

From the House to the Stage:

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Family and Identity in Contemporary Cuban and Puerto Rican Drama

by

Camilla Stevens

B.A., Tulane University

M.A., University of New Mexico

Submitted to the Department of Spanish
and Portuguese and the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of
Kansas in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Camilla Stevens

Abstract

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Camilla Stevens
University of Kansas
Dissertation Director: Vicky Unruh

In Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, writing has performed an important function in the project of constructing and defining nationhood. The role of performance in the cultural politics of representing the nation, however, has been less studied, and this dissertation examines how theater and performance constitute a special site and activity for imagining communities. I argue that the pervasive image of the family in contemporary Cuban and Puerto Rican drama relates to the struggle for national and cultural self-definition in these two countries. The problematic family relationships enacted in Puerto Rican works by Francisco Arriví, René Marqués, Myrna Casas, Antonio García del Toro, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and Roberto Ramos Perea, and in Cuban plays by Rolando Ferrer, Virgilio Piñera, Abelardo Estorino, José Triana, Roberto Orihuela, Alberto Pedro Torriente, and Joaquín Miguel Cuartas Rodríguez serve to explore the discourses of collective identity during important transitional moments in the history of these two islands.

The contextualized analysis of two key periods of the production of family drama--the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, and the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s--reveals historical changes in the modes of representing families as a metaphor for national community and, consequently, significant changes in long-standing identity debates in Cuba and Puerto Rico. In the plays from the 1950s and 1960s, the dramatic action unfolds in the family space--the house--which is identified with the nation. In more recent works, the configuration of theatrical space takes on new meanings, and playwrights are less apt to construct an on-stage structure that houses a particular vision of the national family. This shift in how playwrights stage the family contributes to the new paradigms of collective identity currently discussed in Cuba and Puerto Rico. The de-emphasis of nationalist discourses results in less paternalist and more diverse representations of the family and the nation. Likewise, the presence of performing families in plays from the 1980s

and 1990s underscores the constructed nature of identity and, ultimately, more flexible models of family and nation.

To my family

Acknowledgments

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies, I have been the fortunate recipient of excellent mentoring. I would like to express my gratitude to the many professors who have encouraged me on my journey from Tulane, to New Mexico, and finally to Kansas. I am indebted to them for their role in my preparation as a teacher and a scholar. In particular, I would like to thank all the members of my dissertation committee for their flexibility, careful editing, and helpful feedback. Special thanks to George Woodyard, who has done so much for the field of Latin American theater and who has given me plentiful good advice. I am especially grateful to Vicky Unruh, my graduate advisor and dissertation director. She patiently fielded my ceaseless questions, deciphered my first drafts, and helped me to develop my critical voice. I would also like to acknowledge my friends and family, who have been constant sources of inspiration and fun. Above all, thanks to Mike, who reluctantly left the mountains for the prairie to support me during this undertaking that, of course, took longer than expected. Little did we know where it all would lead us.

Table of Contents

Introduction:	A Family Affair: Theater and Nation in Cuba and Puerto Rico	1
Chapter 1:	Four Failed Puerto Rican Family Romances	18
Chapter 2:	Tearing Down the House: The End of an Epoch in Cuba	104
Chapter 3:	Imagining Community through Performance and Nostalgia in Puerto Rican Drama of the 1980's and the 1990's	191
Chapter 4:	A New Family for a New Cuba: Representing the Revolutionary Family	279
Conclusion:	The Repeating Family: The Performance of Caribbean Identity	369
Bibliography	383

Introduction:

A Family Affair: Theater and Nation in Cuba and Puerto Rico

“Y el teatro es, por más que lo embelequen, una maroma audaz, un feroz riesgo” El Actor, Quíntuples

Family and theater have been intimately intertwined since the beginnings of Western drama. Aristotle, commenting on Greek tragedy, observed that the best plots dealt with famous mythical houses and the messy affairs among family members (44-45; ch. 13).¹ The dramatization of the family in a process of self-destruction is a motif in Shakespeare’s tragedies of royal houses and in countless modern plays by international authors ranging from Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekov, to Eugene O’Neill and Harold Pinter, to August Wilson.² Theatrical representations of the family often confront social problems, but they do not always assume tragic dimensions, for one can trace domestic entanglements in comic plays from Roman times to neoclassic comedies, to twentieth-century bedroom farce and television sitcoms.³ Tragic or comic, the family unit provides rich material for developing specific themes of generational and marital conflict and broad inquiries into cultural origins. In contemporary Cuban and Puerto Rican theater, such private family matters are inextricably linked to the public problem of national and cultural identity.

The prominence of the family institution in Cuban and Puerto Rican societies resonates in their respective dramatic traditions. In both countries, critics have noted a tendency to idealize the family and to equate it with “a great national family” or the nation. This study argues that the pervasive image of the family in numerous contemporary Cuban and Puerto Rican plays relates to the struggle for national and cultural self-definition in these two countries. The problematic family relationships enacted in the plays examined in this study serve to explore the discourses of collective identity and to raise questions about how Puerto Ricans and Cubans envision themselves during important transitional moments in their national histories. The contextualized analysis of two key periods of the production of family drama--the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, and the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s--reveals historical changes in the modes of representing families as a metaphor for national community and, consequently, significant changes in long-standing identity debates in Cuba and Puerto Rico. The on-stage family quarrels between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and among siblings, embody divergent views of national experience and provide insight into how communities are defined and by whom, as well as how visions of national culture change over time.

If family has been a dominant motif in the history of Western drama,

since the nineteenth century family sagas have provided a cardinal metaphor for addressing the enduring themes of nation and identity in Latin American letters and the literature of the Hispanic Caribbean. Drawing on Michel Foucault's studies on sexuality and Benedict Anderson's theory of nation, Doris Sommer explores in Foundational Fictions (1991) the link between narrative romances and nation-building in nineteenth-century Latin America. In these patriotic national romances, the young lovers portray different national constituencies, and their private passions reflect a republican desire to found the nation. Thus the salient characteristic in the foundational national allegories of the Hispanic Caribbean, including the Cuban novels Sab (1841) and Cecilia Valdés (1882) and the Dominican novel Enriquillo (1882), is the quest for racial synthesis. In the Cuban novels, however, cross-racial romances fail, and in Enriquillo, the novel's image of a national family founded by a romance between whites and Indians refutes the nineteenth-century historical reality that blacks constituted the majority of the Dominican population. The Puerto Rican novel La peregrinación de Bayoán (1863) attempts to cross geographical borders. In this work, the allegorical protagonists represent Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, and their relationships constitutes an effort to form a pan-Antillean family. History shows, however, that the cultural heterogeneity of the region

and the experience of colonialism have never permitted the realization of this vision of a united Antillean archipelago. Caribbean national romances, in short, illustrate the complex struggle for self-definition in this region.

While nineteenth-century Latin American dramas have never been as widely disseminated as the romantic novels, in plays by Felipe Pardo y Aliaga (Peru), Fernando Calderón (Mexico), Manuel Ascencio Segura (Peru), and Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (Puerto Rico), the treatment of the education and marriage of women also addresses the project of nation-building. In Tapia y Rivera's La cuarterona (1867), for example, an aristocratic white man wishes to marry a humble quadroon. To prohibit this match, the young man's family reveals a shameful family secret: the potential lovers share the same father. Thus, in this play, the threat of incest keeps different classes and races from forging nation-building alliances. Similarly, in Pardo y Aliaga's Los frutos de la educación (1830), a young lady's passion for the zamacueca, a popular Peruvian dance, alienates her from a promising English marriage partner. From the play's perspective, the potential romance would have strengthened that nation by forming an English and criollo connection. Consequently, Pardo y Aliaga teaches his implicit audience that the deficient education of women is detrimental to building the national family. The period of massive European immigration and urbanization that took place at

the turn of the century through the 1930s in the Río de la Plata region constitutes another intense moment of exploring collective identity in Latin American drama. Plays by Florencio Sánchez and Armando Discépolo dramatize these demographic shifts and the cultural conflicts created by them through the theme of the family. In Sánchez's La gringa (1904), for example, a wedding between a family of gaucho origins and a newly immigrated Italian family signals the changing composition of Argentine national identity.

My approach to family plays in Puerto Rico and Cuba rests on the assumption that the institution of theater is imbedded in the cultural milieu of a particular historical moment and that as a product of and a commentary on society, it participates in a cultural dialogue that shapes certain visions of the nation. That is, theater and performance constitute a special site and activity for constructing collective identities. The performance of a play inevitably underscores the connections between representations and reality in that the worlds created onstage often conjure up a multiplicity of worlds, including whatever the audience may experience as the real one. As Diana Taylor eloquently puts it, "it's impossible to separate out theatre from the 'real' altogether. In the *paso de dos* between theatre and the real, theatre is the self-conscious partner, the one that either dances along, subverts, or mimics

the other's moves" (226). Austin Quigley argues that spatial metaphors in plays evoke ideas of pluralism and fluid boundaries that orient the audience "towards the values of the play and toward their own values" (12). The exchange between theater and society becomes particularly evident in many family dramas. The clusters of plays that emerge in the periods investigated in this study share several characteristics. While not every play is realist, the majority are linked to this aesthetic. Each work contains a combination of two or more characters from an immediate or extended family, each work is set in the historical present, and most take place in the space of the house.⁴ In these plays, the divisions between the theatrical space (the stage) and the theater space (the auditorium) blur, because the private affairs of the on-stage house play themselves out in a public national house--the theater--and incorporate the audience into the conversation as well.

Family also lends itself to the consideration of society at large because family structures and dynamics often mimic those of the nation. The male-dominated patriarchal family, for example, evokes the hierarchies of a larger collectivity: the paternalist political leader/father who implicitly assigns hierarchical roles to members of the national family. Similarly, the conflicts within families that develop among couples, siblings, and different generations parallel the multiple points of view at play in considering the

issues of race, class, and gender in constructions of national identity.

Relationships of kin also bring to mind the notion of “one’s own” and evoke feelings of membership and identification. Much like Benedict Anderson’s theory of how print communities of readers construct an “imagined” nation, Loren Kruger maintains that the experience of theatrical performance builds a national community as well. Kruger affirms that by “summoning a representative audience that will in turn recognize itself as nation [the theatre] offers a compelling if ambiguous image of national unity” (3). In the same vein, Martinican writer Edouard Glissant considers theater a necessary mirror where the nation recognizes itself: “theater is the act through which the collective consciousness sees itself and consequently moves forward” (196). The collective nature of performance itself forms a community for the duration of the event. Whether the audience identifies with the position of the national family on stage, however, depends upon the play’s effectiveness in incorporating the variety of subject positions that the audience may occupy.

The power of theater lies in its capacity to direct a collective gaze on the stage where cultural and national discourses are not only reiterated through dialogue, but also made visible through nonverbal communicative codes.⁵ Through the representation of the family, the theater can immobilize

or empower an audience by making visible certain images of national community while obscuring others. Although playwrights and directors may aim to manipulate the view of a group of people, by pointing to their constructed character, the theater inevitably betrays discourses that present themselves as essential and natural. Even in the most illusionist productions, the audience is aware that the actors play a role and that they are watching a representation, however much it may approximate the real. Homi Bhabha writes that the discourse of the nation provides an ambivalent image of cultural authority “because it is caught, uncertainly, in the ‘act’ of composing its powerful image” (3). Staging nationalist discourse can only accentuate its ambivalence because the theatrical context underscores how identities come into being through repetitive performances. Furthermore, works that flaunt their theatricality oftentimes expose the performativity of the roles that constitute us as subjects. Theater, as a character in Luis Rafael Sánchez’s play Quíntuples affirms, is risky because its artifice suggests that all forms of identity are human-made representations that must be constantly (re)performed. Performance, then, paradoxically implies the possibility of transformation at the same time that it may attempt to lead the audience to envision the nation in a particularly set way.

Contemporary Cuba and Puerto Rico provide abundant examples of

family dramas that enact such problems of national identity, due in large part to the historical commonalities between the islands, including their late nineteenth-century independence from Spain and their ensuing struggle against North American colonialism. This study focuses on thematically and aesthetically similar family plays by playwrights from two significant historical periods: the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. The family stands out as a particularly strong theme in plays from both countries in the 1950s because these years constitute a period of intense self-reflection for Puerto Ricans and Cubans. Puerto Rican history throughout the first half of this century was marked by its evolving semi-colonial condition, which culminated in the island's permanent status as a commonwealth in 1952. Although Cuba had gained its independence in 1898, authoritarianism and North American intervention trapped the island in an unproductive cycle. By the 1950s, the conditions under the Batista dictatorship led intellectuals to express frustration with the reality that Cuba had never really achieved national sovereignty.

The Marxist orientation of the 1959 Cuban revolution strongly differentiates the histories of these countries during the latter half of the twentieth century, but in both Cuba and Puerto Rico, the family emerges as a central image in the theater of the 1980s and 1990s. The discussion about the

nature of Cuban identity in the 1960s and 1970s, sparked by the task of implementing and institutionalizing the revolution, was the subject of many Cuban plays from the 1980s. The breakup of the Soviet bloc (1989-91) and subsequent loss of Soviet support has again made the issues of self-definition a national concern in the 1990s. In Puerto Rico, the 1968 elections reopened old ideological divisions by breaking the political hegemony of the party in favor of the commonwealth. By the 1980s, however, the debate over the political identity of Puerto Rico was less urgent than facing social and economic crises. Consequently, during this decade, the focus on nationalism and colonialism shifts to include new approaches to defining national community.

Taylor characterizes the plays produced between 1965 and 1970--roughly the period between the decades I examine--as a "theatre of crisis" (6). In Cuba and Puerto Rico, as in much of the rest of Latin America, the practice of collective creation and of generally popular and politicized dramatic forms dominated the theater of the late 1960s and 1970s. Rather than portray the national family, many plays confronted specific local social and political crises as well as international events like the War in Vietnam. The focus on very local or international issues placed debates on national identity on hold, and as a result, while the family play in Cuba and Puerto Rico did not

entirely disappear during these years, it did not dominate.

