering at the untalented actress, the audience discovers that it has been doing the same thing to itself. Are her hopes and dreams any more foolish than those of the revolutionary Cuban population as a whole? Are her failures and frustrations any more exceptional than those of her innumerable compatriots? Actually, unlike the actress's disappointing experiences with the theatrical community, other depressing aspects of her life—such as her family's ridicule, her failed relationships, her poverty, the loss of her child—must have elicited many personal responses from original audience members.[194] Thus, if one symbolically regards, as Shakespeare has done in another context, the actress's profession as a representation of life itself, it is apparent that her story embodies, to a significant extent, the collective history of Cuban society during the years of the revolution, and alludes to that society's current condition. For these reasons, a detailed analysis of the actress's unhappy life brings to light the playwright's unflinching commentary on the profound state of despair and hopelessness common to so many Cubans in 1989.

The opening of the work quickly establishes the most fundamental characteristics of the actress's personality. Her makeup is excessive and highly artificial, and her clothing outfit unnecessarily complex. Before she has even spoken, she has given the audience the impression of a contrived and rather false disposition. She walks onto the stage carrying a small table and a bag with a telephone in it. These are supposed to be the props she will use for her monologue. Since she herself—rather than one of the stagehands—has brought them onstage, it is apparent

[194] Gacio Suárez notes the universalizing intent of *Las penas saben nadar*: "[L]a dramaturgia abarca a todos los humanos, profesionales o no, quienes cargan sus frustraciones por no lograr la trascendencia, el reconocimiento en la labor a la cual ha dedicado sus empeños. Entonces el teatro vuelve a convertirse en el ámbito metafórico de la sociedad toda, de la dicotomía entre ganadores y perdedores, entre talentosos y fracasados. Quizás ahí está el logro relevante de este monólogo, lo que le permite permanecer en el interés del público y trascender. […] Estorino universaliza un tema, un conflicto, una historia de una zona muy particular de la realidad, de la cual se extraen lecturas también singulares y generalizadas a la vez" (87).

that her performance constitutes an interruption in the schedule of the festival. The actress immediately affirms that this is the case in her first words to the audience:

> Yo quiero decir algo. Sí, ya sé que hay una programación, pero, ¿por qué no voy a interrumpirla? ¿Acaso a mí no me han interrumpido mi vida? […] [E]stoy cansada, cansada de los programas, las reglas, las normas, las orientaciones. No me voy a callar, no me va a callar nadie. ¿O es que aquí no hay oportunidades iguales para todos? […] Este es un Festival con convocatoria abierta para todo el mundo. Había una fecha tope, lo sé, pero ese día no pude venir. (181)

In these few lines, the actress has thus demonstrated that she is irresponsible, scatterbrained, resentful, and rebellious.[195] Also, by drawing attention to the revolution's stated goal of "oportunidades iguales para todos," the actress—although specifically referring to the open invitation to participate in the festival—alludes to the essential incompatibility between such an egalitarian creed and the theatrical profession, in which the best roles tend to go to the best actors. In other words, whereas the acting profession may be rather discriminatory, the monologue festival is essentially democratic, and she intends to take full advantage of her opportunity. As becomes clear as the play unfolds, she sees the event as a chance to do those things that have generally been denied her in other theatrical contexts:

> Ah, sí, leí la convocatoria y me dije: voy a presentarme, ésta es la oportunidad que he esperado toda la vida: verme sola, solita en medio del escenario, sin compartirlo con un actor que no sabe relacionarse, sin el adorno de una escenografía que me roba la imagen, y además, sin estar iluminada por un

[195] Gacio Suárez observes: "[L]a actriz irrumpe en el patio de butacas para declararse transgresora de la organización del evento que se efectúa y en el cual quiere ubicarse. Veremos cómo frecuentemente, a veces a su pesar, desnuda sus motivaciones. Habla de transgresión y es la primera que transgrede, en franca contradicción con el contexto teatral que le corresponde" (85).

> diseñador que hace efectos de luces tan artísticos que a nadie se le ve la cara. (181-182)

Hence, years of professional frustration are to be utterly forgotten, and a marvelous representation of *The Human Voice* is to begin. However, Cocteau's play never materializes, and the actress uses her time upon the stage for doing nothing else but reviewing the sad details of her personal history.

After taking a drink to calm her nerves, the actress speaks of her fondness for certain famous actresses, such as Greta Garbo, and mentions some of her favorite plays, all of which are foreign. It is apparent that she prefers non-Cuban drama, despite her assurance that "yo creo en nuestras raíces" (183). In any case, she explains that she has chosen to do *The Human Voice*, a French play, since a famous Cuban author (unnamed) has failed to carry through with his promise to write her a monologue for the festival. This leads her to reflect upon several of her experiences over the years as an actress. She remembers when she did the dying scene for Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and was tossed into a swimming pool by the other actors (184). She recalls when she tried out for the part of Martirio in García Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba,* and was assigned to be one of two hundred faceless mourners: "Tú sabes lo que es que uno se pase cuatro años en una escuela estudiando actuación y te pongan con un montón de mujeres a rezar el escenario" (186). This painful memory impels her to once again reach for a drink: "Un buchito, hijo mío, es para calmarme y olvidarme de ese grupo mediocre y de todos esos directores mediocres que pueblan nuestro mediocre movimiento teatral, incapaces de darse cuenta donde hay un temperamento" (186). Her next remembrance is of when she auditioned for the part of Juliet in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet.* After much rigorous and determined practice with her friend Kiko, who was preparing for the role of Romeo, the director (a foreigner)

chose Kiko and a black women who was more than ten years older than the actress (186-188).[196] Her mood completely ruined, the actress insists that "[a] mí no me interesa la fama," and once again takes a drink (188).

She then begins to explore her origins as a thespian, which remit to her childhood. She affirms that "yo quise ser actriz desde niña" (188). Despite her family's lack of support, and their complete recognition of her lack of talent, she manages to gain acceptance to an acting school (188-190). It is around this time that she begins to develop a childishly superstitious outlook, according to which she thinks that she can assure success or avoid failure: "Si cruzo la puerta llegaré a ser una gran actriz, si cruzo la puerta sin que me vean llegaré a ser una gran actriz. Y así. Y cuando no sucedía lo que esperaba, decía: ésta no, es la próxima cuadra la que vale" (190). Such magical thinking is evidently a psychological mechanism for dealing with overwhelming feelings of self-doubt and insecurity. It also suggests that, on a deeper level, she is aware that her efforts, no matter how determined, cannot overcome an inherent lack of histrionic ability.

Thoughts of the past then turn to idealized fantasies for the future. The actress imagines herself as being like Jean Harlow when doing *The Human Voice*. She envisions herself as a celebrated actress who, after finishing her performance, is pursued by a romantic admirer from the audience. This particular fantasy seems like something out of a very bad Hollywood script. Hence, under the influence of several ounces of alcohol by this point, the actress has begun to allow purely cinematic images to assume real dimensions. She sees herself being offered coveted parts in films, attracting attention from strangers in the street drawn to her star power, revenging

[196] Garcio Suárez states that this scene most probably has a basis in historical reality: "En un momento se relata una anécdota sucedida durante la década de los sesenta: la selección de una actriz negra para la Julieta del montaje realizado por Otomar Kreycha, aunque aquí no se menciona al realizador, decisión que produjo opiniones encontradas en su momento" (86). Also, since Shakespeare's Juliet is only supposed to be fourteen years old, one might presume that a director would give preference to a younger actress for the role.

herself—by refusing to accept his offers to work with him—upon the director who has denied her roles in the past, buying a new home and car with her generous salary, and visiting with her daughter in the ritzy Varadero section of Havana (190-193).[197]

This pleasing reverie is suddenly and unexpectedly cut off by "[*u*]*n grito repentino de dolor*" (193). The actress forlornly admits that her exalted dreams can never come true. Sadly, she acknowledges that real life is nothing like the world portrayed in theater and movies, where one can die from love: "Ojalá se muriera de amor, pero no, uno se queda vivo y camina por las mismas calles por donde caminó enamorada. […] No se muere de amor, se agoniza eternamente de amor" (193). She remembers her love affair with the Brazilian revolutionary João, who sexually enjoyed her for a time, then abandoned her forever to return to his homeland. She recalls her hippie husband Riki, who refused to cut his hair, and as a result remained unemployed.[198] Their marriage did not last long, and the couple's daughter, Linda, was given by the actress to her mother when the girl was two years old. She exclaims: "¡Coño, qué sola estoy!" (195). If the audience has had any doubts, at this moment it becomes abundantly clear that the actress's personal life has been an unmitigated disaster. All her hopes and dreams have ended in disillusionment, failure, and unwanted solitude.

Sorrow is quickly replaced by rage as she once again directs her fury at the director who has frustrated her quest to attain her professional goals. She accuses him of blatant favoritism, then claims that the same process operates among the small coterie of Cuban playwrights whose work is frequently published and produced. In fact, for her, the entire theatrical community is

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[197] Gacio Suárez notes: "[C]omo los personajes de *Las aceitunas* de Lope de Rueda, [la Actriz] discute consigo misma sobre la marca del carro que podrá comprarse con los hipotéticos éxitos y la necesidad de un garaje que no posee" (86).

[198] The actress reflects upon the relatively more rigorous ideological conditions of the 1960s: "[M]ientras más corto tenías el pelo más alto era el salario. En las mujeres era distinto. No era una cuestión de pelo sino de falda. Mientras más corta la minifalda más hondos los problemas ideológicos. Las monjas eran consideradas las herederas del marxismo-leninismo" (195).

governed by nepotistic principles: “Porque hay una mafia, una piña, una piña de directores, una piña de jurados, una piña de actores. ¡Viva la producción de la piña!” (196). According to the actress, this problem can be solved by giving each one her due: “¡Coño! Hay que reconocer el talento. Para eso hicimos la revolución” (196). The theater must be cleansed of its corruption: “Hay que acabar con todo, hay que limpiar el fango y la mierda, y dejar los escenarios deslumbrantes. Hay que encontrar la pureza de la vida, sí, hay que depurar y depurar y depurar” (196).[199] However, the actress must finally confess that her failure is ultimately her own fault. She remembers the audience’s lukewarm response to her portrayal of Nora in Ibsen’s *Doll House*, a part to which she dedicated herself in both body and soul. Hence, getting a choice role cannot solve her problems, since by her own admission she is “una mierda, una mala actriz” (197). The blame is God’s. She calls for a revolution to overthrow this God—particularly ironic in a society that has officially denied his existence—who is very unequal in distributing talent among his creatures. She screams: “¡Voy a destrozar los teatros del mundo entero!” (197). At last, all flimsy rationalizations have been abandoned, and her burning envy is nakedly exposed. She makes one last halfhearted effort to do Cocteau’s monologue, promises to do it tomorrow, then drunkenly staggers offstage.