The following exploration of family and identity in Cuban and Puerto Rican drama draws on a variety of cultural texts--from histories and national identity essays to revolutionary documents and film--in order to place theater and performance within the broad cultural dialogue of which they are a part. Thus, each chapter of this study begins by situating the plays in the historical, socio-political, economic, and intellectual contexts in which they were produced. This analysis also draws upon several well-documented histories of Cuban and Puerto Rican theater and a number of book-length studies on major playwrights such as René Marqués, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Virgilio Piñera, and José Triana. I have found Matías Montes Huidobro's volumes on Cuban and Puerto Rican drama to be particularly useful because his historically situated formal and thematic explications illuminate cultural idiosyncrasies.

Chapter one demonstrates that a series of plays staged between 1958 and 1960--Vejigantes (1958) by Franciso Arriví, Los soles truncos (1958) and Un niño azul para esa sombra (1958) by René Marqués, and Cristal roto en el tiempo (1960) by Myrna Casas--participate in a public discussion on Puerto Rico's failure to gain independence and on what constitutes the island's identity. I argue that, in these plays, a desire to found the nation through a

national family romance characterizes Puerto Rico's search for identity.

The family quarrels and failed romances portrayed in the plays evoke the contrasting stances on Puerto Rican political and cultural identity debated on a national level. In these works, the playwrights use the space of the house to raise questions about what kind of family should embody the nation. In contrast to romances among peers falling apart, in Cuban plays produced between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, the vertical tension between generations signifies a desire for national self-determination and a more just society. The conflict between parents and children in Rolando Ferrer's Lila la mariposa (1954), Virgilio Piñera's Aire frío (1958), Abelardo Estorino's El robo del cochino (1961) and José Triana's La noche de los asesinos (1965) highlights Cuba's struggle to define itself in a stifling authoritarian and neo-colonial context. In all of these plays, escaping parental authority and the oppressive space of the family home implies the restructuring of the institution of the family, and implicitly asks what kind of national family should replace the Republican model.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the fading prevalence of the family home, an architectural structure on stage that could "house" a national family, marks a change in how playwrights employ the family to address discourses of identity. In Puerto Rico, the stage itself emerges as a family space, and in

Cuba, the revolution downplays the individual family home. New studies from the post-1968 era that center on the issues of race, class, gender, and immigration in Puerto Rico reveal how the debate on national character has moved beyond the nationalist/colonialist framework that had defined many intellectuals from the first half of this century. In this context, chapter 3 examines the works Hotel Melancolía (1986) by Antonio García del Toro, Callando amores (1995) by Roberto Ramos-Perea, Quíntuples (1984) by Luis Rafael Sánchez, and “El gran circo eukraniano” (1998) by Myrna Casas. Rather than positing a fixed vision of national community, these dramas examine instead the formation of multiple subjectivities that challenge essentialist visions of the nation and the family. Although these plays, which cover the decade of the mid-1980s through the mid-1990s, contest many representations of the national family from the 1950s, they paradoxically display a nostalgic desire to preserve the cultural identity of a seemingly more stable past.

The final chapter of this study explores how the family play in post-1959 Cuba plays a role in a national movement to instill revolutionary values. La emboscada (1980) by Roberto Orihuela and Ni un sí ni un no (1980) by Abelardo Estorino participate in a national discussion on the role of family in a socialist society. These plays represent the challenges confronted by the

evolving conception of a new Cuban family in the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. By the 1990s, on the other hand, due to the economic and ideological crisis provoked by the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, plays have become less didactic and more critical of the new family and the nation. Thus Manteca (1993) by Alberto Pedro Torriente and Vereda tropical (1994) by Joaquín Miguel Cuartas Rodríguez dramatize a new fragmented revolutionary family arising from the loss of paternalist state support. In all four plays, the authors' contrasting approaches to portraying Cuban social realities tacitly pose questions about artistic freedom in the revolution.

The marriage between family and drama in contemporary Puerto Rico and Cuba embodies the complexity of representing collective identities. Throughout this century, socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations in Cuba and Puerto Rico have profoundly changed the ways their national communities have envisioned themselves. In Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, writing has played an influential role in the project of constructing and defining nationhood. Playwrights in Cuba and Puerto Rico make their voices heard in these intellectual debates on national culture by way of the family drama. The profusion of family plays in this region and the identity stories they enact represent an important contribution to a cultural dialogue that critics have tended to examine through narrative.

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of performance adds a unique dimension to the long-standing discussions about national identity on these two islands. The theater provides a dynamic forum for imagining community, whether in concert or conflict with the national family embodied on stage.

Notes

¹ I am citing from Stephen Haliwell's translation of Aristotle's Poetics.

² A sampling of their numerous plays that focus on the family could include Ibsen's A Doll's House (1897), Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard (1904), O'Neill's trilogy Mourning becomes Electra (1939), Pinter's The Homecoming (1965), and Wilson's Fences (1987).

³ Some comic representations of the family throughout the ages include Terence's The Brothers (160 B.C.), Molière's The School for Wives (1663), Oscar Wilde's An Ideal Husband (1895), Alan Ayckbourn's Bedroom Farce (1975), Neil Simon's Lost in Yonkers (1991), as well as innumerable television shows such as Leave it to Beaver, Archie Bunker, and more recently, The Cosby Show and Fraiser.

⁴ In order to limit my study, I have excluded plays that treat solely a married couple and have focused on works with multiple siblings and generations. I have also excluded the many Caribbean plays based on Greek myths because in the Greek tradition, plots almost automatically treat the family. Instead, I found plays in which the playwright imagined original families.

⁵ For an incisive study on the relationship between the power of performance in manipulating what we see, see Diana Taylor's Disappearing

Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"

(1997).

Chapter 1:

Four Failed Puerto Rican Family Romances

In the introduction to his 1993 translation of José Luis González's País de cuatro pisos y otros ensayos (1980), Gerald Guinness compares the long-established debate on Puerto Rican identity to a family quarrel (vii). Guinness maintains that the members of this family, "have in common the assumption that Puerto Rico is—or is on the way to becoming—a nation and that as a nation it has the right to independence and to the free exercise of national sovereignty" (vii). While Guinness limits the family quarrel/identity debate to pro-independence voices, the connection between a family quarrel and a nation-in-the-making underscores an open-endedness that is implicitly more inclusive than any single agenda in the definition of national community. In Puerto Rican drama of the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, the lack of consensus on what constitutes puertorriqueñidad and the country's political future is dramatized by means of problematic family relationships.¹ The failed romances represented in Vejigantes (1958) by Francisco Arriví, Un niño azul para esa sombra (1958) and Los soles truncos (1958) by René Marqués, and Cristal roto en el tiempo (1960) by Myrna Casas participate in the debate on national and cultural identity during a socio-politically and economically pivotal moment in Puerto Rican history.² In each work, failed romantic unions signal the inability of romance to construct a

unified national family that might simplify complex relationships between race and class, and men and women. The plays take place in the paradigmatic family space, the house, which comes to be identified with the nation. The material condition of the houses and the characters' perceptions of their place within them highlight different interpretations of national community. In short, tensions among husbands and wives and brothers and sisters and the spaces they inhabit become metaphors for a society in transition, one marked for some by disorientation and loss, and characterized for others by the forging of a new kind of Puerto Rican family.

My use of the term family romance is based on Doris Sommer's study of nation and narration in Latin American nineteenth-century novels. Her work, Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America (1991), examines how narrative romances (fiction) and nation-building (politics) go hand-in-hand in the post-Independence era in Latin America. The romantic relationships in these "foundational fictions" attempt to cross racial and class boundaries, forming "part of a general bourgeois project to hegemonize a culture in formation" (Sommer 29). Heterosexual love and marriage, in other words, would ideally strengthen bourgeois interests by reconciling racial, regional, class, and gender conflicts. Read allegorically, the young lovers of these novels represent different national constituencies, and their private passions reflect a public desire to build the nation. In these tales of the origins of national identity,

erotics and politics are inseparable, for the desire that joins men and women to form families is part of the political scheme to consolidate the republic. The unions depicted in these foundational fictions, however, are not always easily obtained. Sommer points out that the conflicts the couples face in the course of their romances serve to create the reader's desire for their relationship to succeed (49). On another level, the erotic disappointments of the protagonists and the construction of the nation depend on one another:

Once the couple confronts the obstacle, desire is reinforced along with the need to overcome the obstacle and to consolidate the nation. That promise of consolidation constitutes another level of desire and underscores the erotic goal, which is also a microcosmic expression of nationhood. (49)

In some of the foundational romances Sommer describes, the obstacles are too great for the lovers to overcome and the romance fails on both a personal and a national level. In two Cuban novels, for example, Sab (1841) by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Cecilia Valdés (1882) by Cirilio Villaverde, racial tensions are not effaced by love relationships, and the island's quest for nationhood is complicated by the issue of slavery. Similarly, Puerto Rican plays from the 1950s enact love relationships incapable of resolving tensions between people of differing origins. During this period, Puerto Rico adopted an ambiguous political status, the commonwealth, which established a framework

for constant conflict and debate on the political status and the national culture of the island. In this sense, Puerto Rico “failed” to create a national family with a hegemonic vision of national identity.

Historical and Cultural Contexts

In Puerto Rican literature, the constructive nation-building romance described by Sommer becomes problematic before the creation of the commonwealth in 1952 because the island never became a nation-state in need of a hegemonic family romance.³ Puerto Rico gained autonomy from Spain in November of 1897 only to become a pawn in the Spanish-American War and the United States’ first experiment in colonial expansion. The roots of this lost opportunity for nationhood go beyond the events of 1898, however, and are important in contextualizing the plays examined in this chapter. Under Spanish rule, the Puerto Rican peasant economy was fairly diversified, and compared to Cuba where large sugar plantations dominated, a relatively significant portion of the population owned some land (Rogozinski 207). Consequently, the Puerto Rican peasant, the jíbaro, was cautious in demanding changes that could jeopardize his situation. In addition, two waves of immigration had a deleterious effect on the growth of a bourgeois class with strong nationalist sentiments. First, during the South American wars of independence (1810-25), Spanish royalist partisans migrated to the island in order to flee the conflicts.

Second, to bolster the island's economic development (and in hopes of "whitening" the population), the 1815 Real Cédula de Gracias declared that any Catholic subject of an allied nation could settle in Puerto Rico (González Valés 93). The foreigners—mainly English, Dutch, French, Corsicans, Majorcans, and Catalans—generally took sides with the Liberal Conservatives who wanted to preserve colonial status with Spain. The other elite political group, the Liberal Reformists (made up of creole landowners), favored political reforms and broader autonomy. In short, although in the course of the nineteenth century some nationalist sentiments did develop, as Teresita Martínez Vergne argues, these did not coalesce around the idea of a strong, independent nation:

Puerto Rico's landowning, merchant, professional, and intellectual groups participated in politics only through the formulation of very localized demands consonant with circumstances in the mother country. It is not surprising, then, that the constant attempt at reform culminated in plans for autonomy, not independence.⁴

(192)

As we will see in the dramatic works by Marqués, Arriví, and Casas, Puerto Rican failed family romances have their roots in the nineteenth-century failure to develop a strong sense of national community. The constant search for self-definition, however, has maintained the family as an important metaphor in contemporary literature. Sommer extends her theory of national romance to

mention briefly how contemporary Boom novelists “rewrite or un-write, foundational fictions as the failure of romance, the misguided political erotics that could never really bind national fathers to mothers, much less the *gente decente* to emerging middle and popular sectors” (27-28). Similarly, Jean Franco argues that many Latin American novels since the 1950s do not provide imaginative solutions to racial heterogeneity, or the gaps among social classes, and urban and rural groups (204-205). She contends that the “new social movements which have sprung up on the margins of the nation state no longer couch cultural or political projects in national terms” and takes issue with the concept that contemporary Latin American novels can be reduced to national allegories that homogenize definitions of the nation (205). Perhaps because the Puerto Rican nation was never really founded, Puerto Rican plays of the 1950s, rather than rewrite or deconstruct faulty romances, still attempt to build the nation through romantic unions. At the same time, however, the authors are aware that romance is unable to bring together neatly different sectors. Consequently, the love matches made and unmade in their plays serve only to construct potential positions on collective identity.

Much like the failure of nineteenth-century Puerto Rico to define itself as a nation independent of Spain, its twentieth-century social, political, and economic relationship with the United States created a situation in which the question of national identity is a perennial topic of debate. Throughout the first third of the

century, the Puerto Rican semi-feudal hacienda economy was transformed into one dominated by capitalist plantation agriculture. The process of mechanization and concentration of land in fewer hands began before 1898, but under United States occupation the sugar industry came to dominate the island's economy until the Second World War. The development of large North American sugar and tobacco companies created a rural proletariat and dislocated the creole hacendado class from their hegemonic position in the agrarian sector.⁵ This profoundly changed social relations on the island. The paternalist bond between the hacendados and their workers was broken, and the proletariat class became politically active through the creation of unions and political parties, while the creole landowning classes faced the loss of economic power and their seigniorial way of life.⁶

The cultural crisis brought on by capitalist modernization affected far more than Puerto Rico's economy. The United States sought to Americanize Spanish institutions such as the educational system. They attempted to instill new cultural values by imposing a new school calendar that dropped traditional Puerto Rican holidays, by prohibiting religious instruction in public schools, and by requiring mixed gender classrooms and the study of North American history and English. (Morris 28; Oróñez Echeverría 20). Consequently, the institutionalization of an official national culture became an important project in academic circles at the end of the 1920s and into the early 1930s. The

establishment of the Department of Hispanic studies at the University of Puerto Rico and the founding of important cultural magazines such as Revista de Estudios Hispánicos (1928), Índice (1929), and Ateneo Puertorriqueño (1935) exemplify this project. In response to North American political and economic domination, many intellectuals, some of whom belonged to the displaced creole class, adopted ideologically defensive, traditional Hispanic values in an attempt to bolster Puerto Rican cultural identity in the face of North American influence. Many of the Generation of 1930 writers, in particular Tomás Blanco in his Prontuario histórico de Puerto Rico (1935) and Antonio S. Pedreira in his long essay Insularismo (1934), sought to define an essential Puerto Rican national culture.

In Insularismo, Pedreira responds to the questions “What are we and how are we?” posed by the editors of Índice in 1929. His interpretation of Puerto Rican national identity examines geography and climate, the varied groups that inhabit the island, and the island’s customs and literature to conclude that the Puerto Rican peasant, the jíbaro, is the true root of Puerto Rican culture (149). This would seem to be a contradiction, since, as many critics have noted, Pedreira’s view of national culture is framed by his own class formation and his definition of the Puerto Rican “soul” clearly rejects popular culture in favor of high culture.⁷ For example, in his survey of Puerto Rican literature, he dismisses the importance of the décima, a folk verse literary tradition (67), and chooses the

danza, a formal ballroom dance with a Spanish rhythm, as Puerto Rico's national music and dance (153-54). He is able to appropriate the jíbaro, an icon of the popular classes, as the symbol of puertorriqueñidad, only because this figure has already passed into history. That is, Pedreira bases much of his vision of Puerto Rico on a mythologized past that reflects the nostalgia of his class for its hegemonic position in society. His treatment of race and gender also reveals a hierarchical conception of Puerto Rican identity. As we will see, Pedreira employs a gendered geographical determinism to explain in part the docile character of the Puerto Rican. In the matter of race, Pedreira assumes that the Indigenous and African races are inferior to the Spanish: "El elemento español funda nuestro pueblo y se funde con las demás razas. De esta *fusión* parte nuestra *con-fusión*" (33). He considers the Spanish element the core of the island's identity, and disregards the island's indigenous peoples as a force in national formation. He argues that the subsequent mestizaje with the Africans created "una pugna biológica de fuerzas disgregantes y contrarias que han retardado la formación definitiva de nuestros modos de pueblo" (38). From Pedreira's perspective, the superior Spanish race absorbed the weaker indigenous groups and the mix between the Spaniards and the inferior Africans created a national psychology that is "mezclada y equívoca" (38). Pedreira's interpretation of Puerto Rican culture, which privileges Hispanocentrism, high culture, and a paternalist agrarian lifestyle, became a foundational building

block for a Puerto Rican nationalist discourse to which writers continue to respond today.

The growing nationalist sentiment of the 1920s and 1930s manifested itself politically as the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), founded in 1938 and led by Luis Muñoz Marín. The PPD, which dominated Puerto Rican politics between 1944 and 1969, initially put the political status issue on hold in order to launch new economic and social policies. According to historian Arturo Morales Carrión:

No other period in the history of the island saw such a dramatic transformation or such an alteration in the social horizon. The hard crust of an agrarian economy was permanently broken, and the rural character of culture was changed by new population shifts and distribution. Puerto Rico became urbanized and increasingly industrialized with new social classes of fluid mobility [. . .]. (256)

As the agrarian sugar-based economy declined, North American postwar development programs in conjunction with the PPD's Operation Bootstrap (1947) put into effect economic policies to promote industrial capitalism. The United States encouraged investments in Puerto Rico through tax exemptions and other benefits, which made Puerto Rico increasingly dependent on American capital. The question of political status could no longer be skirted, as

American companies did not want to invest in the island if it became independent. In contrast to independence or statehood, the PPD promoted the middle-of-the-road alternative of an estado libre asociado, or commonwealth, a status that was granted in 1952. As a commonwealth, Puerto Rico is neither a colony nor a state; it is self-governing in local affairs, but the United States handles all foreign relations and defense matters.

From the PPD's perspective, commonwealth status has economic advantages, and it allows the island to retain its distinct identity by placing education, health, and justice (all of which played an important role in the attempt to Americanize the island) under local control (Silvestrini 160). As a counterpoint to Operation Bootstrap's economic development plan, the PPD's "Operation Serenity" instituted cultural policies intended to strengthen cultural pride and curb resistance to the new political status of the island. According to Arlene Dávila, Operation Serenity "aimed to provide a sense of spiritual balance to a society threatened by the rapid social change caused by the new economic policies" (34). The Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO) traveled to rural areas to help the island's transition to modernity by providing educational workshops and pamphlets about budgeting, family planning, diet, and emigration (Dávila 36-37). With the establishment of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (ICP) in 1955, the PPD adopted an even more explicit role in promoting Puerto Rican culture. Through the organization of festivals,

conferences, exhibitions, and contests, the creation of museums, and the restoration of historical buildings, the ICP's express goal was to "contribuir a conservar, promover, enriquecer y divulgar los valores culturales del pueblo de Puerto Rico" (qtd. in Rosario 252). By promoting the cultural uniqueness of the island, government agencies such as the ICP and DIVEDCO helped "the PPD legitimize Puerto Rican nationality within the new semi-independent yet mostly contingent commonwealth status" (Dávila 38).⁸

Some groups, however, rejected Muñoz Marín's populist and conciliatory brand of nationalism and lashed out against the island's continuing colonialist relationship with the United States.⁹ The founding of the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño (PIP) in 1946 and the release from jail of nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos the following year contributed to a renewal of nationalist fervor. Between 1950 and 1954 there were assassination attempts on President Harry Truman and Governor Muñoz Marín, as well as a shooting attack on the United States House of Representatives. Clearly, the tremendous social, political, and economic transformations brought about during the 1944 to 1969 democratic hegemony of the PPD did not silence dissenting voices. In addition to the nationalists who used violence to make their point, many intellectuals pondered what they saw as the negative effects of Puerto Rico's permanent association with the United States.¹⁰

In the context of these turbulent events, the prominent intellectual voice of

the 1950s was essayist, short story writer, novelist, and dramatist René Marqués.

Much like Pedreira, who responded to the social and economic changes of the 1930s from an ideologically conservative perspective, Marqués's entire body of work nostalgically laments the loss of the paternalist agrarian world of the landed creole class (Díaz Quiñones 146; Barradas 69). His essay, El puertorriqueño dócil (1960) explores Puerto Rican national characteristics from a more pessimistic perspective than Pedreira's 1934 essay Insularismo. While Pedreira blames the island's "aplatamiento" (46) or docility and lack of direction on political destiny (the 1898 invasion and subsequent North American dominance) and on geographical determinism, his essay provides the components necessary to build a Hispanic Puerto Rican identity: "Mi propósito es más bien señalar los elementos dispersos que pueden dar sentido a nuestra personalidad" (30). In contrast, Marqués's essay focuses on a major national flaw, docility, which he considers the result of Puerto Rico's colonial condition.¹¹

Writing in the late 1950s, Marqués finds proof of Puerto Rican docility in contemporary Puerto Rican literature. He argues that the constant acts of violence and self-destruction depicted in Puerto Rican literary works such as Emilio Díaz Valcárcel's "El soldado Damián Sánchez" (1956) and Pedro Juan Soto's collection of stories Spiks (1956) tragically reveal a colonial guilt complex created by the dependent and "inferior" condition of Puerto Ricans.¹² That is, these acts are neither heroic nor a sign of healthy aggression. Instead, they arise

from the “desesperación de seres débiles y dóciles acorralados en el último reducto de la dignidad humana” (“El Puertorriqueño” 156). Politically, Marqués sees Muñoz Marín and his party’s creation, the estado libre asociado, as the essence of compromise between nationalism and annexationism; it is the expression of the “peaceful” and “democratic” or, not so euphemistically, docile Puerto Rican who is resigned to his dependent condition (165). For Marqués, this colonialist relationship with the United States has weakened important elements of traditional Puerto Rican culture. Thus, from the perspective of the 1950s, his view on Puerto Rican identity is much more discouraging than that of Pedreira’s in the 1930s.

The theme of family and the issue of gender often permeate the intense discussions about Puerto Rican identity in the literature of the 1930s and 1950s. For Juan Gelpí, the cultural nationalism of Pedreira and Marqués represents, respectively, the apex and the collapse of paternalist discourse in Puerto Rico (2). Gelpí affirms that the paternalist

se ve como padre y coloca a otros miembros de la sociedad en una posición inferior de niños figurados. La retórica del paternalismo a menudo remite a las relaciones familiares, y su metáfora fundamental consiste en equiparar a la nación con una gran familia. (2)

Docility as a national metaphor in both authors’ works implies the lack of a

strong father figure to lead the Puerto Rican people. Their tragedy, according to Pedreira, is to have begun the twentieth century “huérfanos ya de la madre histórica, quedamos al cuidado de un padrastro rico y emprendedor” (164). Similarly, Marqués characterizes the dependence of Puerto Rico’s legislature on the North American executive power as infantile (167). In both Insularismo and El puertorriqueño dócil, Pedreira and Marqués try to orient the childlike island by adopting paternalist voices and directing their discourse to the youth of the nation.¹³ As I have mentioned above, however, the socio-economic and political events of the decades between the two writers color their visions differently. The gendered discourse, moreover, provides one explanation for the unraveling of the paternalist constructions of Puerto Rican identity in the late 1950s.

In order to understand how gender issues pervade nationalist discourse from the 1950s, one must return once again to the 1930s and the essay Insularismo, for, as María Elena Rodríguez Castro puts it, Pedreira built “la casa discursiva de la reflexión nacional” that influenced generations of writers (35). Woman as a metaphor for land is common in nationalist discourse, especially when there is foreign usurpation (violation), or when the nation is in the process of development or modernization (procreation) that threatens the land. Pedreira blames part of Puerto Rico’s passivity, or aplatanamiento, on the geographically “feminine” characteristics of the island. Its smallness, for example, prohibits the grandiose gestures of (male) leaders: “A nuestros hombres próceres [. . .] les falta

el bulto de tierra tan propicio para aclarar y engrandecer las figuras” (51).¹⁴

Moreover, the lack of violent geographical extremes, “nada de estruendo o de magnitud” makes for a landscape that is “suave, halagador, amable y profundamente femenino” (48). Since Puerto Rico’s feminine insular condition cannot be remedied, Pedreira insists that Puerto Ricans must strive to cultivate “ideas y sentimientos viriles. De no aumentarnos culturalmente estaremos condenados a la ingrata condición de peones” (50).

Woman figures into the discourse of the nation as keeper of the national house. Rodríguez Castro argues that in narrating the nation, authors such as Pedreira and, more recently, José Luis González build a discursive house that contains the national culture. In Pedreira’s case, as national housekeeper, woman’s private role as housewife becomes public: “Misión política—¡y tan patriótica!—es la de ayudar a formar, entre nosotros, a la perfecta dueña de casa, tan responsable de la industria, de la agricultura y del comercio nativo” (109). Pedreira’s perfect housewife becomes the repository of the culture and history of the Puerto Rican creole hacendado experience. She is “figura recipiente, canal de transmisión natural y legítimo de la tradición que impone la figura masculina, agente activo en este proceso” (Rodríguez Castro 46). Pedreira’s mission of national self-definition is ultimately a family affair, with assigned roles for men and women.

The spatial metaphor of the house, then, implies a sense of internal

cohesion, a common identity, and conversely, exclusiveness, because the centralizing image legitimates its version to the exclusion of others (Rodríguez Castro 37). Marqués's narration and dramatization of the nation marks the collapse of literary paternalism in Puerto Rican letters, largely because of his nostalgic vision of national identity and distrust of women (Díaz Quiñones 144; Gelpí 136). While his book of essays has the paternalistic intent of clarifying some fundamental national issues for the confused youth of Puerto Rico, bitter sarcasm and resignation weaken the authority of his voice. For Marqués, moreover, the sudden appearance of the leading female character in Puerto Rican literature is a manifestation of the docile character of the island. He explains that this literary phenomenon is the result of the devastating introduction of a foreign cultural pattern: the matriarchy (170). The appearance of the matriarchy, Marqués laments, marks the disappearance of machismo, the last national characteristic that might have been summoned to combat docility. In Marqués's view, gender roles in Puerto Rico have become distorted by the 1950s; men have taken on the feminine characteristic of docility, and women's new active role fosters this weakness. In other words, the growing importance of women's contributions to Puerto Rican society, especially in the burgeoning middle class, cannot be seen as a positive development, for it provides evidence that the patriarchal agrarian world in which Marqués was formed is disappearing. By the 1960s, the national house Marqués had sought to construct

was in ruins. Like the decayed manor in his famous play, Los soles truncos, “la casa de sus ficciones había envejecido” (Díaz Quiñones 139).

These identity debates of the 1930s and 1950s and the institutionalization of “official” Puerto Rican culture coincided with the consolidation of Puerto Rico’s national theater movement. In the first third of the twentieth century, theatrical activity was limited and mostly dominated by foreign authors and travelling troupes. In 1938, the oldest cultural institution of the island, the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, helped initiate an autochthonous theater movement by holding a contest for native playwrights and producing the winners. The three winning plays, Esta noche juega el jóker by Fernando Sierra Berdecía, El clamor de los surcos by Manuel Méndez Ballester, and El desmonte by Gonzalo Arocho del Toro, can be loosely defined as social realist. They treat the problems of rural displacement and emigration that resulted from North American imperialism. Also in 1938, the Ateneo Puertorriqueño’s president, Emilio Belaval, delivered a manifesto entitled “Lo que podría ser un teatro puertorriqueño.” He predicted: “Algún día tendremos que unirnos para crear un teatro puertorriqueño, un gran teatro nuestro, donde todo nos pertenezca: el tema, el actor, los motivos decorativos, las ideas, la estética” (qtd. in Arriví, Areyto 245). The contest and the manifesto sparked a serious theater movement that created a Puerto Rican audience for plays addressing island realities written by native playwrights. Subsequently, throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, a variety of short-lived

theater groups such as Belaval's *Areyto*, Arriví's *Tinglado Puertorriqueño*, Marqués's *Teatro Nuestro*, and the *Ateneo Puertorriqueño's Teatro Experimental* developed new stage techniques and stimulated awareness of a national theater tradition.