Las penas saben nadar comprises a wide range of topics in a mere sixteen pages. As noted earlier, although the play specifically addresses aspects of contemporary Cuban theater, there is much in it that applies to the concerns of the general population. In fact, one might argue that the play, which is ostensibly about the life of one comically tragic individual, is really a clever commentary on the animic state of Cuban society as a whole. Just as the actress claims to

[199] Gacio sees a connection between these lines and some key moments in former plays by Estorino: “Aquí advertimos una oración que nos recuerda al Estorino de *La casa vieja* y *El robo del cochino*. Ese afán por la búsqueda de la verdad, por encontrar lo ético, lo justo, eliminando todo lo que se le oponga” (86).

be upon the stage for the purpose of performing *The Human Voice*, but then does something else, perhaps Estorino himself has, on a conscious level, succeeded in convincing his audience that *Las penas saben nadar* is nothing more than a curious personal history, while on a subconscious level the spectator senses that she is witnessing a variation on her own life. Were it not for such a personal audience connection with the work, it would be difficult to explain the longstanding demand for its performance.

In many ways, the actress is the stereotypical irresponsible Cuban, inasmuch as she leads a dissolute and directionless existence. Like many of her compatriots, she is not counterrevolutionary, but she finds herself chafing under the rules and regulations of socialist society. She is not the only one who sees a fundamental contradiction between the egalitarian goals of revolutionary ideology and the rather more discriminatory reality of everyday life on the island. Undoubtedly, other Cubans can identify with the personal frustration that results from the repeated failure to obtain one's goals, regardless of the passion, dedication, and determination that one applies for the purpose of attaining them. Despite revolutionary assurances that anyone can accomplish what she desires, in certain cases, no amount of effort and will can overcome a lack of natural ability. The idealistic vision for a perfect Cuba, cannot survive when confronted with the reality of a nation of imperfect—and thus fully human—individuals. Since the nation and its people are imperfect, it is natural for them to turn their gaze to a idealized foreign world, in particular one embodied by imported films and plays. It is little wonder that those individuals who seek escape from painful personal and collective realities, might find solace by fantasizing about living according to idyllic foreign existential models, and might feel an instinctive repulsion towards anything that is authentically Cuban. Like the actress, such people may seek comfort in alcohol, childish superstitions, and daydreams of a perfect future. Also like her, such

individuals must eventually come to the sad realization that such dreams must be forever unattainable. Many will have undergone divorce, will have given their children to their own parents, and will have found themselves utterly alone. They will have wondered if Cuban cronyism—so inimical to the populist spirit of the revolution—has cost them their dreams, or whether they have simply blamed others for their own failures. Finally, the remnants of religious belief, despite the established hegemony of revolutionary ideology, still exercise their influence among the national population, which to a significant extent continues to see personal and collective failure as the consequence of a rather arbitrary and unfair divine decree.

Estorino does not prescribe any remedy for the actress's lamentable condition. Therefore, in *Las penas saben nadar*, he offers no solution to the universal problems which the play raises. Although the actress is indeed talentless, this fact cannot explain, in and of itself, the deplorable state in which she finds herself. Estorino neither implies that the actress is free of responsibility for her own failures, nor does he indicate that she is entire to blame for her misery. Likewise, the Cuban citizen must ask herself how much she herself is at fault for her personal problems, and how much of her suffering is owed to collective factors. Thus, the dramatist obliges the spectator to take a hard look at her life and the life of the nation itself, and to strive to put away all false rationalizations that shield her from unpleasant truths. For Estorino, the essence of true *cubanía* is relentless and unflinching self-analysis at both the personal and collective level. As mentioned before, the Cuban existential paradigm—not the idealized one but the actual one—is to a significant extent encarnated in the actress, who in so many ways signifies the striving spirit of national determination, which has struggled to realize its dreams in spite of innumerable setbacks. In this sense, the actress represents the eternal Cuban vision of a better tomorrow, forever postponed by the seemingly insuperable obstacles of the present day. This forms the

basis of audience identification with the character. The nation's act upon the world's stage has been equally problematic.

As Cuba's problems deepened after the fall of the Soviet Union, and as the nation began to enter into its Special Period, Estorino's dramatic production would continue unabated regardless of his advancing age. The decade of the 1990s and the final year of the Twentieth Century would see the author present three original new plays, one of which, *Vagos rumores*, would be an adaptation of *Milanés* as well as a unique interpretation of the life of the poet from Matanzas. His other two original works from that time period, *Parece blanca*, a "versión infiel" (303) of the novel *Cecilia Valdés* by Cuban writer Cirilio Villaverde (1812-1894), and *El baile*, would once again demonstrate his enduring interest in exploring and investigating the complexities of Cuban reality.

CHAPTER SIX:

1990-1999: Revisiting the past in new and innovative ways.

The decade of the 1990s would see Estorino further immerse himself in his investigations of the Cuban past. His first two plays of those years, *Vagos rumores* (1992) and *Parece blanca* (1994), both remit to the Nineteenth Century. Although *El baile* (1999) is essentially an example of immediate drama, its principal character, La Mujer (Nina), spends most of the play recalling and dramatizing important events from her past, most of which took place in the first half of the Twentieth Century. At a time when the nation was experiencing a number of transformative, trying, and at time divisive changes—such as the Special Period, the radical reorganization of the economy, and the legalization of the US dollar, to name a few—Estorino's drama served to remind the citizenry of their common past as a people, and to call their attention to the ideological origins of the revolution that had guided their collective destiny for so many years.

In terms of dramatic content, the 1990s in some ways witnessed a decline in the author's production of fully original material. *Vagos rumores*, although in many ways significantly different from *Milanés*, is basically a skillful reworking of its predecessor. Similarly, *Parece blanca*, while offering a decidedly unprecedented interpretation of the novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), does not constitute a fully unique work *per se*. Only *El baile* appears to be inherently underivative in its conception. Hence, although there is no point in extensively reconsidering the ideological content of *Milanés*—covered in Chapter Four of this study—as manifested in *Vagos rumores*, there are nonetheless certain modifications present in the latter play which reflect upon the spirit of the 1990s in Cuba, as well as upon the artistic development of the author. Similarly, the interests of this study would not be properly served by a thorough analysis of the novel

Cecilia Valdés, to which an abundant amount of critical commentary has already been directed, and to which the interested reader might refer. Instead, with regard to *Parece blanca*, I have chosen to focus upon the historical and ideological significance of first presenting such a work to a Cuban audience in 1994. Also, one must take into account those aspects of Villaverde's novel which Estorino has chosen to emphasize, and the specific manner in which he has done so. By means of such an exploration, one may come to more completely understand the implicit dialogue that the dramatist intended to establish with the original spectator.

As noted in the previous chapter, the year that the Berlin Wall fell (1989), marked the beginning of a major paradigmatic shift in Cuba. In the early 1990s, owing to the precipitous collapse of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the island nation suddenly found itself without accustomed economic and geopolitical support. These circumstances forced Fidel Castro and his government to implement new financial policies and legal initiatives. By 1991, when the Soviet Union was formally dissolved, Cuba, deprived of generous Soviet support and now subjected to grave material privations, found itself in the midst of its Special Period. Cubans were placed on a wartime economy, wages were frozen, purchasing power was eroded, fuel shortages and electrical blackouts were common, public transportation became unreliable, food rationing was tightened, and living standards were reversed. Understandably, many Cubans were dismayed by these changes, and in 1992 and 1993, more than 7,000 *balseros*, many of whom had presumably decided to leave because of growing economic hardship, made the perilous passage to the United States from Cuba in makeshift boats or rafts. In reaction to the growing economic desperation, the regime legalized the use of the US dollar in August of 1993. This decision "allowed the government to capture [much] needed foreign exchange" in order to pay for its imports and debts. In 1993, the Cuban authorities

"started to move away from [their] traditional emphasis on state-run farms," which were "transformed into member-operated cooperatives." Also in that year, *paladares,* or private home restaurants, were legalized. By 1994, the tourism industry was creating more income than the sugar industry. As a consequence, "[t]he decision was made to encourage the growth of tourism on the island." That same year, "the government legalized, once again, the farmers' markets, where surplus crops could be sold for profit." As a result, black market sales, which had been very active during the earlier part of the Special Period, declined. In September of 1995, the revolutionary leadership "dramatically changed the law concerning foreign investments on the island. Both joint ventures […] and complete foreign ownership of companies were legalized." (Staten 126-130).

Such decisions would have far-reaching ramifications for the general population. Among these was the widening gap between the wealthier and poorer sectors of the citizenry.[200] In particular, those individuals working in the tourism and service industries, which have access to dollars, found themselves with much more purchasing power than fellow workers in peso-based professions, such as those associated with state-sponsored institutions. Thus, a taxi driver who dealt with foreign tourists, could earn considerably more money than a university professor. As Staten notes: "This presents a major dilemma for a country that invests so much in education. What is most evident is that resentment among those in the peso economy is growing and the egalitarian ideal of the revolution is clearly being threatened by the dual dollar and peso economies" (131). Although by 1996 the economy was growing again, and Cuba had passed through the worst part of its Special Period, it was nevertheless evident, in spite of the fact that the nation's much-vaunted systems of public services and support remained largely intact, that the revolution's socialist foundations had been considerably compromised (Staten 131).

[200] As will be demonstrated further ahead, such earning discrepancies tended to follow racial lines.

From among Estorino's plays of the 1990s, only *El baile*, in which La Mujer (Nina) is compelled to sell a treasured piece of jewelry as a consequence of the Special Period's material difficulties, appears to directly address the economic and political concerns of that decade. Although *Parece blanca*—which, the same as Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés*, treats the problematic matter of race in Nineteenth-Century Cuba—does not specifically refer to the original audience's contemporary reality, it is nonetheless clear that, at the time of the play's premiere in 1994, the general population's centuries-old preoccupation with ethnic origins had been made even more acute by growing—and to a significant extent racially-biased—economic inequalities.[201] Hence, the concerns raised in *Parece blanca*, despite being contextualized within a relatively distant era, would, as will be shown, have a decidedly contemporary significance for the spectator attending the play's premiere. As for *Vagos rumores*, if it is considered as a modified version of *Milanés*, one might take into account the changes that the author made to the original version, and determine how such alterations reflect upon the spirit of the early 1990s in Cuba.

Vagos rumores

At least two critical articles dedicated to *Vagos rumores* are available at the time of this writing. "*Vagos rumores*: un acontecimiento teatral" by Reinaldo Montero, examines the most significant differences between the original and revised versions of *Milanés*. Likewise, in "*Vagos*

[201] Unsurprisingly, those who have benefitted the most from the partial conversion of the Cuban economy to the use of the US dollar, are those of more white, or European, origin. Evenson notes: "Regrettably, measures taken to confront the economic hardships that descended on the Cuban population in the past decade have had an unintentional but disparate racial impact. In order to increase the inflow of hard currency, the Cuban government legalized the use of the U.S. dollar among the Cuban population and, thus, encouraged relatives living abroad to send money to their families. However, it is generally acknowledged that since Cuban emigrants were predominantly white, the remittances could widen economic differences between white and black Cubans on the island. Further, as a measure to absorb growing unemployment, the Cuban government permitted growth of self-employment into a broader area of services than previously permitted, including small family restaurants. To some extent, since whites have greater access to resources to engage in such activities, often receiving assistance from relatives abroad, this measure might also contribute to increasing economic differences although many self-employed laborers such as plumbers, carpenters, locksmiths, etc., are non-white" (130-131).

rumores de Estorino: experimentalismo y reafirmación de cubanía" by Vivian Martínez Tabares (Didascalias 47-54), the author considers many of the aesthetic and content changes apparent in *Vagos rumores*.