In the university context, Leopoldo Santiago Lavandero, director of the *Teatro Universitario*, taught modern techniques of acting, staging, and directing, and produced many classics of world drama. In fact, between 1944 and 1956 no plays by national authors were produced by the *Teatro Universitario* (Pilditch 7). For political reasons, the university administration privileged Western culture in hopes of assimilating local Puerto Rican culture and discouraging nationalist or pro-independence sentiments. As we have seen, however, with the creation of the commonwealth in 1952, the PPD and Muñoz Marín began to promote national heritage.¹⁵ The collective forum of the theater was one area in which the PPD could implement its project of preserving national cultural patrimony and legitimizing certain visions of national community. Consequently, in 1958, twenty years after the *Ateneo's* call for national playwrights, the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* sponsored its first annual festival of Puerto Rican theater. The event brought together actors, directors, and technicians trained in the *Teatro Universitario* with Puerto Rico's most influential playwrights. The performances, well publicized and reviewed, took place in Puerto Rico's national theater, *Teatro Alejandro Tapia y Rivera* in Old San Juan, in front of capacity

houses (Dauster 182).

The plays performed at the 1958 festival were by four playwrights whose work was fundamental in the development of theater on the island: Los soles truncos by René Marqués, Vejigantes by Francisco Arriví, Hacienda de cuatro vientos by Emilio Belaval, and Encrucijada by Manuel Méndez Ballester. With the exception of Encrucijada, which exhibits naturalist-realist characteristics, the plays go beyond the social realism of the 1938 Ateneo Puertorriqueño contest to examine the island's crisis of identity from a more subjective, psychological, and poetic perspective typical of the literature of the post-World War II period (Phillips 90). In each play from the festival, and in Cristal roto en el tiempo (1960) by Myrna Casas, the family unit provides a crucial entrée to the widespread discussion on the character of the nation during the 1950s. While the plays share the impulse to represent Puerto Rican identity in the face of North American imperialism, the family members who embody various positions on the island's identity and the disagreements among them attest to the dissention on a national level on what should constitute puertorriqueñidad. Likewise, how the characters relate to the house, the space in which the family quarrel takes place, reveals contrasting visions of collective identity.

Vejigantes: Unmasking puertorriqueñidad

As a playwright, a chronicler of the development of drama in his country,

and, for many years, supervisor of the theater wing of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, Francisco Arriví (b. 1915) was instrumental in promoting a national theater from the 1940s through the 1960s. Unlike many writers of the 1930s and 1950s, Arriví does not base Puerto Rican identity on Hispanic creole roots. In contrast, Vejigantes (1958), Arriví's best-known play, argues to its implicit audience that the mixing of African and Spanish traditions forms the foundation of Puerto Rico's national identity. The play examines the effects of cross-cultural romances between Mamá Toña, who is of African descent, and a Spaniard, between her daughter Marta and another Spaniard, and between her granddaughter Clarita and a North American. The three generations of relationships present what Matías Montes Huidobro calls the "síntesis erótica de la historia puertorriqueña" (151). Because of the refusal to recognize African heritage as an integral part of the Puerto Rican identity, the synthesis fails to form a national family. Clarita comes to understand this through her relationship with Bill, an American, and with her exclamation, "¡Si tuviéramos el valor de afirmar nuestra alma!" (64), she calls for the audience to recognize a long-suppressed part of Puerto Rican identity.

The motif of the vejigante is central in the process of coming to terms with Puerto Rico's African heritage. Literally, vejigantes are monster-like devil masks worn during the carnivalesque celebrations of Santiago (Saint James) in Loíza, a predominantly black region on the north coast of the island. The feast day is a

hybrid and paradoxical celebration because Santiago was also the Spaniard's "Saint of Conquest" in the wars against the Moors and the conquest of the Americas. Dressed as vejigantes (forces of evil), caballeros (the Spanish knights) and locas (men dressed as women who behave as a chorus in the ritual battles between the caballeros and the vejigantes), Puerto Ricans of Spanish, African and Indian descent perform their own conquest. On a metaphorical level, the vejigantes mask underscores the theme of disguise and deception; that is, the denial of African heritage as a part of national identity is a psychological block, or vejigante.¹⁶ In the play's climax scene, Clarita insists that her family face the reality of Puerto Rico's racial mestizaje: "Mamá, vivamos de frente a esa realidad puertorriqueña. Sin los disfraces que convierten el país en una pesadilla de máscaras. Nos sobrarán fuerzas para vencer este embrujo de vejigantes y buscar una dicha real" (106). The tension between concealment and revelation that leads to Clarita's appeal is highlighted by the characters' relationships to the different spaces constructed on stage.

In some respects, Vejigantes is a typical well-made play. The first act presents a problem that is developed in the second act and resolved in the third. However, props, lighting, and music establish a variety of spaces and periods that transcend the unities of time and space and recreate the island from a symbolic and poetic perspective. Act 1 takes place in 1910 in a palm grove in Loíza on the feast day of Santiago. The sexual union between Toña, a young

black Puerto Rican woman, and Benedicto, a Spaniard disguised as a vejigante, introduces the theme of miscegenation. Forty-eight years later, the second and third acts take place primarily in the living room of a home in an upper-middle class San Juan neighborhood, el Condado. The second act centers on Marta, Toña's mulatto daughter, who denies her African origins by covering her head with a turban.¹⁷ She plots to marry her daughter, appropriately named Clarita (she is the offspring of another Spaniard), to an American businessman, Bill. Marta knows there has been a falling out between Clarita and Bill, and hoping for reconciliation, she has invited him over for a drink. Marta does not know, however, that the tension between her daughter and Bill stems from an outing to Luquillo beach during which, to Clarita's chagrin, Bill makes clear his racism. Bill's visit in the third act leads the play to its climax in which Clarita reveals what her mother has tried so desperately to conceal: her family's African heritage. In a final symbolic scene, Clarita dares her mother and grandmother to step outside their home to walk in their garden: "Ese jardín pertenece a todas. Tenemos el mismo derecho a disfrutar de los flamboyanes" (124). The red color of the flamboyán flower, a symbol of puertorriqueñidad, embodies the mixed blood of the Puerto Rican people (125). To walk freely in the garden is to assert their mestizo identity and to "unmask" themselves. This affirmation is spatially reinforced as the walls of the house begin to disappear, and the Condado scene merges with the scene from Loíza in which caballeros are engaged in killing

vejigantes.

The dissipating walls of the house at the end of the play are significant because the space of the house in Vejigantes constitutes a sign for the psychological entrapment that the nation suffers for not confronting racial issues. With respect to the construction of character subjectivity and theatrical space, Charles Lyons argues that “the spectator sees the character in space and observes the character perceiving the scene and conceptualizing his relationship to that site” (37). By witnessing this process of constructing identity through theatrical space, the spectator, in turn, is led to contemplate his relationship to the nation and to evaluate his or her own position on collective identity. In Vejigantes, each generation of women is linked to a different space within the house/nation, and the female characters’ voiced perceptions of that space convey different views on the racial identity of the island. Throughout the course of the play, the audience sees the three women negotiate their identity in a variety of spaces: outside on beaches in Loíza and San Juan, and inside an urban middle-class living room. References to off-stage spaces such as Clarita’s workplace and the North American South are also important in shaping character subjectivity.

In 1910, during the celebration of Santiago, Toña takes center stage outdoors in a palm grove while dancing to the music of the popular African-derived bomba y plena. The bomba “Joyalito” is the musical motif of the play. Unlike Pedreira, who in the 1930s chose the formal danza to represent Puerto

Rican culture, Arriví selects the African beat of the bomba y plena.¹⁸ While dancing to the bomba, Toña becomes Benedicto's object of desire, and he seduces her on the beach, a space that brings to mind the conquest of the Americas. The Spaniard's cries—"Santiago y cierra España" (13) and "Viva Alfonso XIII y Toña de Loíza" (12)—make explicit the union as a metaphor of the colonization of Puerto Rico. It is clear, however, that Toña is not a completely unwilling party. First, a dream reveals her subconscious desire to give birth to a son or daughter physically lighter than herself, and second, her disappointment when Benedicto proposes that she be his servant by day and lover by night conveys her hopes for a legitimate relationship (23). She does give birth to a lighter child, but the only space in Benedicto's life is in a small wooden shack behind his store (21).

In the second act, Toña (now Mamá Toña) is further relegated to the back room of her race-conscious daughter Marta's home in the affluent neighborhood the Condado. By playing a record of the bomba in the living room, Mamá Toña creates a contrast between her youth in Loíza and her current life in San Juan. Marta turns the music off and says, "Mamá Toña. Vivimos en el Condado. (*Señalando hacia el jardín.*) Los vecinos aborrecen esta música. La asocian con. . ." (35). Mamá Toña completes her sentence with, "gente de color" (35). Highly aware of her marginalization, she laments that, "Yo era feliz en el palmar de Loíza. Jugaba en las arenas blancas, corría suelta frente al mar y podía bailar la bomba bajo las flores del flamboyán. [. . .] Nadie me encerraba en el cuarto de

atrás" (35-36). In *Vejigantes*, as in many realist plays, the living room constitutes the public space of the house. Not surprisingly, the living room is the only space the audience is allowed to see, as the back rooms are associated with the private, or in Marta's case, what is being suppressed from public life. At one point, Mamá Toña even describes herself as "enterrada en la vida" because of her daughter's extreme efforts to conceal her (49). Mamá Toña knows that Marta fears Bill will discover Clarita's African heritage if he sees her and constantly offers to move into a retirement home. Mamá Toña manipulates Marta's sense of guilt, and although she is displaced, her presence in the living room—Puerto Rican public life—cannot be fully concealed.

Mamá Toña asserts her sense of identity and cultural roots through folkloric language replete with nature metaphors. For example, in direct opposition to Marta, Mamá Toña refuses to deny her racial heritage and affirms, "Me gusta verme como soy: algodón y café" (33). Later, she threatens to stay in the living room during Bill's visit by comparing herself to a hearty Puerto Rican tree of great longevity: "(Señalando el centro de la sala) Si me plantara ahí como una ceiba. . ." (49). Mama Toña's shift from the back room to the margins of the hallway shows the potential for a rebellious invasion of the center of the house. From her position in the hallway, unseen by both the audience and the inhabitants of the house, Mamá Toña listens in on the events in the living room. When accused by Marta for eavesdropping, she humorously defends herself by

saying she obtains her information by the brujería (witchcraft) for which her native region is famous (39). If the house represents the nation, then Mamá Toña's encroachment on the center spatially underlines the pervasiveness of the African roots of Puerto Rican identity and challenges the forces that would conceal them.

Although Mamá Toña complains of her physical imprisonment in the back room, she is more psychologically free than her daughter Marta, who, "tuvo la dicha de estudiar y casarse, y vivir en la sala" (117). The play does not detail the circumstances of Marta's romance, but it can be ascertained that she looks white enough for a Spaniard to marry her, and that in turn, she has married the Spaniard in hopes of having even lighter children. If Toña, as Montes Huidobro puts it, is "el símbolo básico, Puerto Rico, sometido a cópula colonialista" (157), then Marta gives her body in a romance that represents the self-hatred born of a colonialist complex. Marta's space in the nation/house is the living room. As a teacher and the wife of a Spaniard, she has a public role in Puerto Rican society. She does so under false pretenses, however, and she is the character who struggles the most in defeating the vejigante, that is, in denying her authentic heritage. In the living room, Marta is literally able to direct the scene and adopt the role of a white woman. She mutes the lighting so as not to betray her mulatto features (33). Her costume and make-up include a thick layer of white powder, clothes that cover her body completely, and a turban that hides

her curly hair (42). Her self-conscious performance highlights the instability of identities and the ease with which they can be manipulated and re-constructed for certain agendas. But Marta cannot always control the scene as a director would a play, and as a result, she lives in constant fear that her plans for Clarita will not be realized: "Si a Bill se le ocurre pasar al interior de la casa. . ." (39). If Bill wanders into the back room of the house, he will find Mamá Toña, that is, if he ever examines Puerto Rican society on more than a superficial or business-motivated level, he will have to confront what has been hidden away.

Marta believes she will save Clarita the pain she has suffered by sending her to the United States. She hopes to distance Clarita from both "el pasado nuestro" (37) and the here and now of Puerto Rico, where "se vive con el alma encogida. Unos rencores nos condenan. Se sufre sorda, interminable" (37). Marta adopts religious discourse in her mission to transport Clarita to another "world." For example, her goal is to save her from "miedos que desgarran la voluntad. Salvarla de rencores que estrangulan el corazón. Salvarla. . . Salvarla. . . Entregársela libre al reino de los blancos" (63). Later, she suggests that this world of whites is literally a heaven not to be found in "este mundo," or Puerto Rico (97). Marta desires to save Clarita from the psychological damage of living inauthentically by removing her from the island. She fails to understand that Clarita's acceptance of her racial heritage exempts her from the identity crisis she herself suffers.

While Mamá Toña has been hidden in the back room, and Marta is most at home in the shadowy living room, Clarita's space is outside of the house. Unlike her mother and grandmother, Clarita is associated with a number of spaces and shows great mobility in moving between them. She works for a North American insurance company as a guide for insurance salesmen who need to acquaint themselves with all social circles of San Juan. Thus, she has contact with a wide spectrum of social classes and spaces, including the company office, Luquillo beach, dance clubs in el Condado, and less affluent areas of the city. From her perspective outside the house, she comes to understand the psychological entrapment her family—and by extension, her country—suffers, which is why she insists at the end of the play that the three women together leave the house for the garden. To step outside is to unmask one's true self publicly, and Marta does just this by finally removing her turban.

Clarita's job presents an opportunity for romance that raises identity issues different than those encountered by her grandmother and mother: Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States. Bill's company underscores the economic and cultural influence of the United States on the island during the 1950s. While it could be argued that a positive outcome of American influence on the island is better job opportunities for women like Clarita, the play's stereotyped portrayal of the southerner Bill paints a mostly negative picture of American influence. United States economic interests in the island are expressed

in terms of conquest, as Bill surveys the beautiful Luquillo beach: “Millones en potencia. Millones. Un poco de inteligencia y los americanos invadirán este paraíso.”¹⁹ To facilitate this invasion and to climb the corporate ladder, Bill has sworn to learn Spanish perfectly: “A los clientes les encanta oírme hablar en su idioma” (66). His ever-present highball complements his characterization as an over-zealous businessman and loosens his inhibitions enough to reveal his racism. It troubles Bill to see blacks and whites together in Puerto Rico, and his officemate’s nagging question regarding Marta’s turban forces him to broach the subject of Clarita’s family heritage. Clarita responds by insisting they spend time apart and ends their conversation with the cryptic remark: “Un rompecabezas, Bill, y la conciencia exige resolverlo” (72).

Clarita’s exposure to various spaces constitutes a major factor in her growing awareness of her puertorriqueñidad, or cultural identity. She buys Mamá Toña a recording of the same bomba she danced to in Loíza and expresses a special interest in her grandmother’s heritage. Her explanation-- “Es una grabación patrocinada por el Gobierno. [. . .] Se ha despertado un gran interés por todo lo puertorriqueño” (44)--highlights the 1950s promotion of national patrimony (by Muñoz Marín’s Partido Popular Democrático). Clarita’s beach outing with Bill, however, leads her to a new level of identity consciousness: “Hay momentos, Mamá, en que me doy cuenta que Puerto Rico es un país y Estados Unidos otro” (59). In contrast to her mother and

grandmother, whose cross-cultural romances brought together different sectors of the nation but failed to build a strong national identity, Clarita's romance fails because it never takes place. She rejects Bill and the false promises of harmony that romance might offer. In a scene parallel to Toña's seduction in the beach in Loíza, Clarita refuses Bill's physical advances at Luquillo beach after he reveals his distaste for Puerto Rico's racial makeup. This choice implies the rejection of racism and the affirmation of her Afro-Antillean roots.

In some respects, Vejigantes follows a pattern Sommer finds in her study of populist rhetoric in contemporary Dominican literature. For Sommer, populism is a "rhetoric that displaces the relationships of the traditional family in crisis onto a nation in the throes of modernization" (xvii). She examines how the country's transition to an industrialized society is articulated in terms of the disruption of a traditional patriarchal family. The land (woman) is defiled by the usurper (oftentimes the imperialist) and "national destiny thus becomes the expulsion of the Usurper to re-establish legitimate ownership by the Husband so that (re)production can proceed naturally, [. . .]" ("One Master" 11). Vejigantes does begin with family strife—the three women are at odds due to their conflicting visions of identity—, and the play ends in utopic harmony in a paradisiacal garden as they affirm their puertorriqueñidad. The play's ideological position, however, seems to be that while there is no denying Puerto

Rico's economic romance with the United States (Clarita's job), culturally the island should reject a consequent inauthentic national identity (Clarita's rejection of Bill). This rejection raises an important question that remains unanswered: whom should Clarita embrace to construct a romance of national and cultural identity?

Vejigantes departs from Sommer's model of populism in the striking absence of the traditional patriarchal family. There is no male counterpart to Clarita, and, in fact, the Puerto Rican male virtually does not exist in the play. Puerto Rican men are present only in the first act during the celebration of Santiago, and even then, they are dressed in drag as locas or as Spanish caballeros.²⁰ Furthermore, neither the Spaniards nor Bill occupy the stage for very long. Other than Benedicto's brief seduction scene, he and Marta's Spanish husband are reduced to portraits on the wall of Marta's living room. Bill's presence is felt most strongly diegetically, that is, as a verbal construct in the conversations among the women, rather than in his two appearances on stage.²¹ The play does not follow Sommer's populist paradigm entirely, for Clarita's rejection of Bill (the foreign imperialist) does not necessarily imply that the patriarchal family will be reestablished. Instead, the play offers a new kind of family, and, having exorcised the vejigante, it reconfigures woman as a metaphor for nation. Arriví's play strongly departs from Pedreira's depiction of Puerto Rico as a defenseless and diminutive feminine island. Woman's

body is not available for colonization and procreation with the subsequent production of identity complexes. If there is to be romance to forge a national identity, in her future relationships Clarita will seek to preserve her sense of puertorriqueñidad instead of effacing it as her mother did. Because the play does not present such a match for Clarita, it privileges the connections between grandmother, mother, and daughter. This anti-patriarchal and non-hierarchical relationship provides an alternative to the traditional Puerto Rican family and a subject position that offers more agency for women. Unlike Marqués, Arriví does not suggest that increased mobility for women constitutes an imposition of a matriarchal foreign model and the loss of Puerto Rican cultural traditions. Rather, the family structure in Vejigantes presents new ways to explore a changing national community.

In the vein of Pedreira's Insularismo, Arriví finds the components necessary to construct a Puerto Rican identity and proposes that it is a question of having the will to recognize them. These components, however, differ greatly from Pedreira's Hispanocentric, paternalist, and agrarian vision, because Arriví finds strength in an urban community of women of Afro-Antillean roots. In his treatment of the issues of race and gender in the construction of national identity, Arriví was well ahead of his time. Twenty years after the play's première, González argued that to valorize the African roots of Puerto Rican identity is to recognize the Caribbean rather than

Hispanic or North American nature of the island's cultural identity. This would imply that Puerto Rico's destiny should be the same as that of other Caribbean islands: decolonization and independence (González 43). Other important dramas of the late 1950s by René Marqués and Myrna Casas also oppose Puerto Rico's colonial condition. We will see, however, that neither of the playwrights presents as constructive, or didactic, a vision of national identity as does Francisco Arriví.

The Fading Paternalist World of René Marqués

René Marqués (1919-79) is Puerto Rico's defining dramatist of the 1950s and is one of island's best-known writers of this century. Marqués was deeply concerned with the problem of Puerto Rican identity, and many of his plays explore the multiple consequences of the island's colonialist relationship with the United States.²² While he is remembered primarily as a nationalist playwright, his ability to combine the particular issues of his country with more international themes such as the existential isolation of the modern world make many of his plays accessible to broader audiences. Marqués is also noted for his experimentation with dramatic forms and techniques. His plays vary from social and psychological realist to existentialist and absurdist, and his innovative uses of lighting and music influenced playwrights of his generation. Marqués was instrumental, as

well, in fomenting theatrical activity on the island, through his creation of theatrical groups and participation in national festivals.

Marqués's generation witnessed the island's urbanization and displacement of the dominant rural classes, and consequently, many of their works reflect the Puerto Rican subject's struggle to adapt to this new reality.²³

Un niño azul para esa sombra (1958) and Los soles truncos (1958) constitute two such examples. Both are symbolic realist plays set in urban San Juan homes, and although the action of the plays takes place in 1958, the characters are highly concerned with another epoch and setting: the lost nineteenth-century agrarian world. In Los soles truncos, three spinster sisters reject contemporary Puerto Rican society and attempt to retain the purity of their European ancestry by secluding themselves in their dilapidated colonial home. When it becomes apparent that they can no longer avoid contact with the outside world, the sisters commit suicide by setting their mansion on fire.

Un niño azul also ends in self-destruction. In this play, the marriage of Michel and Mercedes LeFranc falls apart under the pressures of competing responses to the island's relationship with the United States. Their son, Michelín, caught between the ideologies of his mother and his father, can find no viable ideological position to embrace, and he kills himself. In contrast to Vejigantes, which explores the nation's complex ethnic origins and identities, Un niño azul and Los soles truncos examine the displacement and

identity confusion resulting from the social, political, and economic changes generated by North American influence on the island. In other words, Vejigantes addresses identity issues that derive mainly from within the island, whereas the two plays by Marqués consider the cultural conflict that ensued from pressures without. In both plays, failed romances and unfulfilled unions highlight the fading dominance of the creole landowning classes and Marqués's disillusionment with the changing character of Puerto Rican identity.

My study of failed romance in Un niño azul and Los soles truncos is framed by recent criticism on how Marqués communicates his vision of Puerto Rican national experience through his works.²⁴ Efraín Barradas, Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, and Juan Gelpí have pointed out the conservative ideology Marqués clings to in the face of North American influence. Barradas, for example, argues that there is one central theme in all his works: "La añoranza de un mundo idílico que se ha perdido" (69). This is the patriarchal world of the landed creole classes that ruled before the advent of North American agricultural modernization and industrialization. Barradas and Díaz Quiñones note that, in lamenting the loss of this lifestyle, Marqués ineffectively diagnoses Puerto Rico's problems because his vision does not evolve to take into account new factors in the makeup of national community and because he never proposes a viable solution to the problem of Puerto

Rican docility (Barradas 71-73; Díaz Quiñones 153-54). In short, while there is no doubt that Marqués's works are strongly committed to exploring the issues of Puerto Rican identity, his devotion to an outdated worldview blinded him to issues of class and race, and provoked controversy by defending machismo.

Among the works analyzed in this chapter, Un niño azul is the most explicit in attributing a failed national romance to the United States presence on the island. The play portrays the impact of a marriage ruined by political differences on a little boy. Acts 1 and 3 take place in the present, 1958, in the LeFranc family's luxurious home in the Condado, on Michelín's tenth birthday. Act 2 presents a flashback that provides the details justifying the events of the first and third acts. Through flashbacks, colored lighting, and musical motifs, Marqués evokes spaces beyond the on-stage house and terrace to create the ambience of cultural and psychological confusion. Michelín is characterized as a strange and precocious boy trapped between the opposing ideologies of his parents. At present, he lives with his Americanized and materialist mother, Mercedes, and Cecilia, a family friend from his father's side, who serves as a nanny. Michelín's father, Michel, is an idealistic professor-revolutionary who has been imprisoned for eight years because of his participation in a 1950 nationalist uprising. During this period, his mother has had an affair with an American and has adapted to

the new social order of the commonwealth (established in 1952). Alienated by his mother's behavior, Michelín seeks comfort from Cecilia and the sheltering branches of the family's backyard quenepo tree.²⁵ When Michel returns from prison, he realizes that his wife has betrayed him and finds that he no longer has a job. Seeing himself displaced from his public roles as husband and professor, he leaves, ostensibly to join a cause for justice in Chile. In the final act of the play, Mercedes reveals to Michelín the truth about his father's destiny: he has died an alcoholic on the streets of New York City. This ugly fact leads Michelín to commit suicide by poisoning himself, as his friends and family await his appearance at his birthday party.

While Michelín is the protagonist of the play and is the character who has received the most critical attention, the relationship between his parents and their family origins is crucial to the play's ideology. Following Doris Sommer's concept of national family romance, one might expect that the romance between Michel and Mercedes would strengthen the nation, as their union appears to consolidate classes and interests. Michel, the grandson of a French revolutionary, comes from a family that immigrated to the island during the first half of the nineteenth century. Papá François, the family patriarch, married in Mayagüez and through his attachment to the land, came to consider himself a "buen jíbaro" (166). Mercedes's family, in contrast, represents new money and the commercial world of banking.

Michel points out to Mercedes that her affinity to the North Americans is artificial since there are none in her family; rather: “Hubo sí baturros, corsos y africanos” (128). Although there is nothing mentioned about the racial identity of Mercedes’s family other than Michel’s comment, the vehemence with which she insists that her family did everything it could to fight for one freedom--“la libertad que nos da el dinero y la posición social” (137)-- suggests that, because of race, her family was less privileged than Michel’s. The more aristocratic bloodlines of his family permitted the luxury of fighting for ideals and national independence. The marriage between different races (European and mestizo), classes (the new money of an ascending class and the disappearing agrarian world of old money), and ideologies (materialism and idealism) should have strengthened the nation. The play implies, however, that love and politics cannot go hand-in-hand in Puerto Rico because of its political status with respect to the United States. Michel states that “Quizás el amor a la libertad y el otro amor sean incompatibles” (123). In other words, in a colonial context, his love for Mercedes is impossible, and the productive, nation-building union of classes and ideologies is untenable as long as he must fight for independence.