Stylistically, the most evident difference between *Vagos rumores* and *Milanés*, is the fact that the former is significantly more condensed that the latter. In a sense, *Vagos rumores* may be thought of as a destillation of the dramatic essence of *Milanés*, since the revised version preserves many of its predecessor's most memorable and moving lines while eliminating a considerable amount of dialogue. The huge cast of *Milanés* is reduced to a mere three actors in *Vagos rumores*, two of whom—Carlota and Mendigo—represent the roles of more than one character. Even so, the twelve represented personages in *Vagos rumores*, are only slightly more than one fifth of the fifty-eight actors needed for *Milanés*.[202] Likewise, the script for *Vagos rumores*, at about forty pages, is less than half the length of *Milanés*'s one hundred pages. Finally, while *Vagos rumores* preserves the largely chronological presentation of *Milanés*, it dispenses with the formal divisions of life episodes. The end result of this particular change is a faster-paced and more dynamic script. Thus, purely from the standpoint of dramatic technique, it is clear that *Vagos rumores* is a more focused and mature work than *Milanés*.

Another significant change apparent in *Vagos rumores*, is the play's use of metatheatrical devices. Although in *Milanés* the poet and Mendigo acknowledge that they are only imagined entities as opposed to real human beings, at no point do they identify themselves as actors, nor refer to the presence of the audience. In *Vagos rumores*, however, all three characters openly admit at certain moments in the drama—as do most of Estorino's theatrical characters from the 1980s—that they are actors upon the stage performing before a group of spectators. Owing to the

[202] Undoubtedly, the drastically reduced cast of *Vagos rumores*, as well as its significantly decreased need for stage props, would have improved its chances for production at a time when funding for government-sponsored cultural activities was, as a consequence of the deprivations of the Special Period, severely restricted.

application of this method, *Vagos rumores* creates even more emotional distancing from its subject than *Milanés*.

As significant as all of the aforementioned changes might be, perhaps the most important modification relates to the almost complete elimination from *Vagos rumores* of the contestatory content (with relation to the hegemonic revolutionary paradigm) present in *Milanés*. Estorino does not include authoritarian government officials—such as El Español, El Fiscal, and El Gobernador de Matanzas—in his revised version. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Four, such characters allude, in a highly ironic way, to the misgovernance of the island in the 1970s. Undoubtedly, their presence in *Milanés*, had much to do with the fact that the play, written in 1973, would have to wait until 1984 for the Cuban cultural authorities to approve its premiere.[203] Hence, by removing such problematic personages from his script, Estorino quite possibly hoped to improve the leadership's reception of the drama.[204] Whereas in *Milanés* the Matanzas poet embodies the spirit of *cubanía* in opposition to a Nineteenth-Century regime which is implicitly and subversively compared with Castro's government, in *Vagos rumores* Milanés is simply a fully-humanized historical figure who in important ways incarnates the nascent revolutionary spirit. In other words, the Milanés in the original play has a highly problematic relationship to the contemporary socialist leadership, while his counterpart in the adapted work largely serves as an emblem of hegemonic revolutionary values.[205] Certainly, the Cuban cultural authorities of the

[203] According to my sources, this is the only representation of *Milanés* that has occurred up to the time of this writing. I have not been able to determine if the director on that occasion, Roberto Blanco, presented an unexpurgated version of the play, or whether he chose to eliminate certain scenes containing subversive intent. Another probable contributing reason for why the play has only been staged once, is its great length, ambitious use of props, and profusion of characters.

[204] Likewise, in *Vagos rumores*, Estorino only includes one reference to the problem with censorship in Nineteenth-Century Cuba (278), in which the issue is presented as an insuperable obstacle. However, in *Milanés*, the references to censorship—considered at length in Chapter Four of this study—imply that there is a way for the dedicated writer to "burlar" the government's vigilance.

[205] However, this does not mean that the ideological content of *Vagos rumores* bears no relationship to the Cuban reality of the 1990s. In this regard, Martínez Tabares states: "La clara voluntad de actualización que guía el texto

1990s were in many ways no more tolerant of contestatory literature than they had been during the previous two decades. Referring to the final decade of the Twentieth Century, Pérez-Stable notes:

> Cuban politics left no room for the natural cycles of support and disaffection that all polities experience. The absolutist politics of *la patria* penalized or ostracized *citizens* known to harbor even the most trivial reservations. Forty years after the revolution, Cubans still had no options but to support (or pretend to support) the government unconditionally or face jail, death, exile, or silence; the political system provided no space for partial or halfhearted support, let alone peaceful opposition. […] *La doble moral* gripped the conscience of citizens whose only recourse was talking in the hallways. (The Cuban Revolution 192)

Therefore, Estorino's revised—and to a significant extent self-censored—version of *Milanés* quite probably represents the continuation of a marked tendency, begun with *Ni un sí ni un no* in 1980, to scrupulously avoid any criticism—whether direct or implied—of the revolutionary leadership.

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hace que las personalidades políticas y literarias reales de la época—Del Monte y Plácido—se muestren a través de un prisma cuestionador de actitudes contradictorias. La necesidad de un proceder consecuente por parte del poeta—del hombre—para cumplir su misión del lado del deber sin claudicación ni escapismo; la inutilidad de los ideales mediatizados para alcanzar la justicia social y la necesidad de la lucha sin cuartel en condiciones de violencia son debatidos desde diversos ángulos y el efecto de la discusión rebasa el marco del esclavismo decimonónico para aludir a la realidad contemporánea. Curiosas asociaciones de insospechada vigencia afloran del encendido debate entre Milanés y Del Monte y el ideal del artista, su lealtad y el concepto de responsabilidad social se cuestionan desde ahora mismo. La defensa de los valores patrios y de la soberanía no responde únicamente a las condiciones de coloniaje español sino que se inscribe en un reclamo de reafirmación que cobra hoy significado de batalla por la superviviencia y en el cual la fidelidad a los principios está en el centro mismo de la lucha de las ideas" (Didascalias 53-54). Still, such deliberately non-specific comments by Martínez Tabares in no way imply that *Vagos rumores* criticizes Castro's regime.

Parece blanca

However, the author's decision to eschew any pointed commentary aimed at the regime, did not prevent him in the 1980s from meaningfully addressing important social issues, nor would he refrain from boldly taking on such matters in the 1990s. *Parece blanca*, which unflinchingly explores Cuba's deeply-rooted and extremely problematic racial concerns, is certainly a testimony to this fact. At around forty-five pages, Estorino's version of *Cecilia Valdés* is necessarily "infiel" (303), since Villaverde's narrative, at over eight hundred pages, is simply too lengthy to adapt to the theater in a fully comprehensive manner. In addition to missing numerous scenes and considerable dialogue from the novel, *Parece blanca* also differs from its model insofar as its characters are metatheatrical. They regularly interrupt the dramatic action to consult and philosophically reflect upon the text of *Cecilia Valdés*, acknowledge themselves as fictional characters, and refer to the presence of the theatergoers. Thus, in *Parece blanca*, Estorino once again uses such dramatic techniques in order to emotionally distance his audience from the action—just as he had previously done in plays such as *Ni un sí ni un no*, *Morir del cuento*, and *Que el diablo te acompañe*—and thus assists the spectator to dispassionately consider the ideological issues that the work raises. Also, this particular method serves to draw attention to the contemporary significance of the events portrayed. In other words, since the personages in *Parece blanca* continually emphasize the artificially constructed nature of the dramatic action, they likewise implicitly stress the relationship between the modern-day reader of *Ceclia Valdés* and the Nineteenth-Century reality embodied in the novel: "ROSA: (*Se acerca al libro en el facistol.*) […] Mientras el libro está cerrado nada sucede. Son letras muertas. De pronto, unos ojos desconocidos recorren estas páginas y todo vive: las casas, el murmullo de las palomas, el cuchicheo de los esclavos y esa apretazón en la garganta en el momento que alguien

muere" (350). Even though the institutionalized racism evident in *Cecilia Valdés* had of course been long ago abolished by the time of the premiere of *Parece blanca* in 1994, it was nonetheless painfully apparent—as previously noted—that reactionary racist attitudes and mindsets still continued to characterize much of the Cuban population.[206]

At the time of this writing, a handful of studies on *Parece blanca* have been published: "Na(o)ciones en *Parece blanca* de Sarraín-Estorino" by Maité Hernández-Lorenzo, "Estorino parece joven," by Norge Espinosa Mendoza, and "Otra contribución al mito" by Reinaldo Montero. Also worthy of note is *Cuba Teatro* by Ileana Fuentes, which contains a useful synopsis of *Parece blanca* (14-16), a brief study of cultural conditions in Villaverde's time called "Sex, Race and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Cuba" (22-24), and a helpful section titled "¿Y tu abuela, dónde está?" (28) which defines the racial terminology used in Estorino's play.

Before beginning a detailed analysis of *Parece blanca*, which is a work largely concerned with racial identity in Cuba, it is important to take into consideration the state of race relations on the island during the 1990s. Relatively little research has been done on Cuban race issues in revolutionary society, although those studies which do exist are quite informative. Of particular note is *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa* (1988) by Carlos Moore, which offers an exhaustive and well-documented exploration of the aforementioned topic. Similarly, Debra Evenson's *Law and Society in Contemporary Cuba* (2003) (123-132) offers a more limited, yet no less useful, investigation on this theme. Finally, one may find a series of articles related to matters of race in

[206] Writing in 1996, Juan Antonio Alvarado notes: "En los últimos treinta años la sociedad cubana ha sido objeto de un profundo proceso de transformaciones socioeconómicas. Uno de los objetivos fundamentales de la Revolución fue la erradicación de la discriminación racial. Para ello eliminó las trabas existentes en ese sentido y creó las condiciones objetivas que posibilitaron el acceso de todos los cubanos al pleno ejercicio de la igualdad racial, lo que contribuyó a la transformación de la estructura socioclasista en sus expresiones raciales. Sin embargo, la eliminación del racismo institucionalizado y la supresión de los mecanismos jurídicos que impedían el disfrute de iguales derechos con independencia del color de la piel, no significó la erradicación del racismo en todas sus expresiones, como incialmente llegó a pensarse que sucedería" (37).

revolutionary Cuba, which were published in the seventh volume of the journal *Temas* in 1996.[207]

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the various economic and legal changes both associated with and brought about by the Special Period, had a significant impact upon overall income distribution on the island, which tended to favor whites at the expense of blacks.[208] Practical necessity led Castro's government to adopt measures that effectively eroded the egalitarian ideological base of the revolution. However, in all fairness to the island's leadership, it cannot be said that the regime implemented racist policies during the 1990s. Still, as the decade wore on, it became increasingly apparent that Castro had, to a certain extent, made a number of economically and politically expedient decisions which were ultimately to the detriment of the less privileged—and hence more predominantly black—sectors of the population. Rather than create inequality where equality had previously existed, such conditions simply made more evident the underlying and longstanding racial divisions that had characterized Cuban society prior to the revolution, and had continued—although in a decidedly less overt way—to define that society after Castro's ascent to power. In other words, the economic and political crises of

[207] These articles deal with a variety of issues pertaining to race on the island and in other nations. Articles from this volume which specifically address the black/white paradigm in revolutionary Cuba—the implied thematic focus of *Parece blanca*—are: "Enfoque: De la étnia y la raza" by Germán Piniella and Alfredo G. Rostgaard (3), "Relaciones raciales en Cuba: Notas de investigación" by Juan Antonio Alvarado Ramos (37-43), "Los prejuicios raciales: sus mecanismos de reproducción" by María Magdalena Pérez Álvarez (44-50), "Etnicidad y racialidad en la Cuba actual" by Jesús Guanche Pérez (51-57), "Relaciones raciales, proceso de ajuste y política social" by María del Carmen Caño Secade (58-66), and "Los repertorios bibliográficos y los estudios de temas afrocubanos" by Tomás Fernández Robaina (119-128).

[208] In this regard, Caño Secade, writing in 1996, remarks: "La crisis actual y una parte de las medidas que ha sido necesario adoptar para su paulatina superación, han estimulado el incremento de un conjunto de desigualdades sociales y el ensanchamiento de la brecha entre aquellos grupos que ya al comienzo de la crisis se encontraban en desventaja social, y el resto de la población que dispuso de mejores condiciones de partida, válidas para acceder a las diferentes opciones de inserción social promovidas por la sociedad en transformación, y articular estrategias de vida que potenciaran su despegue social. De manera que la crisis ha constituido un factor de reproducción y acentuamiento de las desigualdades sociales y, en consecuencia, de las raciales, dados los nexos históricos que han existido entre raza y clase. La problematización del asunto consiste, además, en que las condiciones actuales erosionan significativamente las posibilidades de solucionar esta contradicción al menos en una perspectiva visible de corto o mediano plazo. (59)

the Special Period exposed more fully the chasm between official government rhetoric (which proclaimed full racial equality) and everyday reality, according to which lighter-skinned Cubans still enjoyed—much as they had before the revolution—disproportionate privileges in relation to their darker fellow citizens.[209] Although Estorino's unique dramatized version of *Cecilia Valdés* does not directly refer to the growing racial divide on the island in the 1990s, there can be little doubt that the racist mindset guiding the fateful actions of the unfortunate characters in *Parece blanca*, still continued to exert its baneful influence upon Cuban society in the closing decade of the Twentieth Century. Hence, the moral lesson of *Cecilia Valdés* was still entirely relevant for *Parece blanca*'s original audience. By reminding the spectator of the tragic nature of race relations in Nineteenth-Century Cuba, Estorino makes clear the imperative need to abandon, for once and for all, the reactionary outlook that defined—and to a certain extent continues to define—the issue of race on the island. Just as the tragedy of the novel is lived again each time the narrative is read, so too does the nation itself appear to be trapped in an endlessly-repeating story of needless suffering: "CECILIA: ¡Basta! Cierren el libro. ¡Ciérrenlo! ¡Dios! ¡Villaverde! ¡Qué tortura! (*Cierra el libro que está en el facistol.*) FIN" (351). Thus, Cuba would do well to forever close the book on—or to prevent the continuance of—its sad racist past.[210]

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[209] Caño Secade notes: "El estrecho y marcado vínculo existente a lo largo de la historia de nuestro país entre los rasgos raciales y clasistas de la población, desde la misma introducción del sistema esclavista, ha devenido una contradicción histórica difícil de superar, aun en el contexto de un proyecto social socialista que ha alcanzado niveles significativos de consenso, a partir de la generación de un escenario conveniente de justicia e integración social" (58). Similary, she observes: "[L]a existencia de un conjunto de factores estructurales condicionantes de la reproducción de una situación desventajosa en sectores de la población con predominio de la raza negra, ha contribuido a la propagación de una falsa interpretación del significado de la igualdad racial. […] Si bien el prejuicio racial se expresa con más claridad en las relaciones sociales a nivel grupal-individual que a nivel institucional, como este último no es sino un orden de relaciones socialmente determinado, puede funcionar, aun en nuestras condiciones, como mecanismo de expresión y reproducción de dichos prejuicios sociales. La mención, durante el II Congreso del Partido, de la necesidad de aumentar la proporción de jóvenes, mujeres y negros en la dirección del país, constituyó el reconocimiento oficial de un problema que es reflejo de la propia desproporción existente en la estructura socioclasista de los grupos raciales que integran nuestra población respecto a su representación en el poder" (61-62).

[210] Such concerns were amply reflected in the intellectual discourse taking place on the island at the time of *Parece blanca*'s premiere. The 1990s represented both a continuation and an intensification of the public debate on racial

Although one might consult an abundance of critical commentary on *Cecilia Valdés*—whose storyline and characterizations, as noted earlier, form the basis for *Parece blanca*—a brief review of the fictional legend is helpful for the purposes of this study. Out of practical necessity, Estorino of course only presents a general sketch of what he considers to be the most significant series of events from Villaverde's narrative. The represented action is, in the most essential terms, the following. In Nineteenth-Century Cuba, Cándido, a married man and wealthy *negrero*, or slave trader, has an affair with Charo, the daughter of the devotedly religious Chepilla, who is *parda*, or the daughter of a black mother and white father. Charo herself is *parda clara*, since her father is white. Since Cándido is white, Charo's daughter Cecilia is supposedly *blanca*, although she cannot escape the crippling social stigma of having one black great-grandparent. Hence, one sees why Estorino chose *Parece blanca* as the play's title. In accordance with the racist customs of the times, Cándido refuses to openly acknowledge his daughter Cecilia, nor does he tell her who he truly is, although his conscience compels him to provide her with a certain degree of economic assistance. Only Charo, Chepilla, and Cándido are aware of the true identity of Cecilia's father, which is a closely guarded secret. Cándido has a son, Leonardo, by his legitimate white wife Rosa. Cecilia is strongly drawn to Leonardo, since he represents for her the opportunity to enter into white society. For his part, Leonardo finds Cecilia to be sexually attractive, and—owing to Cecilia's supposedly impure racial descent—he intends to take her as his mistress without giving her the full social recognition to which she aspires. Cándido, Chepilla, and Charo are fully aware of what is happening between Leonardo and Cecilia, yet

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issues in Cuba. Piniella and Rostgaard note: "En Cuba, la cuestión de la desventaja social relacionada con el color de la piel (más o menos oscuro) había dejado de ser—hasta que fuera retomada a mediados de los 80—un tópico del debate público. A diferencia de los casos de otros grupos—las mujeres y los jóvenes—ninguna organización social había considerado que los problemas relacionados con el color de la piel fueran parte de su agenda. Desde que el discurso de la *rectificación* lo recuperara, ello se ha ido conviertiendo en un asunto del mayor interés, tanto dentro como fuera de Cuba" (3).

they cannot bring themselves to reveal the truth in order to prevent the incest from taking place. Meanwhile, Cecilia's black friend, Nemesia—who just as intensely desires to move up in society—has become determined to win Leonardo for herself. Of course, Leonardo, who wants Nemesia as his lover, and who is fully aware of the social repercussions involved in marrying a woman who is not completely white, is no more willing to offer marriage to Nemesia than to Cecilia. Nemesia's black brother, Pimienta, has fallen madly in love with Cecilia. She finds him attractive, but in the end her fascination with Leonardo's social position overcomes any deeper feelings of affection that she might have for Pimienta. Chepilla dies before she can reveal to Cecilia the dark secret, Charo—who has become utterly demented—is incapable of telling Cecilia who her father really is, and Cándido cannot muster up the will to confess the truth and prevent his children from having sexual relations with one another. Cándido and Rosa hope to separate Leonardo from Cecilia by arranging for him to marry Isabel, who is a wealthy white coffee plantation owner. Neither Isabel nor Leonardo feel any sincere interest in each other, but both accept the arrangement in conformity with prevailing social expectations. Despite the preparations for Leonardo and Isabel's nuptials, Cecilia becomes pregnant and gives birth to Leonardo's child. After a time, Cecilia—whom Leonardo now supports as his mistress—realizes that her lover has lost interest in her, and fears that his marriage to Isabel will cause him to abandon her. In a brief meeting with Pimienta, who is still enamored of her, she confesses her rage towards Leonardo. Pimienta misinterprets this as a request to kill Leonardo, and he murders his adversary at Leonardo and Isabel's wedding. As a consequence of this act, Pimienta is taken away by the authorities—presumably to be executed—and Cecilia descends into the same madness that has taken possession of her mother.

Although, as previously noted, *Parece blanca* is essentially loyal to the storyline and character representation of *Cecilia Valdés*, Estorino's play is more than just an adaptation of the novel.[211] Rather, it also establishes an explicit dialogue between its contemporary audience and the fictional yet fully historical world portrayed in Villaverde's narrative.[212] To a significant extent, *Parece blanca*, in addition to addressing the problematic matter of race in Cuba, is likewise a metaphysical exploration of what literature—whether narrative or drama—really means or should mean in relation to everyday life. Rosa, speaking to Leonardo, remarks:

> ¡Ay, qué tragedia! Ser un personaje de ficción y no tener ningún poder de decisión. […] [E]res un personaje de ficción. No eres real. Si fueras real pensarías. O mejor, si pensaras, serías real. […] [L]os lectores escogen qué libro

[211] In this regard, Hérnandez-Lorenzo remarks: "Aquí nuestra amantísima—la novela—*Cecilia Valdés* no es un pretexto, ni punto de partida, ni trampolín para la indagación. La novela decimonónica como espacio de enunciación posibilita el tránsito, la cosificación y la deconstrucción de los cubanos de Estorino. […] Asistí por primera vez a *Parece blanca* en 1994 […]. Entonces un amigo me decía: Pero para ver esto mejor me leo la novela. Tiempo después, revisitando *Parece blanca*, el comentario de mi amigo encontraba una respuesta. Las fronteras entre ambos discursos eran apenas perceptibles. Esa sutileza, ese ser y no ser, ese parece Cecilia pero no lo es, fue lo que más me interesó desde entonces. […]Estorino reconforma las estructuras internas de la novela, las relativiza, las distancia, las coloca en oposición, pero desde un discurso que no se aleja de la narratividad, del discurso literario; de ahí de que parezca novela, pero no lo sea" (67-68). Similarly, Espinosa Mendoza observes: "[N]os ocupábamos en dilucidar cómo el autor de *La casa vieja* habría insuflado nueva vida a esa novela mítica, cuyo título no ocuparía el lugar central de la cartelera, oculto bajo aquel otro, *Parece blanca*, con el cual el dramaturgo y director nos estaba diciendo ya de su deseo de zafar las ataduras del mito, y entregar una mirada fresca a un argumento que casi todo cubano dice conocer a la perfección. […] *Parece blanca* es y no, felizmente, la tragedia de Cirilio Villaverde. Sus personajes viven un argumento similar, se llaman del mismo modo, […] soportan el mismo destino. Pero el dramaturgo […] les otorga el privilegio de *teatralizar* esas líneas resabidas, de reescribir la muerte indetenible de Leonardo, de dialogar con un lector devenido público, para repetir con él la queja que el calor y las miserias humanas han hecho sempiternas en la Isla […]. Así conviviendo en ese espacio único e intemporal que es el recuerdo de la novela y no la novela misma, […] el país hierve, la nacionalidad habla por ellos y se cruza con el anhelo de la carne, de la raza, con la añoranza imposible de la nieve" (46-47).