In addition to blaming the United States for creating the scenario for Michel’s and Mercedes’s failed marriage, Marqués subtly criticizes Michel for his poor choice in a marriage partner. If Mercedes represents betrayal on a

personal and a national level, then the nanny Cecilia embodies the traditional rural world of Michel's past. She sings peasant lullabies, prepares food with traditional jíbaro ingredients, and, most importantly, defends the values of this world. She is deeply committed to Michel and his family, and when he asks her to live with his wife and son while he serves his jail sentence, she does so because "nada ni nadie habría impedido que yo accediese al llamado del nieto de Don François" (125). For Cecilia, there is no other "familia mejor, más digna, más recta" than that of Michel's (112). While he is away, her task is to instill the traditions of the past in Michelín, but she knows that this is impossible:

le habría dado el mundo de don François. Porque me parece que era un mundo bueno. Pero ni teniendo un poder muy grande hubiese podido hacerlo. Porque aquel mundo está ya muerto. Sólo. . . Sólo he tratado de darle al niño las cosas que no han muerto de aquel mundo. ¡Cosas que no deben morir en ningún mundo! (113)

Cecilia understands the importance of family unity in combating the cultural confusion suffered by the island in the 1950s, which is why she so readily comes to Michel's aid. She, in turn, urges Michel to save his family: "¡Tienes que luchar! Hay un hogar, una mujer, un niño, ¡tu hijo! ¡Defiéndelos, Michel! Defiéndelos del mundo que intenta destruirlos" (124). However, as many

critics have noted, Michel is the prototypical docile Puerto Rican, and he bows out of the marriage.²⁶

One of the questions the play tacitly poses is, if Michel had married Cecilia instead of Mercedes, would they have had the strength to maintain their beliefs and identity? Characters never explicitly suggest that Michel should have married Cecilia, but a good deal of evidence implies that their union would have preserved better the ideals and values of Don François's world. We learn that Michel's family raised Cecilia as his sister. As a widow with a grown son, she is now able to repay his family's kindness by coming to live with Michel's wife and son. Her new role in the family is somewhat undefined, however, which creates tension by underscoring that being a sister to Michel is not her only possible role. She explains that she does not feel comfortable interfering with Mercedes's life decisions because she is not a family member, but Michel insists that she really is. Cecilia responds: "Bueno, ése es otro decir. Somos hermanos de crianza. Pero para ella y para todos los demás no somos hermanos, realmente. Creo que a menudo ha resentido mi presencia en esta casa" (125). Mercedes, in fact, resents the ease with which Cecilia serves as a surrogate mother to her own son. Cecilia's mode of dress and servant-like behavior role in the family further confuses her role in the family. Her severe black dress and white apron make her look like a servant, and she seems to perform the tasks of one. For example, she

does not have to carry the clean laundry from room to room, but she does, and this adds yet another layer of tension. According to Montes Huidobro, the laundry becomes the motif of “las sábanas blancas,” constantly bringing to mind the intimacy of the bedroom (414).²⁷ These character nuances--the widow, mother, servant, and possible lover roles--blur Cecilia’s former characterization as a sister figure enough insinuate the romantic possibilities between her and Michel.

Marqués presents two romantic options in Un niño azul, then, that reveal his stance on national identity. From the play’s perspective, the marriage between Michel and Mercedes has betrayed of the cause for independence and permitted the progressive North Americanization of the island. The other alternative--the possible union between Michel and Cecilia--epitomizes Marqués’s problematic yearning for the lost past. For Marqués, recuperating the island’s agrarian past entails regaining national control over the political, economic, and social destiny of the island. While this vision might seem to strengthen Puerto Rico’s sense of identity, Marqués fails to take into account that the world he privileges includes a lifestyle and value system that many Puerto Ricans of the 1950s had rejected. Marqués’s vision seems anachronistic in the urban world of San Juan where, in these years, there is much more social mobility for blacks, women, and the working class than existed during the nineteenth century.

Marqués's nostalgia for the creole hacendado world traps his characters in an idealized and unrecoverable past epoch and does little to negotiate constructively with the changing composition Puerto Rican identity. The failed and unrealized romances in Un niño azul are underscored spatially to create a sense of entrapment that ultimately results in the destruction of the LeFranc family. As in Vejigantes, character subjectivity is constructed by each character's association with various theatrical spaces the play presents diegetically (unseen space communicated verbally and through sounds) and mimetically (perceived space) and by their voiced perceptions of these spaces.²⁸ Mercedes, and to some extent Michelín, are linked to the play's mimetic spaces of the LeFranc family home's living room and the terrace. Michel also appears in the house, but only in a flashback and in the space of his son's imagination. He is mostly associated with diegetic spaces created through dialogue such as the past, jail, and New York. The various spaces in the play are representative of different worlds and ideologies, but, rather than guiding the characters to consider the diversity of world views that would lead them to understand their own stance as unstable and provisional, this plurality serves to isolate and entrap.²⁹

Mercedes and Michel are unable to reconcile because they are devoted to mutually exclusive worlds. Mercedes is committed to living her life in the

present and her philosophy is to confront reality, no matter how cruel it may be. When Michel was sent to jail, society rejected Mercedes, and she felt just as imprisoned as her husband. She refused to live in isolation however, and explains: "Tuve que vivir, buscar nuevas relaciones, nuevas amistades, no en tu mundo ni en el mío, sino en esta zona entre los dos mundos que es la tierra de nadie" (138). The play represents this new zone mimetically through the eclectic French, Greek, and North American-style furnishings of the house. As Montes Huidobro has suggested, the decoration of the house is emblematic of Puerto Rico of the 1950s in the sense that the lack of autochthonous markers and the jumble of styles underscore the identity confusion of the period (411). A large portrait of Mercedes clearly identifies the luxurious living room as her territory. Telephone conversations with her lover Phillip and her new friends diegetically reveal Mercedes's connection to an Americanized world of clubs and exclusive fashion retail. As we will see, this world has no room for the past, which is exemplified by the destruction of the garden quenepo tree to make room for Mercedes's parties with her new acquaintances.

In contrast to Mercedes, none of spaces with which Michel is associated represent the present reality of Puerto Rico. He is portrayed primarily through the dialogue of other characters in the isolated worlds of jail, his idealistic past, the streets of New York, and the dream world of his son. Michel's most extensive physical presence in the play takes place not in the 1958 present but as

a flashback that reveals why, upon his return from jail, he has chosen to leave his wife and his country. This flashback, in turn, contains scenes that communicate his alienation from his wife's Americanized social milieu. Through voices and sound effects, these scenes create on-stage worlds that characterize Michel. For example, dimmed lights and the competing melodies of patriotic Puerto Rican and French songs, a North American military march, and the sounds of machine guns recreate Michel's participation in a nationalist uprising (115). The voices of a Judge and a Jury relay the events of his trial, and a few minor prop changes such as bars placed across a hallway transform the living room into a prison (116-17). The focus on Michel's past experiences and his absence from the present depict him as trapped between his wife's new world and an impotent fight for independence. His only option is to leave Puerto Rico.

The worlds of Michel and Mercedes are so far apart ideologically that there is no possibility for the productive crossing of borders that could create a dialogue that might confront the island's new political status, look towards the future, and esteem traditions of the past. In her study of time and space in Un niño azul, Bonnie Hildebrand Reynolds concludes that the competing ideologies of Michel and Mercedes leave no space for their son. She writes:

Caught between the libertarian ideals of his father and the materialistic world of his mother, Michelin's personal conflict

involves the suffocation of his own potential. [. . .] Michelin's conflict is that of the Puerto Rican island, caught between a search for individual identity and a materialistic world which gradually destroys the possibility of finding (or developing) that identity. (43)

Rather than the metaphor of woman as nation posed in Vejjigantes, in this play the child Michelín embodies Puerto Rico and its infantile relationship to the United States that Marqués describes in El puertorriqueño dócil.

Michelín--potentially the island's future--exists in the shadows of his parents' ideologies and is unable to create his own space or identity. In relation to his family's home, he is characterized physically as occupying borders. In the first scene of the play, Michelín enters the terrace carrying a caged canary and disappears out of the audience's sight into the garden. He reappears on the terrace and greets his friend Andrés seated on a banister, a border between two spaces. When Andrés asks where he has come from, Michelín replies: "De cualquier parte" (78). In other scenes, crossing borders into the adult world of the living room emphasizes his marginality. For example, when his basketball rolls from the terrace into the living room he follows it and overhears a telephone conversation between his mother and her lover (106). Later, during his parents' confrontation in the living room, Michel's hand can be seen on the banister of the staircase leading from the living room

to the bedrooms upstairs, indicating that he is a participant in the scene, albeit an unknown one. Upset after witnessing his parents' argument, Michelín frantically tries to leave the house, but he finds himself literally trapped at every turn (143).

The only place where Michelín feels comfortable is the dream world of his games and fantasy conversations with his father. He prefers the sombra of illusion to the realities of the present where he literally does not have a place to grow and develop a unique identity.³⁰ Unlike his friend Andrés, Michelín is not interested in birthday parties, candies, or playing cowboys. His preferred activity, which he convinces Cecilia to participate in as well, is to "jugar al pasado" (85). Similar to Marta in Vejigantes, who was able to "direct" the scene in her own home, Michelín is able to exercise control by replaying scenes from the past. Like a director, Michelín theatrically recreates moments from the past and directs the actions of the characters: "Empecemos. Tú estarás cerca de la puerta para anunciarle a *ella* que los hombres ya han terminado su faena [. . .]" (87). In this case, he reenacts the scene in which his mother poisons the backyard quenepo. Michelín also creates alternative worlds to the present by falling into dreamlike states in which he can conjure up conversations with his father. A bluish purple light and the music of a lullaby distinguish these moments from the present reality of the house. Michelín tells his doubtful friend that his father comes to visit

“Cuando yo lo quiero” (82), which emphasizes again the sense of control that creating and directing these worlds provides him. Ironically, his father, who chooses not to deal with his problematic marriage and Puerto Rico’s new political status, insists: “No es bueno jugar tanto al pasado. Puede ser. . . puede resultar peligroso. Podemos perder conciencia del presente. Y es preciso vivir en el presente. Aunque el presente sea la más dolorosa realidad” (98). Mercedes exposes her son to this painful reality, and he learns that his idolized father has died, not fighting for freedom in Chile, but alone on the streets of New York. Without a fantasy world to sustain him, Michelín cannot exist because he literally has no space of his own, in other words, no voice or agency in the present world. He ends his life on his birthday with the blue poison his mother used to kill the quenepo tree, and his body is found hanging like a small Christ on the trellis that replaced the uprooted tree.

Although a trellis now stands in its place, the quenepo tree constitutes a central motif that supports the connection between family and national identity in Un niño azul. The quenepo, a symbol of puertorriqueñidad, suggests a family tree, a record of the relationships that have constructed the nation. How different characters perceive the tree indicates their stance on national identity. For Mercedes, it has no material value (it did not produce fruit), and it has stood in the way of life in the new social order of the

protectorate, so she has it removed. Similarly, Michelín's friend Andrés tells how the two trees in front of his house were cut down: "Mi tío dijo que tenían como cien años y que era una pena. Pero papá dijo que no era una pena ninguna, que había que sacrificarlo todo al progreso" (167).

Michel and his son, in contrast, see the tree as a symbol of their roots, of tradition and identity. When Michel was imprisoned, the tree became a companion and substitute father for Michel, as Andrés notes: "En la escuela te pasas hablando del quenepo macho, que es alto y poderoso, como un padre" (83). When Mercedes realizes the significance of the tree for Michelín, she regrets having it removed. These regrets come too late in the play, however, and she is ultimately characterized as a *femme fatale* who oppresses and destroys her husband. Ripping out the roots of the tree is tantamount to castration, and, together with her infidelity and the destruction of his manuscripts, the act leads Michel to cry, "¡Qué poder tan absoluto el tuyo! ¡Cuán totalmente me has aplastado!" (141).³¹ As Thomas Feeny has shown, this type of female character derives from Marqués's displeasure at what he sees as the rise of a matriarchy "that relegates man to a secondary position and threatens the underpinnings of traditional Puerto Rican culture" (192). The loss of the tree, then, alludes to much more than the destruction of a single nuclear family; it signals the death of a way of life marked by Puerto Rico's patriarchy embodied in the LeFranc family line.

Michelín's yearning for his absent father is indicative of Marqués's nostalgia for a world he has witnessed disappear. The boy's death parallels that of his father's, and, as they both die poisoned by liquids, a cycle of destruction repeats itself. After the potentially constructive romance between Michel and Mercedes falls apart, and the possibility of a union between Michel and Cecilia remains unfulfilled, the play ends with a sense of sterility: without a family tree to sustain the island's roots or identity, there can be no growth for the future. In this sense, the child's death becomes the extreme consequence of a failed romance.

A corresponding nihilistic tone can be found in Marqués's more famous play of the same year, Los soles truncos (1958). In this piece, three elderly sisters prefer to die rather than to accept that their way of life has progressively disappeared. Like Un niño azul, Los soles truncos presents two central romances, one failed and the other unrealized, that serve to examine the island's problem of identity. The two-act play exposes a privileged landowning family's decline during Puerto Rico's transition from a traditional nineteenth-century agrarian society to the twentieth century dominated by North American capitalism and modernization. Although all the action of the play takes place inside their Old San Juan home during one day in the late 1950s, flashbacks signaled by music and a change in stage lighting provide a half a century of family history that poetically illustrates

how the Burkhart sisters have come to live a life of seclusion in their decayed colonial house. The death of the eldest sister, Hortensia, and the impossibility of keeping creditors at bay lead Inés and Emilia to commit suicide in a blaze they consider a triumph over the corrosive effects of time.³²

The marriage between the sister's parents, Papá Burkhart and Mamá Eugenia, exemplifies Puerto Rico's nineteenth-century romance that failed to bring about a sense of identity that might lead to national independence. Given the couple's European origins (he is German and she is Spanish), it is conceivable that their families came to Puerto Rico after the proclamation of the Real Cédula de Gracias (1815) welcomed Catholic Europeans to the island to maintain white dominance and gain new agricultural technical skills. Most of these foreigners became Liberal Conservatives and were interested in preserving the island's colonial status with Spain. As Tamara Holzapfel has stated, the family's "attachment to everything foreign" is the source of much of its failure (154). The Burkharths surround themselves with German, Spanish, and French furnishings and send their daughters to Strasbourg to be educated. Inés's description of her father as a "naturalista alemán metido a hacendado del trópico" reveals his ambivalence towards Puerto Rico (23). Likewise, it is doubtful that Mamá Burkhart ever considered herself a Puerto Rican; she died of "El dolor de ver flotar una bandera extranjera donde siempre flotara su pendón rojo y gualda" (33). In other words, the Burkhart

family grieved the loss of Spanish sovereignty and the invasion of the North American “bárbaros,” not the lost opportunity for independence.