[212] Hernández-Lorenzo describes the way in which Estorino associates Cuba's past with its present in *Parece blanca*: "No estamos jugando al teatro para buscar la verdad, para reconocer el pasado y poder finalmente construir un presente, como en *Morir del cuento*. Estamos ante un pasado que nos ha hecho la visita en un viaje a la inversa. Un pasado que se cuestiona en el presente, haciéndonos una mueca. […] La repetición de ese encuentro pecaminoso nos denuncia la necesidad de volver a él. Se regresa con la esperanza de develar otra historia, una historia presente que se ha ido construyendo desde el pasado. Pero se trata de la repetición de la tragedia, como si estuviéramos condenados a vivirla una y otra vez" (67-68). Similarly, Montero observes that: "la versión de Abelardo Estorino nos habla en un presente palpable, hasta el lenguaje de los personajes anda equidistante entre la primera mitad del siglo XIX y el día de hoy, pero el dramaturgo no se deja tentar por el vicio de la actualización […] la fidelidad a la trama delineada por Villaverde en la Cuba del gobierno de Vives se hace poco menos que obsesiva" (38).

> leen, con quién se casan, quién los gobierna. […] [S]on completamente libres. […] Para ellos la historia sucede, no es estática. […] Si durante mucho tiempo ves cómo los mismos hechos se repiten, rechazas la repetición y comprendes que la vida es otra cosa, que todo puede cambiar. Eso es ser real. (339)

It requires little effort to see that Rosa's words are in reality Estorino's, and that in reality they are directed more at the audience than at Leonardo. Thus, the comparison between fictional characters and real human beings (in the audience), serves not to draw attention to the impotence and utter passivity of imaginary personages, but rather functions as a method for highlighting the undeniable freedoms—and hence grave historical responsibility—of real individuals. According to the playwright, thinking and having a real existence are two intrinsically-related qualities. Therefore, in order for one to be fully real (or realized), one must completely exercise one's mental faculties by thinking independently. Unlike characters in a fictional novel, flesh-and-blood human beings have the power of choice. For this reason, they are—unlike fictional entities—not compelled to unquestioningly accept the circumstances with which they are presented in life. Real (or realized) people do not passively resign themselves to culturally disfunctional historical trends—such as endemic racism—but rather resolve to put an end to them. Such individuals understand that, as opposed to in the closed universe of a novel, in real life "la historia sucede, no es estática." This message would have had a particularly strong impact upon the play's original audience, since such words appeal to the basic motivating impulse of the revolution itself. Accordingly, Estorino skillfully associates the core spirit of *cubanía revolucionaria* with the urgent need to eliminate racism—a destructive and endlessly-repeating remnant of the island's pre-revolutionary past—from national society.[213]

[213] Hernández-Lorenzo sees Estorino's play as an exploration of the essential national character: "Con *Parece blanca* acudimos a la razón de entender una nueva nación, de reconocer las móviles fronteras de nuestra insularidad.

At the play's beginning, Estorino presents—just as he does in *Morir del cuento*—the drama's climactic event, which is Leonardo's murder. Thus, the dramatic focus of *Parece blanca* is not the tragic death of Cecilia's half-brother, but rather those events which precipitated his untimely demise. Montero notes: "Merced a que [Estorino] muestra el asesinato de Leonardo en la primera escena, la reflexión puede centrarse en las razones del crimen y en la magnitud de esas culpas" (38). For these reasons, the play is not driven by dramatic tension, but is rather structured around a largely dispassionate investigation of the well-known story line and existential concerns of *Cecilia Valdés*.[214] Since the ending is already known, audience interest is to a great extent sustained by the play's abundant metatheatrical activity, through which Villaverde's novel is revisted in unexpected and thought-provoking ways. Montero describes the function of metatheater in *Parece blanca* in the following terms:

> [L]os personajes mismos pasan a ser hacedores del espectáculo, directores de escena. Pero la mayor eficacia es haber resuelto las complejidades técnicas de tratamiento semejantes desnudando las motivaciones de los caracteres. […] [L]a mayor dificultad para la dirección de actores, es la distancia mínima que hay entre personaje en situación y personaje distanciado, porque se pasa del universo ficcional a la reflexión en torno a la ficción con leve movimiento. Lo contrario de lo probado por el dramaturgo en *Ni un sí ni un no*, donde es enorme la separación entre actor y personaje. (42)

[…] Para Estorino la nación se reconstruye, se desdibuja y se vuelve a armar a través de su dramaturgia. Esteban, Milanés y ahora los personajes de una novela son los que entran en oposición. Es en la patria de la creación donde el intelectual comprueba sus operaciones identitarias, donde edifica el imaginario común" (68).

[214] Montero describes the thematic focus of *Parece blanca* in these terms: "*Parece blanca* nos avisa sobre el juego de apariencias y el querer ser que se posesiona de cada personaje" (38).

The play's metatheatrical asides also serve to make explicit the dialogue between Cuban past and present. Hernández-Lorenzo notes:

> Quizás aquí el recurso del teatro en el teatro es en primera instancia el mecanismo a través del cual los personajes fantasmagóricos de *Parece blanca* […] pueden buscar su verdad y volver a montarse en un sentido contemporáneo. Las oscilaciones entre rostro y máscara, entre juego y verdad, van construyendo nuevas naciones, imaginarias y reales, pequeños fragmentos de isla que llevamos en peso. (69)

Hence, Estorino's use of metatheater in *Parece blanca* acts as a kind of lens through which matters of race[215] in nineteenth-century Cuba, can be perceived from the vantage point of revolutionary society in the 1990s. Such a perspective intentionally implies the need to compare and contrast current realities with former ones. Therefore, in order to more completely understand the ideological intent of the play, one must consider the reality of interracial relationships in Cuba at the time of the drama's premiere, and then identify those aspects of Estorino's—and Villaverde's—fictional universe which allude to such a reality.

The historical background of racial prejudice in revolutionary society is evident in *Parece blanca*'s intended comparison of racial attitudes from the nineteenth-century with those of the 1990s. Estorino invites the spectator to ask herself if the nation—thanks to the radical changes brought about by the socialist revolution—has really made a complete break with its racist past, or whether remnants of that past, despite the egalitarian goals of Castro's regime, still remain.[216]

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[215] Admittedly, incest and class conflict are also principal concerns in *Parece blanca*. However, the incestuous relationship between Cecilia and Leonardo, cannot be considered separately from racial considerations which are—at least from Cecilia's perspective—its *raison d'être.* Likewise, the class conflict and desire for social advancement apparent in the play, are symbiotically related to the firmly-rooted racism which defined Nineteenth-Century society.

[216] Alvarado Ramos explains that racism in Cuba has longstanding historical antecedents which were not automatically swept away by Castro's revolution: "La tendencia inicial de una buena parte de los cubanos es a

Unfortunately, the answer is that Cuba has yet to completely recover from centuries of endemic racism.

As in Villaverde's novel, in *Parece blanca* the primary means for transmitting reactionary values about ethnic origins—whether in the Nineteenth Century of the 1990s—is the family unit. Alvarado Ramos, writing about Cuban society in 1996, notes:

> La familia, sobre todo, como institución básica de la sociedad, ha constituido un elemento importante en ese sentido. Su estructura y funcionamiento no cambian al ritmo que lo pueden hacer las disposiciones de carácter jurídico. Por lo tanto, continuó siendo, junto al medio social inmediato y al individuo, un factor decisivo en el mantenimiento y reproducción de los prejuicios raciales. (38)

In *Parece blanca,* all three families, whether white (Leonardo, Cándido, and Rosa), *mulata* (Chepilla, Charo, and Cecilia), or black (Nemesia and Pimienta), contribute to the perpetuation of racist mindsets which exalt whiteness and denigrate blackness.[217] Cándido's racism is

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autocalificarse como no racista o, al menos, expresar que no siente ningún tipo de rechazo hacia personas con una filiación racial distinta a la suya. Pero lo cierto es que durante el sistema esclavista primero y en el transcurso de la República neocolonial después, se crearon estereotipos sustentadores del prejuicio racial y justificadores de la discriminación que echaron profundas raíces en la población. Las expresiones de estos prejuicios y la adopción de actitudes y conductas de contenido racista, que en otras épocas se habían mostrado de forma abierta, chocaron a partir de 1959 con la política de la Revolución. La soberanía sin distinción de razas no pudo menos que provocar cambios en las manifestaciones públicas de esas ideas y prácticas, pero fue imposible borrarlas de la conciencia social. Fue así que el prejuicio tomó formas más solapadas y más lo fueron también las conductas portadoras de este" (38). For these reasons, and despite government initiatives, a significant degree of racism has persisted in Cuba up to the present day. Alvarado Ramos adds: "Las transformaciones estructurales que se han operado en la sociedad cubana han significado, sin lugar a dudas, un paso de profunda connotación y amplias repercusiones para el logro del pleno ejercicio de la igualdad racial. Sin embargo, como se ha venido señalando, sus resultados no permiten afirmar que se hayan logrado en toda su dimensión los propósitos que llevaron a la puesta en práctica de una legislación profundamente antirracista. Los estereotipos y prejuicios raciales están todavía presentes en la sociedad cubana" (42). Similarly, Guanche Pérez states that the revolutionary government simply needs more time to address the nation's racial issues: "Los esfuerzos realizados en solo algo más de tres décadas no pueden ser suficientes para superar más de cuatro siglos de dependencia estructural y mental. Las diversas vías de participación sociocultural de la población tampoco pueden medirse por el esquema rígido y prejuiciado de la coloración epitelial en un país donde predominana las mezclas crecientes de toda índole" (55).

[217] In the play, racist perspectives become most evident in the dynamics of the romantic liasons between members of the younger generation. Of all the youth (Cecilia, Leonardo, Nemesia, and Pimienta) presented in the play, only Pimienta seems to be sincere—and hence unmotivated by racial considerations—in his profession of love, but his interest eventually becomes an unhealthy obsession which drives him to an act of homocide.

motivated primarily by the desire to preserve his privileged position within the *status quo*. His refusal to reveal himself as Cecilia's father stems from his fear that his social and economic standing will be seriously compromised if it becomes known that he has fathered an illegitimate *mulata*. Rosa, like her husband, also strives to perpetuate the family's favored place in society, and has little trouble in convincing Leonardo that Cecilia is beneath his station. As for Leonardo, he opportunistically uses his family's racist standards in order to satisfy his carnal lusts without being forced into the responsibilities of marriage. Chepilla, who is pleased to see the increasing whiteness of succeeding generations, has instilled into both her daughter and her granddaughter the goal of marrying white men, with tragic results. Both Charo and Chepilla have aspired to social acceptability and material benefits by sexually yielding to white men, and both have been repaid with illegitimate children and abandonment. Nemesia is just as cynical as Cecilia in her pursuit of Leonardo, and no less desirous of the material and social benefits with which she foolishly imagines that Leonardo, as a portal to white society, can provide her.[218] Apparently, such confused attitudes about race—in particular with relation to interracial marriage—were continuing to characterize Cuban families in the 1990s. Alvarado Ramos states:

> Es indudable que los cambios estructurales de la sociedad y el alto nivel de convivencia multirracial de los jóvenes han contribuido a socavar mitos, prejuicios y barreras que tradicionalmente se han interpuesto a las relaciones matrimoniales interraciales. Pero ellos siguen ahí, causando, no pocas veces, serios conflictos generacionales en el seno de la familia y hasta en el círculo de amistades. […] Mientras que un grupo de jóvenes se manifiesta y actúa de manera

[218] Among all the characters, only Pimienta appears to be unwilling to succumb to the racist mindset. As for Nemesia, *Parece blanca* does not indicate if she has developed her envious attitude towards whites as a direct consequence of family indoctrination. Still, given the work's emphasis on the transmission of negative family values, one may easily suppose that such has been the case.

> francamente desprejuiciada, otros muestran una interiorización y aceptación de los patrones raciales heredados, que en ocasiones se fortalecen por experiencias negativas de lo vivido. […] [C]uando aparecen los conflictos familiares, no son pocos los que optan por aceptar el criterio de los mayores que, en definitiva, son los que han venido interviniendo de manera más activa en la formación de sus valores. (41)[219]

Therefore, the original spectator of the play would have witnessed to some extent—particularly in the actions and attitudes of Leonardo's family—a reflection of certain contemporary Cuban families and their reactionary perspectives on interracial relationships. By implicitly comparing hegemonic Nineteenth-Century perspectives on race with the non-hegemonic—yet nonetheless largely prevailing—ones of revolutionary society, Estorino shows that Cuba, despite the predominance of its egalitarian socialist rhetoric, is still to a significant extent characterized by the racist—and thus necessarily regressive and exploitative—patterns of social behavior that defined Nineteenth-Century life. Although, as noted earlier, all official barriers to full association and fraternization among different races were eliminated with the advent of the revolution, the longstanding and widespread opposition to interracial marriage—not to be confused with mere interracial sexual union between white males and black females or *mulatas*—appears to have endured to a considerable degree. Alvarado Ramos explains the results of a study, conducted in Cuba in the mid-1990s, on attitudes towards interracial marriage:

> [E]l 81.7 % de los entrevistados expresan que su círculo de amistades integra tanto a negros, como a blancos y mestizos. Otra es la cuestión que se presenta

[219] With regard to the role of the family in transmitting racist values in Cuba in the 1990s, Pérez-Álvarez also notes: "Como consideración inicial, según se ha documentado, entre los mecanismos causales de la reproducción del prejuicio racial, el papel de la familia la sitúa como pieza clave en la gestación de los estereotipos y prejuicios hacia personas de otra filiación racial" (47).

> cuando se trata de las relaciones matrimoniales. Este es uno de los indicadores que con mayor nitidez muestra hasta qué grado persisten y funcionan los prejuicios raciales en nuestra sociedad. Aproximadamente, las dos terceras partes de los blancos (68%), casi un tercio de los mestizos (29.4%) y la cuarta parte de los negros (25%) desaprueban los matrimonios interraciales. Con independencia de que una gran parte de las personas consideran las relaciones matrimoniales como un derecho individual, solo el 55.2% de los entrevistados valoró convenientes las uniones interraciales. (40)

Clearly, to a certain extent *Parece blanca* indirectly presents its contemporary Cuban audience with an unflattering collective representation of itself. Thus, with regard to interracial marriage, the tragedy of Cecilia Valdés still addresses a significant part of the present-day revolutionary reality.

There appear to be two primary and intrinsically-related motives—both previously mentioned—driving Cecilia's pursuit of Leonardo and ultimately bringing about the story's tragic ending. The first is the desire to better her economic condition through marriage to a white man. Secondly, but no less importantly, is the goal of "whitening her skin"—indoctrinated into her by her grandmother Chepilla—by having a child by a white man. Although such a perspective may appear regressive in the extreme, according to Alvarado Ramos, in the mid-1990s it still describes a significant part—although clearly not all—of the contemporary *mulata* population:

> Es muy frecuente escuchar criterios relativos al interés de los mulatos por el "adelanto de la raza" y la importancia que le conceden a mejorar sus caracteres somáticos, pero sobre todo el deseo de "blanquear la piel" mediante los vínculos

> matrimoniales con personas blancas. Tales actitudes, a las que en ocasiones se alude cuando se describe a los negros, aunque algunos las tienen por positivas—según los estereotipos blancos—otros, en todos los grupos raciales, las enjuician como algo negativo, por ser manifestaciones negadoras de la propia condición. (39)[220]

By definition, the *mulata* finds herself in an intermediate position in Cuban society. Neither fully white nor black, in a certain sense she belongs to both white and black society, yet in another sense she belongs to neither.[221] Since the island's culture has traditionally favored whites both economically and socially, it is not surprising that many *mulatos*, in an effort to make the most of their European background, might aspire to marital union with whites. For these reasons, one may fairly well conclude that the difficulties confronted by Cecilia Valdés as a *mulata* in Nineteenth-Century society, are to a certain degree still encountered by *mulatas* living in revolutionary Cuba.

As noted previously, the conditions of the Special Period necessarily exacerbated economic disparitities between white, black, and mixed sectors of the population,[222] and thus

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[220] The desire to "blanquear la piel" obviously stems from an idealization of white society. According to Alvarado Ramos, this has impacted the self-esteem of both blacks and *mulatos* in Cuba: "[H]ay que tener en cuenta […] que la interiorización por parte de los negros y mestizos del ideal estético y cultural blanco, ha conducido a actitudes francamente contradictorias que a veces han llegado a afectar el grado de autoestima que cada grupo tiene de sí mismo" (39).

[221] In this regard, Alvarado Ramos notes: "En relación con los mestizos, la cuestión presenta otros matices. En ocasiones se les considera en una posición intermedia y difícil de definir. En esa línea de pensamiento un joven negro expresó: 'No los considero un grupo racial, sino con valores y cualidades intermedias.' En realidad, la imagen que se tiene de los mulatos a veces se muestra de manera contradictoria. Mientras unos les asignan características propias de los blancos, la mayoría les atribuye aquellas que, según los estereotipos antes señalados, definen al negro. […] Tales diferenciaciones se basan generalmente en el mayor o menor grado de semejanza que racial o socioculturalmente, según cada persona, tienen los mulatos respecto de los blancos y los negros" (38-39).

[222] Alvarado Ramos refers to the impact of the Special Period upon the black and mestizo sectors of the Cuban population: "[E]n todos los grupos raciales, es común señalar que la igualdad de posibilidades no puede medirse por la existencia de legislaciones que amparen a todos por igual. En la base de estas consideraciones está el hecho de que los estratos de la población más humildes y económicamente deprimidos—entre los que los negros y mestizos representaron siempre una proporción considerable—se enfrentaron a los cambios en una situación de desventaja que no les permitió aprovechar en igualdad de condiciones las nuevas posibilidades que se ofrecieron" (42).

called attention to persistent patterns of racial inequality in revolutionary society. Such conditions heightened the public's awareness of the nation's racial problems, and increased the perceived relevance of plays such as *Parece blanca* which address those problems. The premiere of this drama in 1994 constituted an implied criticism of the breach between the revolutionary ideal of a non-racist society and the actual reality of contemporary Cuba. In spite of offical government rhetoric, racial inequities have endured. As Caño Secade states, it has not been enough to simply proclaim racial equality. Rather, it has proven necessary to actively implement such a standard: "En alguna medida están cambiando las condiciones de partida para la socialización de la relaciones raciales; no basta con reconocer nuestro mestizaje racial y cultural y reiterar que somos iguales, si se reproduce y aumenta la segmentación" (64). Still, as Alvarado Ramos acknowledges, significant progress in that regard has recently been made: "[H]ay que convenir en que los matrimonios interraciales se han incrementado notablemente en los últimos tiempos y existen muchas familias racialmente mixtas" (41).[223] Therefore, far from being a statement of despair, *Parece blanca*, while drawing attention to entrenched models of racist behavior, is ultimately a call to abandon such negative models, and to persist in the ongoing implementation of the revolution's—and thus of *cubanía revolucionaria*'s—egalitarian values. As Estorino has demonstrated, real-life Cubans—unlike their fictional counterparts in *Cecilia Valdés*—are not doomed to eternally repeat the same tragic tale.

[223] Alvarado Ramos also calls attention to public opinion on racial matters in Cuba during the mid-1990s. As the following statistics show, the general population perceived significant improvement in interracial relations during the revolutionary period, despite the persistence of certain longstanding racist tendencies: "[E]s muy alta la proporción de los que consideran que se ha progresado mucho en la eliminación de la discriminación racial: el 80.9% de los blancos, el 75% de los negros y el 70.6% de los mulatos" (42).

El baile

Before the 1990s had come to a close, Estorino would dramatize one last tale of personal disappointment. Perhaps one of his most structurally simple—yet at the same time technically innovative—plays, *El baile*, first staged in 1999, associates (as does *Morir del cuento*) Cuba's present-day reality with its past in the first half of the Twentieth Century. The drama is set in a dilapidated mansion in the upscale Vedado section of Havana in 1995, which was a time when the economic privations of the Special Period were still being acutely felt.[224] The only permanent residents of the large dwelling are Nina, who is seventy-five years old, her aged male companion Simón, and Nina's elderly and sickly sister Amalia, for whom Nina is obliged to care. Neither Simón nor Amalia appear upon the stage. Nina's link to the outside world is a telephone, which rings several times during the play. During her phone conversations, Nina speaks with family in Miami, and with an individual who is interested in buying her treasured pearl necklace. Only two other actors appear: Conrado, Nina's deceased husband, and Fabrizio, the first man that Nina fell in love with as a young lady in the 1930s. Although both men have a real historical existence in the fictional universe of the play, in another sense they are only figments of Nina's imagination, since they are only the encarnated forms of her memory in 1995. These circumstances are further complicated by the constant metatheatrical references, according to which the characters identify themselves as fictional creations, refer to their author, and acknowledge the play as such.

Apart from the metatheatrical asides, the stage action is divided into two parts, the first corresponding to the "real" time transcurring in 1995, and the other relating to the "unreal" time of Conrado and Fabrizio, which freely ranges from 1935—the year in which Nina met Fabrizio

[224] Since the play was both written and premiered in 1999, one might suppose that it is an example of remote drama, since the stage action corresponds to 1995. However, since the time difference here does not imply the need for any fundamental adjustment to the audience's interpretative faculties, I prefer to consider *El baile* as an example of immediate drama.

at a dance—to the present day. These two parts effortlessly blend into one another. In this way, Estorino creates an atmosphere of timelessness in which present and past fuse to become one united reality. In "real" time, very little happens: Nina answers some phone calls, rummages through a box of old letters and photographs, calls for Simón (who never comes), and struggles to decide whether or not to sell her pearl necklace. However, in "unreal" time, Nina relives important moments in the history of her life, and carries on extensive dialogues with Conrado and Fabrizio.