As characterized by the play, the Burkharts have never identified with Puerto Rican jíbaros like the LeFranc family did in Un niño azul. Although we learn that Papá Burkhart was committed to the family’s land and ordered his daughters never to sell it to the North Americans, as Inés points out: “Tierras que no se trabajan, siempre serán de los bárbaros” (48). Following her sister Hortensia’s lead, she has refused to sell the land only to lose it eventually in a public auction. The play suggests that the Burkhart desire to resist the North Americans was deeper than the commitment to making its land productive. Cultivating the land might have benefited Puerto Ricans, but the Burkharts have been more interested in their private battle against the “bárbaros” than in the future of the island. This is because they have never identified themselves as Puerto Rican; they were transplanted Europeans, whose family tree never fully took root in Puerto Rican soil. In contrast, González maintains that the black slaves imported during Spanish rule came to identify with the land because they were forced to “por ser los más atados al territorio que habitaban en virtud de su condición de esclavos, difícilmente podían pensar en la posibilidad de hacerse de otro país” (20). For González, blacks constitute the first Puerto Ricans of the island. The Burkhart’s European heritage is undoubtedly an important component of Puerto Rican

national culture, but the play censures the failure of this class to create a productive romance with other groups on the island. Instead, the group looked inward and maintained its European identity at the expense of the development of a strong national sentiment. This is relevant to Puerto Rico's evolving relationship to the United States in the 1950s, because, as Ralph Mcleod suggests, "The new colonialism has been made possible by the almost inherently colonial attitude of the Puerto Ricans, especially among landowning families that maintained strong ties with Europe to the detriment of their country" (103).

Through the retrospective scenes, we learn that the Burkhart daughters have carried on a tradition of pride and class interests by refusing to "open" the family up by marrying. The play's central unrealized romance is between Hortensia and a Spanish lieutenant. Papá Burkhart accepts the lieutenant as a worthy marriage partner for Hortensia only after studying the Spaniard's family ancestry to assure that he carries no Moorish blood (24). However, Hortensia never marries the Spaniard; she breaks the engagement when Inés reveals that he not only has a lover, a black yerbatera from Imperial Street, but that he has fathered a child with this woman as well.³³ Hortensia's reaction, to never marry or love again and the decision to shut herself off from the world,—"no saldré jamás"—derives from racism and class-consciousness (26). It is unbearable to her that society knows that her

fiancée has had a relationship with someone beneath her class, and especially, someone of African heritage.³⁴ Although it provides a seemingly minor subtext in the play, the Burkhart family racism explains in great part why they have never identified with the fundamentally racially mixed island.

To connect with this mixture through marriage would have drawn the Burkharts into a national romance of which they wanted no part. When Hortensia says “NO a la vida” (19), her sisters join her out of their guilt for also loving the Spaniard and ruining their sister’s chance for happiness. By sequestering themselves in their home, the sisters become isolated from the contemporary world. Withdrawing from society was originally a way for Hortensia to salvage her pride. Such limited interaction with the world, however, leaves too much time for the sisters to develop silent feelings of bitterness and guilt. Emilia tries to blame any ugliness on the changing world outside of the house, but Hortensia corrects her and says, “No, en nosotras mismas, Emilia. Celos, envidia, soberbia, orgullo. Rencor” (35). For Inés and Emilia, protecting the house from the outside world becomes a mission of atonement for having ruined Hortensia’s aspirations; Emilia says, “La casa debe expiar por nosotras. Es nuestra cómplice. Nadie debe rescatarla de su expiación. Lucharemos por conservarla, [. . .]” (29). The house and its formerly luxurious furnishings recall the Burkhart family’s

glorious colonial past, and Emilia and Inés fight to retain the beauty of this world for their sister whose dreams they have destroyed. From the perspective of the audience, however, the dilapidated state of the mansion and the sister's life of misery (both economic and emotional) are signs of the decadence and decline of their social class.

The sisters' attempt to defy the onslaught of time is characterized by a worldview that looks to their European past for answers instead of to the Puerto Rican present that they try to deny even exists. The invasion of the "bárbaros" in 1898 and the death of Papá Burkhart are two events that destroy their sense of security as the nineteenth-century's hegemonic class. Upon the father's death, time "se partió en dos: atrás quedóse el mundo de la vida segura. Y el presente tornóse en el comienzo de un futuro preñado de desastres" (48). Just as in Un niño azul, the nostalgia for the past is in part a yearning for stability embodied by the lost father. For the Burkharths, the past is a traditional world characterized by paternalist relationships between the upper class and their servants. The image of Papá Burkhart's cadaver carried upon the shoulders of four black servants captures the hierarchy that kept the world secure for the creole landowners (47). Gelpí argues that the sisters duplicate the lost paternalist family structure and shows how each character is identified with a certain familial role (124-25). Metaphorically, Inés represents the father, Hortensia stands in for the mother, and Emilia plays

the part of the child. I would add that the sisters adopt the roles of the paternalist triad in an attempt to recuperate the stability of their former life. In other words, the reproduction of this family composition is a method to cope with the trauma of historical progress. By recreating a paternalist family the sisters create a sense of structure in their enclosed world and are able to create an impression of timelessness, as though the family has never changed.

Like Michelín in Un niño azul, moreover, to cope with their precarious present state, the sisters adopt theatrical techniques such as a special space in which to play out their drama and props to “play” the past (Fraser 6).³⁵ Emilia, in particular, evokes past scenes to escape the harsh reality of their financial situation. To avoid mopping the floor, she transforms the living room into a party for the governor: “Hace una impecable reverencia cortesana ante la butaca y se sienta en el sillón de Viena. Se oye lejano el vals de Chopin” (18). In other flashback scenes in which her sister Hortensia appears, a strange musical sound followed by a blue dreamlike light signal the transition from the present to the past (22, 30, 47). For the audience, these scenes have a practical purpose: they provide the Burkhart family history and explain how the sisters arrived at their present situation. The flashback scenes, however, serve to emphasize that the sisters are not only physically cut off from the world but that they have also become psychologically

trapped in an anachronistic epoch.

The sisters' rejection of the contemporary world literally constitutes the decision to close off the family from romance. The house in which they sequester themselves, furthermore, provides a complex symbol that comes to have different meanings. On one level, it is the house of los soles truncos that refers not only to the architectural design of three windows over the balconies of the house, but also to the three sisters who are "truncated" in that they cut themselves off from the expected heterosexual life-cycle that includes marriage and procreation. When Hortensia decides to retreat from the world she makes a point of asking Inés never to open the three balcony doors below the truncated windows again (26). The house becomes an extension of their bodies, and its doors, windows, and balconies are points of entry that the sisters consider dangerous. For example, the description of men knocking on the door as a "golpetear estruendoso" and Emilia's fear of direct sunlight as they enter--"Por favor, caballeros, me molesta el sol"--underscore her panic provoked by contact with the outside world (48-49). The shutting of all entrances into the house is emblematic of what Gelpí calls the sisters' "supresión erótica" (133).

The outside world of the play's present is constructed diegetically through sounds such as honking horns, the pounding on the door, the voices of street vendors, and through the dialogue of the inhabitants of the house.

For the Burkharts, these sounds evoke a threatening male world of laws and economics in which they refuse to participate (28). As Ileana Rodríguez observes, moments of transition such as modernization favor the public sector, that is, male-dominated spaces (51). Rodríguez argues that women confront change from the family space, the house, and they have the most power in the rural world of the hacienda where they form part of a clearly hegemonic class (55). This world has been lost for the Burkhart sisters, thus, as creditors pound at the front door and attempt to enter the house, they are under the siege of a new (male) urban order that makes their cloistered existence vulnerable. The voice of the male Pregonero that penetrates the house at the beginning of each act is ironic on several levels: “¡Malrayo, polvo de amor, besitos de coco, pruébelos, doña! ¡Malraayo, polvo de amor, besitos de coco para endulzarse el alma, cómprelos, doña!” (16). Reynolds, for example, comments that the sister’s financial misery that prohibits the purchase of the treats (24). But there are other ironies as well: the sweetness of the products contrasts with the emotional bitterness raging within the house, these traditional Puerto Rican treats tempt the Europeanized sisters, and the erotic nature of the sweets’ names contrasts with their suppressed sexuality. The sweets are, as Montes Huidobro puts it, “una invitación terrenal y gustativa al amor” (395).

The economic realities of the 1950s also threaten to invade the

Burkhart family mansion, placing the world within the house and the world outside in constant tension. The contrast between the visible space represented (the house) and the invisible space described (the world outside) create the play's dramatic tension. As in Vejigantes, an interest in the development of tourism is a sign of North American economic influence. Capitalists are literally knocking at the door in Los soles truncos because they plan to convert the house into something profitable, a hotel. This possibility is historically accurate, for we should recall that in 1949, Old San Juan was declared a historic zone, and in 1955, the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña began restoration of this historical district. The sisters are horrified by the prospect of turning their house into a hotel, because their microcosm of the past would become contaminated by "la risa de los turistas, la digestión ruidosa de los banqueros, la borrachera sucia de los que grita" (52-53). The plot to reconstruct and preserve the house reveals the sisters' folly of trying to maintain an epoch that has already passed into the history of the island. That is, the fact that their home needs restoration implies that their world no longer exists in the Puerto Rican present. The interest in preserving the mansion is economic, but the project is also a matter of national pride, for it attests to the importance of the colonial world in the cultural heritage of the island. Since the Burkhart family never identified with being Puerto Rican, however, it would be difficult for them to consider their house as a part of

the national patrimony (Montes Huidobro 390). In addition, as they have no interest in the Puerto Rican present, contributing to the Puerto Rican economy and perhaps improving their own financial situation are not valid motivations.

Marqués's choice of hotel as the future of their house is particularly apt in supporting the play's theme of family romance. For Gelpí, a hierarchical and exclusive definition of nation characterizes nineteenth-century paternalist discourse (132). A hotel can hold many kinds of families that could displace the patriarchal structure of the traditional nineteenth-century family embodied by the Burkharts. To make the family home available to guests is tantamount to an erotic "opening" that would make the Burkhart's Europeanized upper-class world vulnerable to other national constituencies. In other the words, the mutation of the family structure would force the sisters to join "la gran familia puertorriqueña" of the 1950s, a primarily mestizo, urban, and middle-class family. They have chosen long ago, however, not to multiply in order to maintain the purity of their European heritage.

The prospect of their home being converted into a hotel forces the Burkhart sisters to act. They save their world from contamination by making the house and themselves vanish in a suicidal fire. Like Michelín in Un niño azul, who never finds his own voice or national space, the sisters also end

their family line because its role in the nation has all but disappeared and they have no desire to adapt to a new one. As Angelina Morfi observes, Marqués knows that the sisters have to die because, “Una vez su pasado se anula, se anulan ellas también” (513). However much Marqués may yearn for the values and stability of a bygone world, his plays Los soles truncos and Un niño azul highlight some of the factors involved in the demise of the creole hacendado class. While North American influence is much to blame, Marqués also recognizes the flaws in Puerto Rico’s family tree. Instead of love relationships that bind the nation together, conflicting ideologies and poor choices in partners tear romances apart. The self-destructive act of suicide literally cuts down the family tree, leaving little hope for future romances to regenerate what Marqués considers traditional Puerto Rican culture. In Cristal roto en el tiempo, Myrna Casas also mourns the loss of the island’s agrarian past, but with respect to the issue of gender, she views Puerto Rico’s paternalist traditions more critically than Marqués.

Myrna Casas: The Family Romance Degraded

Like Francisco Arriví and René Marqués, Myrna Casas (b. 1934) has played an important role in the development of Puerto Rican theater as a dramatist, professor of drama, director, actress, and founder of her own theater company, Producciones Cisne. Casas, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and

Gerard Paul Marín are the principal playwrights of a generation of writers who began to approach the social problems of the island in formally and thematically innovative ways in the 1960s.³⁶ Her first play, Cristal roto en el tiempo (1960), nonetheless, is very much a part of the Marquesian vein of theater of the 1950s, in its themes, psychological poetic realism, and experimentation with time, lighting, and music. Compared to Marqués, and even Arriví, Casas has been a much less publicized voice in the debate on national culture, and her works treat national themes with more ambiguity.³⁷ The characters in Cristal roto, for example, are not spokespersons for particular stances on the problem of identity, and there are fewer contextual clues to orient the spectator or reader toward conflicting visions of Puerto Rican experience. However, the themes Montes Huidobro finds in the play such as “los recuerdos, el fracaso, la debilidad y la culpabilidad” are unmistakably Puerto Rican (512). These themes describe the characters’ psychological state, the outcome, in great part, of problematic love relationships and the disintegration of the family. Through its failed family romance, Cristal roto participates in the traditional patriarchy identity stories prevalent in the discourse of the nation, at the same time it subverts this vision of national community.³⁸

In a sense, the setting of a colonial mansion-turned-brothel in Cristal roto continues the story of Los soles truncos. Similar to the prospect of

transforming the Burkhart mansion into a hotel, the Salazar family home reveals how the decayed upper class must finally open its doors, as the national family is reconfigured during a period of social and economic transformation. Through the dialogue of the characters on stage and the voices of characters from the past (that reveal the guilt complexes suffered by the living characters), the play reconstructs the conversion of the house into a brothel. Upon the death of the family patriarch, Don José, the Salazar family begins to fall apart. His demented wife is placed in an asylum, and his son, Pepito, has squandered the family fortune. In an attempt to regain the money, Pepito sets up the business of the brothel but dies in a car accident leaving his younger sister Laura alone with the new family venture.

The action of the play, which takes place “hace algunos años o quién sabe si ahora” (266), captures a critical day in the lives of several women who work in the brothel. The business is on the border of financial ruin, and one of the more profitable prostitutes, Amelia, abandons the house to try her luck in New York. At the same time, Doña Laura fires María, an aging and alcoholic prostitute who has progressively lost touch with reality. The title, Cristal roto en el tiempo, refers to María’s fragile mental state and the broken dreams of the brothel inhabitants. It also underscores the play’s static quality; there is little action because the dreams have already been destroyed. Instead, the play dramatizes the painful psychological consequences of

modern social problems, especially as they affect women. Sudden changes in stage lighting, bursts of violin music, and accusatory voices from the past highlight the atmosphere of anguish and guilt that pervades the house.