In the narrowest sense, *El baile* is about an old woman's internal conflict in having to choose between meeting her material needs by selling a sentimental keepsake, or suffering privations by refusing to part with it. In a larger sense, it is a play about the contradictory components of the varied Cuban character—*cubanidad* as opposed to *cubanía*[225]—as the nation looks back at the end of a century and prepares to enter a new one. Aspects of the country's character are embodied in Nina, Conrado, and Fabrizio, all of whom Estorino largely refrains from judging. Each are complex individuals who, rather than correspond to the traitor-or-hero paradigm common to the manichean outlook of the revolutionary leadership, embody the antithetical and at times paradoxical qualities that have defined individual Cubans. In other words, the characters are neither protagonists nor antagonists, and their performance upon the stage serves neither to affirm nor to deny the values of *cubanía revolucionaria*. Rather, the playwright has chosen to focus more upon how the older generation actually is or was, as opposed to how—according to hegemonic revolutionary criteria—that generation should be or

[225] As I have explained in Chapter One, *cubanía* (and in particular *cubanía revolucionaria*) is an ideal level of personal integrity, expressed through dedicated commitment to the people and/or nation, to which the patriotic Cuban—whether revolutionary or not—is supposed to aspire. *Cubanidad* constitutes those personal qualities and perspectives that tend to characterize Cubans as a whole, or particular groups of Cubans, regardless of their level of commitment to the values of *cubanía*.

should have been.[226] For these reasons, *El baile*—unlike any of Estorino's former plays—does not in any discernible way constitute a proposal for effecting change in Cuban society. Instead, the play simply appears to be an invitation to explore the fundamental incongruities which underlie the national mindset.

Very little investigation has been done on *El baile*. The only study that I have found is the prologue—titled "Teatro adentro" and written by Reinaldo Montero—to the 2000 edition of the play. Montero does an extensive analysis of each of the three main characters, and demonstrates how each one embodies a particular human quality. Ileana Fuentes also offers a useful synopsis of the work in *Cuba Teatro* (37-40).

Significantly, Estorino proposes *El collar* as an alternative title for *El baile*. This indicates the essential relationship between the pearl necklace and the momentous dance to which Nina wore the treasured family heirloom. For Nina, the dance signifies the moment when she first passionately fell in love, and the necklace represents generations of family tradition, since it has been successively passed down to her from her grandmother and her mother. Nina remembers that at a particular moment during the dance, Fabrizio made a flattering comment in which he compared the pearls of the collar to her eyes: "Tú mismo lo celebraste, dijiste que mis ojos brillaban más que las perlas" (50). Thus, Nina has two compelling reasons for not selling the necklace. For one, it is an enduring feminine symbol for her family identity, and secondly, it is forever associated in her mind with the moment in which she first gave her heart to a man. However, her family's traditional sense of shared identity has been utterly shattered by the various transformations brought about by the revolution, which has ultimately caused the better

[226] This is not the first time that the dramatist has implicitly suggested that the spectator show special consideration for her elders regardless of their ideological outlook. As noted in my analysis of *Morir del cuento* in Chapter Five, Estorino presents Anciana as a member of the older generation who should be accepted on her own terms, since there is no point in attempting to force her to conform to revolutionary standards that she cannot assimilate.

part of her relatives—those opposed to the politics of the Castro regime—to abandon the island and adopt a new life in Miami. Likewise, her understanding of the man to whom she has professed undying love, is based on little more than a romantic fantasy, since the passion-charged moments that she and Fabrizio actually spent together in real life were exceedingly brief. As the play progresses, Nina finds herself coming to terms with these realities, and her resistance to selling the precious keepsake is weakened.

Thus, in the final analysis, the necklace represents a link to an idealized past which may be sacrificed in order to answer the urgent needs of the present. Estorino presents this situation as a paradoxical dilemma—one which he pointedly decides not to resolve at the play's end—since he allows the characters to fully consider the pros and cons of selling the necklace, yet clearly favors neither argument. For example, Fabrizio counsels Nina not to sell her prized possession: "FABRIZIO: […] Si el collar tiene algún valor para ti guárdalo […]. NINA: Necesito dinero. ¿De qué voy a vivir? FABRIZIO: Si algún día logro tener un Van Gogh, no lo venderé por todo el oro del mundo. Prefiero morir de hambre" (50). Conrado, on the other hand, finds Fabrizio's reasoning to be laughable: "Es evidente que él, Fabrizio, nunca ha pasado hambre." To which Fabrizio responds: "Tan evidente como que usted […] jamás ha visto un original de Van Gogh y no tiene la menor idea de la importancia de los bienes espirituales" (50). Similarly, a daughter from the United States writes a letter offering advice: "Llega el momento en que uno tiene que escoger. La decisión será tuya. Hay que vivir, mamá, y vivir no es sólo recordar los momentos felices, o los tristes. Llora un poco y véndelo" (51). Nina herself finally and neatly summarizes the essence of the matter: "Y ahora, perderé el collar. No hay más remedio. Comer o soñar. Soñar o comer" (51).

An exploration of the reasons for either keeping or selling the necklace, leads Nina to carry out an extensive review of the two most important men in her life. With regard to Nina's affections, each man holds certain advantages over the other. As for Conrado, although she does not feel a passionate love for him, he is after all the man who fathered her children, and was her husband for the better part of her life. As a successful and hard-working businessman, Conrado was also able to offer Nina the material benefits and social status to which, as the daughter of a prestigious Cuban family, she felt entitled. Conrado also demonstrated his devotion to his wife by patiently bearing with her coldness and indifference towards him, and by striving to consent to her every whim. Although Nina has little regard for Conrado, she nonetheless clings to his memory, since so many years after his death she has yet to accustom herself to doing without him. Conrado's selfless commitment to his spouse would be more endearing if it were not for his grasping materialism and ruthlessness as an employer, which he justifies as being natural and necessary for an orphan who has had to work his way to the top. Conrado grows bitter after the victory of the revolution, since he has been branded an exploiter and relieved of his business: "Y mis cuarenta años de trabajo se han vuelto cenizas. Ya estoy viejo y no tengo ánimo para empezar de nuevo" (41). Nina calls his subsequent death an effective suicide brought on by the inability to accept the conditions of revolutionary society (40). Although Nina has no sympathy for Conrado's poverty and loneliness as a child, neither does she judge him for his exploitative practices before the revolution. Quite simply, she took him for granted while he was alive, and presently resents his absence now that he is dead.

As for Fabrizio, he is an inverse image of Conrado. While Nina's husband is from a poor family and is uncultured, uneducated, wealthy, and politically conservative, Fabrizio is from a wealthy family and is cultured, educated, poor, and—presumably—revolutionary in outlook.

While Nina was intimately familiar with Conrado for decades, she only knew Fabrizio in the most ephemeral way. This is why she can only imagine him as a dashing youth, whereas she remembers Conrado as the depressed and broken middle-aged man he was before he died. The enduring passion that Nina claims to feel for Fabrizio, is without any substantial foundation and resides chiefly within her heated imagination. To a certain extent, she is aware of this, yet her desire to believe in her own fantasies is so strong, she is willing to suspend all disbelief under the most minimal pretext. For example, when her phone rings and nobody answers, she wonders to herself if it could finally be Fabrizio calling her after so many years. Even at such at advanced stage in her life, Nina's attachment to her unrealized dream—the complete consummation of her love for Fabrizio—is quite strong.

It is evident that none of the main characters completely corresponds to the rigid categories of socialist ideology. As a poor orphan, Conrado was supposed to be one of the main beneficiaries of the revolution, but instead, he is designated as one of its bourgeois enemies. Likewise, as the cosmopolitan son of a favored family, Fabrizio might have been expected to side with Machado in the 1930s, but he instead opposes him and then chooses exile in the United States. However, since there is no mention of Fabrizio's return to Cuba, it is implied that he simply remained in New York, where, as a professed revolutionary and highly-educated man, he might have continued to enjoy the material benefits and pleasures of living in a capitalist country. Finally, Nina's political orientation is never quite clear. Even though she feels strongly drawn to the revolutionary mystique exuded by Fabrizio, she ultimately settles for the high-class comforts that Conrado offers her, since she is just as attached to her lavish lifestyle as she is to the memories associated with the treasured string of pearls that adorn her neck. Nina also demonstrates her resistance to revolutionary principles by refusing to share her mansion with

family members who need use of its rooms. However, her efforts to join her relatives in the United States are only half-hearted, since her family—that is, her sister Amalia—and her first memories are in Cuba (35). So, despite whatever reservations she might have about Castro's government and its socialist doctrine, the island is her home, and—just like any devoted revolutionary—she has no intention of abandoning it.

By presenting such problematic characters, Estorino intends to call into question some of the more common hegemonic assumptions about Cuban society as it transitions into a new century. Perhaps the chief of these is the idea that the population can be neatly divided up into loyal and disloyal individuals. As stated earlier, Nina, Conrado, and Fabrizio are neither completely good nor bad from an ethical point of view. Rather, they are people who, to a significant extent, have been shaped by the conditions into which they were born, and by the turbulence, upheavals, crises, and conflicts of national politics in the Twentieth Century. To judge them is to judge the complex and often contradictory reality of the island's past and present. In particular, to judge Nina—who in the end is the source of all dramatic action—is to judge between the past and the present themselves. Should the dreams of the past be forgotten—should the necklace be sold—in order to meet the needs of the present? Or should the aspirations of yesteryear—no matter how unattainable—be held on to at the expense of the present?

However, in *El baile*, Estorino does more than examine fundamental aspects of Cuban society. He also brings to account his very own work as a dramatist. As a monologue by Nina demonstrates, the author and the character—both elderly and nearing the end of life—are both being judged by the spectator: "Se me acaba la noche y se me acaba la vida, la vida efímera de este personaje creado por un egoísta que aprovecha todo lo que ha vivido: los secretos de sus amigos, las intimidades de familia, las noticias de los periódicos para crear una historia falsa. ¿O

será más verdadera que la verdad misma?" (48-49). Perhaps Estorino's greatest accomplishment as a playwright over the years has been to present his unique and enduring vision of his *patria* in such a way as to make it "más verdadera que la verdad misma."

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I have shown that Estorino's plays not only treat matters of significance for revolutionary-era Cuban society, but also express the dramatist's own personal vision of *cubanía*. Just as the concerns of the island's populace have—as a consequence of numerous social, political, and cultural transformations over the years—undergone considerable change since Castro's victory in 1959, so also has Estorino's drama reflected the constantly evolving reality of the Western Hemisphere's first communist nation. Accordingly, I have demonstrated the key importance of taking into account historical context (whether in relation to the setting of the play or with regard to the date of the work's original premiere) when interpreting the author's drama. Likewise, and in agreement with certain precepts associated with reception theory, I have emphasized the need for the present-day reader or spectator to take into account the intended premiere audience's reception of a given play, in order that she might more completely appreciate the work's original ideological intent. By using this interpretative approach with regard to Estorino's drama, I have discovered the historically-contextualized ways in which Estorino has dialogued with his audiences about matters which were of primary relevance to them in their day.

To a significant degree, Estorino has been a witness to revolutionary history on the island, and his plays have largely succeeding in capturing and preserving fleeting moments in time. It is one thing to consult a book on Cuban history and inform oneself of political and military activities, laws that have been passed or repealed, committees which have been formed and disbanded, speeches given by Fidel Castro, etc. It is quite another matter to read or attend a play by Estorino and thus experience a theatrical representation of the everyday historical reality

of (extra)ordinary Cuban life. Even the story of *Milanés*, which portrays one of the nation's most revered poets, takes care to demythologize and humanize an iconic figure. History comes alive in the playwright's theater. His immediate drama mentally and emotionally takes us back to the days in which it was premiered, and his remote drama helps us to see the thought-provoking and quite frequently ironic connections between Cuba's past and present.

Throughout his dramatic explorations of the nation's yesteryear and today, the author has manifested—at times explicitly and at others implicitly—his own personal vision of what constitutes the authentic spirit of justice and fairness in the context of his homeland. Such a vision forms a key part of Estorino's unique representations of *cubanía revolucionaria*. At times his views have been in accordance with the hegemonic revolutionary perspective, and at times they have not. Estorino began as an ardent supporter of the Castro government, spoke out against it when he felt that it had overstepped its proper boundaries, found himself silenced for several years as a consequence, then enjoyed a long period of productivity during which he skillfully succeeded in preserving his ideological and artistic outlook—characterized to a significant extent by his awareness of *cubanía* as a human rather than abstract quality—without arousing the ire of Cuban officials. Thus, it is apparent that, similar to the progressively transformative nature of island society and its ideology during Castro's rule, the dramatist's own personal representation of *cubanía* has also continually evolved over the years. Nonetheless, his plays have also made evident a number of his unchanging personal values or beliefs.

For Estorino, political creeds are meant to serve people. Hence, according to him, individuals should not be sacrificed for the sake of intellectual concepts. Likewise, during the last four decades, he has consistently demonstrated the need for tolerance, understanding, and acceptance on the island, and by inference, throughout the world. Finally, his drama, while

unflinchingly examining the most problematic aspects of Cuban society, ultimately manifests the author's belief in a better future for his nation's people. However, he emphasizes the need for individual self-honesty and personal reformation in order that Cuba as a whole might realize its true potential. According to Estorino, the solution to the country's ills is not a new political philosophy or new leadership *per se*, but rather the moral and ethical transformation of each and every one of its citizens.

To a certain extent, Estorino's perspectives have been vindicated by nationwide developments over the years. He called attention to Cuba's longstanding problems with *machismo* and sexism in *El peine y el espejo* in 1956, *El robo del cochino* in 1961, *Las vacas gordas* in 1962, and *La casa vieja* in 1964. With the passing of the Family Code in 1975, his progressive outlook on these issues was finally given official backing, although large sectors of the general population have proven quite resistant to change. His call for a more tolerant and accepting government and society—manifested in plays such as *La casa vieja*, *Los mangos de Caín* (1964), *El tiempo de la plaga* (1969), and *Milanés* (1973)—has yet to be fully heeded, but there have been some signs over the years that the Cuban leadership has in some regards relaxed its frequently inflexible control over its citizens, while at the same time maintaining—or even increasing—the degree of authority exercised in other areas. Estorino's views on race, so poignantly expressed in *Parece blanca* (1994), remain—as do his outlook on sexism and totalitarianism—an ongoing concern on the island, and will undoubtedly continue to remain so into the forseeable future. Undoubtedly, the author's vision for a better society and the fuller realization of *cubanía revolucionaria* will endure, and with the passage of time, it must necessarily be confirmed through the living and continually changing reality of Cuba itself. For

this reason, as well as for the high artistic quality of much of his work, Abelardo Estorino deserves a place among the most important Cuban playwrights of his day.

APPENDIX: CORRESPONDENCE WITH ABELARDO ESTORINO

As I was in the process of writing the initial chapters of this study in the fall of 2005, my major professor, Dr José Álvarez, was able to obtain for me Abelardo Estorino's e-mail address. I was very excited about the prospect of being able to personally communicate with the playwright. In the articles I had read about him, all had testified to his pleasant nature and disinterested friendliness. My initial correspondence with him only reinforced that impression. Once made aware of the nature of this project, he kindly and graciously expressed his willingness to assist me. The only conditions he placed upon our relationship were that he would only answer questions that he might consider to be appropriate. Since he did not give specific details as to how I should judge between reasonable and unreasonable queries, I found myself in a conundrum. I decided not to press Estorino for specifics, since he had already requested that I only send him a small list of questions to which he might offer concise replies.

Thus, I decided to avoid all matters that might draw attention to the sometimes problematic relationship between Estorino and the revolutionary regime. I submitted my initial list to my major professor, who suggested that I revise it, since in his estimation it would be better to formulate more ideologically challenging questions. Accordingly, I developed the following queries, which I showed to my major professor, then sent to Estorino:

> Entre 1964, cuando presentó por la primera vez *Los mangos de Caín*, y 1980, cuando estrenó *Ni un sí ni un no*, usted no vio representada sobre el escenario cubano ninguna obra original suya. ¿A qué se debe esto, y cómo fueron estos años para usted? Usted ha mencionado en una entrevista que las autoridades no tenían problemas con la sexualidad de Milanés tal como está representada

> en *La dolorosa historia.*…sino con la suya. ¿Podría Ud. elaborar sobre los cambios en las respuestas gubernamentales hacia la diversidad sexual de los ciudadanos en las diversas épocas y a partir del cierre de las UMAP? ¿Podría Ud. elaborar en cuanto a qué reacción provocó el estreno de *Los mangos de Caín* tanto entre las autoridades como el público en general? ¿Por qué esperó tantos años antes de entregar la versión final de *El tiempo de la plaga*? ¿Cómo es que usted pudo estrenar tantas obras durante la década de los 80? ¿A qué se debe este cambio? ¿Cuál ha sido su mayor dilema como dramaturgo cubano? ¿Piensa estrenar una nueva obra próximamente? ¿Cuál de sus obras considera Ud. que ha sido la más polémica y cuál ha recibido el mayor rechazo por parte de las instituciones culturales cubanas? ¿Cómo afectaron las carencias del "Período Especial" a su producción como dramaturgo?

Estorino did not respond to my e-mail for several days. Finally, his message arrived:

> He leído cuidadosamente las preguntas que usted me envía y me he quedado sorprendido al descubrir que todas tienen un matiz político muy evidente y además se refieren precisamente a obras con tema político explícito o no. Todas las preguntas sobre *Los mangos de Caín* están escritas con un juicio previo y el conocimiento de los conflictos que tuve con ella. Esos conflictos han sido aclarados varias veces en entrevistas o en trabajos míos o de otros autores. Los años sesenta fueron años de lucha ideológica muy fuerte y por lo tanto de un extremismo político que causó muchos problemas en el campo del arte y en otros aspectos de la vida cubana. Es verdad, se sabe que esa obra [*Los mangos de Caín*] se bajó de escena ante la actitud que tomaron algunas

> agrupaciones políticas juveniles que encontraban en ella críticas al gobierno cubano. Yo he tenido muchos problemas en EEUU con periodistas o especialistas de teatro, en cuyas entrevistas o ensayos sobre el teatro cubano en general o relacionados con mis obras han tergiversado mis palabras o han hecho un análisis con una visión distorsionada. Eso me ha llevado a tomar una actitud cuidadosa cuando escribo algunos textos para personas que no conozco. Es lo que me ocurre con su cuestionario: parece escrito por alguien que se ha hecho un juicio sobre cuál es la situación del teatro en Cuba, la censura, el estalinismo, la falta de libertad en los regímenes comunistas, etc. sin pensar en que la vida no es estática, que todo proceso histórico comporta un cambio constante. ¿Cómo sé en qué forma usted va a leer mis respuestas cuando al leer sus preguntas parecen indicar que hay un juicio político previo? Comprendo perfectamente que usted quiera analizar mi obra en su contexto, pero para responder a esas preguntas usted debe buscar a un sociólogo, un politólogo, un especialista de los conflictos Cuba/EEUU, que son muchos. Yo escribo teatro, soy responsable de las ideas que quiero exponer en mis obras y en ellas está expresado lo que pienso del mundo que me rodea. No vivo en el aire. Pero temo por la forma en que se tome lo que digo. Por estas razones no voy a contestar su cuestionario. Lo siento mucho. Me hubiera gustado que la relación hubiera sido fructífera, pero no es posible, estamos afectados por el mundo en que vivimos.

I was surprised and very disappointed by Estorino's reply. For a brief moment, I had been given privileged access to one of Cuba's most acclaimed playwrights, and in a moment I

had lost it. Still, in his response to me I nonetheless found evidence of his customary kindness, although upon the first reading I found it difficult to fathom the deeper reasons behind his reaction. After some careful reflection, however, I began to see his message as yet another testimony to his well-developed skill for surviving as an intellectual artist under highly complex and exceedingly challenging circumstances. Undoubtedly, his e-mail account, which is provided to him by the Cuban government, can be surreptitiously read by the authorities. So, I am quite certain that, in a sense, his words were intended for readers other than myself. If any revolutionary authorities had read these words, they would have been pleased by Estorino's tactful and uncompromising—at least from their perspective—response to a list of questions which in large part draw attention to the playwright's former clashes with the hegemonic order. Yet, as I read again his words, I saw that Estorino had also taken care not to attack me personally, and had subtly insinuated another reality lying beneath the apparent one in the letter: "[E]stamos afectados por el mundo en que vivimos." Not wishing to oblige him to once again defend himself before his government and at the same time avoid offending me, I sent him the following reply in order to ease his mind:

> Siento no haberle preparado preguntas de su agrado. En realidad no me considero una persona política, pues mi religión [Bahá'í Faith] me prohibe involucrarme en la política, aunque sí hago mis propias observaciones sobre lo que pasa en el mundo. Respeto y entiendo su decisión de no contestar mis preguntas y no me ofendo en absoluto. Es evidente que usted ya no quiere corresponder conmigo, por lo tanto éste será mi último mensaje para usted. Le deseo lo mejor en todo y sigo siendo un admirador de usted y de su dramaturgia.

Of course, this investigation would unquestionably have benefitted greatly from Estorino's extensive involvement, but this is not to say that his final response to me is without value. On the contrary, for the perceptive reader, the author's words—few as they are—say a great deal about the difficulties confronted by the contemporary Cuban intellectual and artist. Also, his references to a constantly changing revolutionary society and world, and his emphasis on the fact that nothing remains static, remind me—and perhaps the government official who might read his words—that one must guard against making excessively broad generalizations about highly complex issues.

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