As in the other pieces examined here, Casas uses the family space, the house, as a metaphor for the nation. The play's most striking dramatic device is the character agency of the house. As the play opens, the audience sees the skeleton of a colonial mansion and hears a voice that announces: "Soy la conciencia de una casa. En esta casa encontraréis un mundo lleno de tristeza, angustia, soledad. A través de los años todo ha culminado en una sola palabra, dolor" (267). The house adds that the blame for this painful state lies not with the passage of time, but rather, "*sois vosotros los únicos responsables de la derrota porque la cobardía es el camino más fácil a seguir*" (268). Critics have suggested this voice speaks to the women of the brothel, but I would argue that the voice addresses audience members as well, for a detail in the stage directions signals that the house has no walls (267).³⁹ This opens the house up, merging what Hanna Scolnicov terms the "theatrical space"--the space created by the production, in this case the brothel--with "theatre space"--the physical space in which a performance takes place, the theater itself (11). If the voice were speaking exclusively to the brothel inhabitants, it would use the feminine pronoun vosotras, for this is a house entirely of women. The play suggests, then, that cowardice and defeat are something

the audience and the characters share, which widens the interpretation from the specific issues of the characters to a collective problem that includes the spectators. The women who sell their bodies as prostitutes are not the only ones who have “sold out.” The house itself--that is, the nation--has taken the “camino más fácil”: selling out to the Americans by settling for commonwealth status. Without walls, as Montes Huidobro has argued, the nation’s “identidad parece irse disolviendo en la nada,” leaving the island exposed and vulnerable to North American imperialism (216).

Casas further develops the identification between house and nation through the characters’ reactions to the uncertain (financial) state of the brothel. The voice of the house is the first to point out the dead-end situation of the brothel/nation. For the voice, the house “se derrumba lentamente día tras día [. . .]” (268). Not surprisingly, one way for characters to escape the collapsing house is to emigrate to New York. When Manuela, brothel’s housekeeper, warns Amelia about going to New York, house and nation become one: “Si crees que te van a tratar como en esta casa, te equivocas. Aquello es grande y nadie le importa lo que le pase a uno” (276). Later, the voice of Amelia’s sister persuades her to leave the island, “En esa casa no tienes futuro” (269). For Amelia, to leave the house is to abandon the nation. Casas presents only the options of staying or leaving entirely; there is no intermediate alternative of leaving prostitution to seek another kind of

employment in Puerto Rico. Thus the house has come to embody the entire island in a state of prostitution. There is no space outside of the brothel to offer Amelia better opportunities.

The other option for the lower class is to stay and try to maintain some of the nation's dignity. The privileged classes--the Salazar family--have irresponsibly "sold out" leaving the island's working class to pick up the pieces. This is the case for Manuela, the family servant who has long ago made a promise to Don José not to abandon the family. A "pobre jíbarita" (288) when she joined the Salazar household, like Cecilia in Un niño azul, she is the character most closely associated with the traditional agrarian world. The stage directions describe her as the backbone of the house (271), and Amelia comments, "Manuela está dentro de la casa como si fuera otra pared. Esta se va el día que la entierran" (318). In other words, Manuela and the class she represents provide the foundation of the island. Throughout the entire play, Manuela constantly cleans the brothel, underscoring her task as national housekeeper. Especially important to Doña Laura is the cleanliness of the grand colonial-style door, the only structure visible in the house's frame of empty walls. Manuela is aware of the falseness complicit in trying to maintain appearances: "La puerta limpia. Limpia y blanquita para que de la calle parzca todavía una casa elegante. Todo el mundo tiene su puerta blanca, pero los cuartos sucios y revolcados" (288). She cannot clean away

Doña Laura's guilt, just as the Burkhart sisters in Los soles truncos could not cleanse their guilt by preserving the beauty of the colonial world for Hortensia. However, as the structural base of the nation, Manuela continues to support the very class that betrayed the world she values.

As in Marqués's plays, there is a strong sense of nostalgia for the paternalist past in Cristal roto. The death of the Salazar family patriarch sets off a chain of events that have been disastrous for Doña Laura's future. Her sharp words and physical abuse of the prostitutes indicate her struggle to assert control over a situation that is spinning financially out of control. Like Inés in Los soles truncos, in her attempt to regain the security of the past, Doña Laura becomes a paternalist figure. Nature images, similar to the quenepo tree in Un niño azul, emphasize a happier and more stable past. The play's initial stage directions describing the interior of the house, for example, mention a "palma moribunda" that stands out in contrast to the well-kept furniture (267). The dead tree is an obvious sign of the decadent state the elegant mansion has come to occupy. Later, when Doña Laura insists on throwing it out, Manuela replies that she would like to take the plant out to the garden to replant it: "Estoy segura que así revive. Lo que necesita es aire y sol" (313). Manuela, more than Doña Laura, understands the connection between the strength of the family and its relationship to the land. Replanting the (family) tree expresses a desire for a more rooted

future.

The tree motif reappears when Pepito as a child identifies himself as Laura's protective tree: "Te protegeré siempre con mis ramas fuertes. Sí, soy tu árbol protector" (270). In contrast, María describes her present situation as "esta realidad desierta como tierra sin árboles ni viento" (321) and similarly, the voice of the house tells the characters and the audiences that they live a "sueño amargo, sin árboles ni viento, un sueño roto por el sendero largo y seco, el sueño eterno hacia la nada" (349). In an interview, Casas has explained that, in her plays, trees represent identity, or lack thereof, on both a personal level (she had a peripatetic youth), and on a national level (Pánico 414-15). Through the tree motif, Casas expresses her characters' rootlessness, an implicit comment on Puerto Rican identity during the late 1950s.

Cristal roto constructs a less idyllic picture of Puerto Rico's past than Los soles truncos and Un niño azul. While here the past may also evoke security and a stronger sense of identity, decadence and sordidness surface as well. Casas also subtly subverts Marqués's idealistic vision by including fragments of the past that, when combined as a whole, portray male domination and sexual abuse as products of mechanisms for sustaining a patriarchal social order. For example, through the voice of Manuela's husband, Casas reveals that Manuela has had sexual relations with Don José: "Al infierno con los Salazar. Le has rendido bastante servicio. (*Ríe burlón*).

Sí, y qué servicio. . . más que debías dar” (285). In contrast, Manuela--the character most closely tied to the agrarian past--describes Don José as “un hombre de verdad, noble y bueno” (288). Blind to Don José’s unfair behavior, Manuela ironically explains his wife’s dementia: “La pobrecita no hizo más que sufrir con la muerte de don José. No en balde perdió la razón, lo quería demasiado” (287). Because the play does not fill in the details, the spectator is left to speculate that perhaps Don José’s wife went crazy because of her husband’s infidelity. The contrasting characterization of Don José, on the one hand, can be explained only by the fact that Manuela is so effectively interpellated by the patriarchy that she herself perpetuates it.⁴⁰

In the traditional patriarchal family evoked by the play, the unequal power relations between men and women permit males to behave irresponsibly with no censure. Thus, according to María, a long-time prostitute in the brothel, Pepito, the young patriarch of the Salazar family, has become a “un monstruo sin conciencia” (297). Pepito is characterized as greedy, vain, and reckless (he dies in a car accident because he drives too fast). He wastes his (and his sister’s) inheritance and refuses to work to regain it: “No, no puedo trabajar. No soporto esa palabra. Todo saldrá bien, verás. Tengo muchos amigos” (291). By mentioning Pepito’s friends, willing participators in the brothel business, Casas widens the critique of male behavior to a whole class of young people capable of sacrificing dignity for

economic success. Unlike Laura, who has a real attachment to her home and whose conscience is tormented by her father's condemning voice, Pepito explains that "la casa no me importa. Es el negocio que me interesa" (349). To open the house to prostitution degrades women as housekeepers of the nation and sacrifices family pride and tradition.

The voice of the house repeatedly tells the characters and the audience that cowardice is to blame for its present state of anguish and isolation. One has to ask if the cowardice refers in part to Laura's compliance with Pepito's plans. An incestuous relationship between the siblings could explain her excessive loyalty to her unlikable brother, and it supports the generally sordid account of the past as embodied by the Salazar family.⁴¹ Opposed to his plans, Laura nevertheless acquiesces because "Pepito siempre fue el mas fuerte. Nunca tuve valor para oponerme a él" (291). The audience can assume that she may not have been able to oppose or stop him in other respects as well. Pepito's voice recalls a scene from their childhood that underscores Laura's fragility and his power over her: "Ven, Laurilla ven. No te escondas. . . , ven conmigo. . . , nadie te hará daño. . . , jugarás conmigo y nada más. . . Vente conmigo. . . Así, juntos los dos. . . siempre. . ." (293). Even more telling is Laura's reaction to the memory described in the stage directions that follow: "*La música ensordecedora ahoga la voz del niño. Doña Laura vuelve la cabeza hacia la izquierda en un grito contenido de protesta. Su*

mirada es de intenso disgusto" (293). Laura's intense reaction suggests that going to the garden to play with her brother is something that causes her great pain and guilt. An incestuous relationship with her brother also would help explain why Laura has never married. When a prospective suitor materializes, Pepito rejects him and forces her to stay at the brothel: "Tú te quedas y me ayudas. Yo te enseñaré. Además, ¿qué vas a hacer? ¿Casarte con el tonto del español? (*Ríe sarcástico.*) ¡Claro que no! Una Salazar casada con un triste comerciante" (291-92). His commentary on the Spaniard's class could be an excuse that hides his real motives of not wanting to lose his sister. Like Don José's relationship with Manuela, Pepito, through sexual domination, coerces his sister into complying and supporting the patriarchy.

Incest provides a strong indication of failed national romance because it is not productive in constructing the nation. It is an "inward" looking relationship that does not cross barriers of race or class to join together different groups to build a stronger community, nor is it associated with procreation, which is so important for the nation's future. By not marrying the Spanish merchant, Laura has lost any opportunity for her family's financial success. On a national level, a marriage between the aristocracy and the merchant class could have strengthened Puerto Rico and made it less vulnerable to the United States. Like the sisters in Los soles truncos, however, Laura says "no" to life and becomes trapped in a sterile

environment. Her brother now dead, Laura expresses her anguish at her failure to make connections with others: “Nunca pude conservar una amistad, nunca pude retener nada a nadie” (292).

In addition to the incestuous romance between brother and sister, the brothel, while it may bring together groups that otherwise would have little interaction, also exemplifies a non-productive romance. María, for example, yearns for a loving and life-affirming union to the point of madness. Blue stage lighting signals the moments in which she loses contact with reality. María drinks rum and hears sounds and voices that help to create a fantasy world in which she plays out scenes with her ex-lover. He had promised that they would have a baby, and her only personal possession is a music box (a gift from him) that plays a lullaby. María’s desire for a baby is further underscored when she speaks to Manuela’s grandson Paquito, and invents a son just his age (306). As in the other plays in this chapter, María’s fantasies provide a metatheatrical mode of coping with reality, in this instance, her terribly degrading profession. Due to her delicate mental state, Manuela sends María few clients. When she does send her a young man, the incident that ensues forces Doña Laura to fire María. Ernesto, characterized as a sensitive outsider, reluctantly visits the brothel as a part of the initiation process of his college fraternity. During the course of their conversation, María begins to confuse him with the son she wished she could have had and

becomes hysterical when he attempts to kiss her (342). The play reintroduces the theme of incest (this time between mother and son) to emphasize María's particular failed romance: her profession that brings people together in a sexual union but fails to create a family.

As Montes Huidobro has pointed out, the voice of the house that announces the play's themes of cowardice and guilt establishes the didactic framework of a parable (512). On an allegorical level, the brothel, a symbol of the degraded state of the family/nation, is the result of the combination of the passage of time (historical process), and the decisions made by its owners (the upper class). The play suggests that while the women are left to pick up the broken pieces of the title's broken crystal (Puerto Rican identity), the nation's popular base (represented by the jíbara servant Manuela) shares in the upper class's cowardice and guilt for its excessive loyalty. Manuela's loyalty serves to expose some of the mechanisms by which the patriarchy coerces women into supporting it. Compared to Arriví's play, the didactic element here is less explicit, and unlike Vejigantes, at the end of the parable, Casas does not provide a positive solution for her female characters.

While nationalist discourse and specific references to Puerto Rico's political status are absent from the piece, the play's romances make clear its dialogue with René Marqués's vision of national identity. Instead of idealizing the bygone days of financial stability and paternalism, the play

reveals the gendered and class-based cracks in the aristocratic façade. Thus the disintegration of the Salazar family has been in part its own doing, and, rather than focusing on the losses of the family's privileged world, the play highlights instead how the economic and social transformation of the first part of this century have affected women and the lower classes. Casas's examination of the Puerto Rican family and nation introduces gender and class issues to the debate on national community, questioning other representations of identity of the 1950s.

Conclusion

Under the tutelage of the United States, during the first half of this century, Puerto Rico underwent socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations that profoundly changed how Puerto Ricans envisioned themselves. Consequently, the decade of the 1950s constitutes a moment in which intellectuals discussed the character of Puerto Rican national and cultural identity with particular intensity. At the same time, Puerto Rico's national theater movement coalesced, and playwrights such as Francisco Arriví, René Marqués, and Myrna Casas joined the debate by using the private family unit to investigate the problem of Puerto Rican identity in the public forum of the theater. Instead of strengthening the nation by wedding disparate groups, love relationships in Vejigantes, Un niño azul para esa

sombra, Los soles truncos, and Cristal roto en el tiempo either fail to come together or fall apart. That is, the plays reveal Puerto Rico to be a house divided. In all four works, family romances are shown to fail in part because of North American cultural and economic imperialism. The plays also show, however, that the weaknesses in the Puerto Rican family tree have their roots in the Spanish colonial period. In each piece, moreover, the condition of the house featured on stage and the perceptions of the characters of this space are instrumental in communicating different images of national community. For Arriví, to leave the family home constitutes an identity-affirming act, whereas for Marqués and Casas, the deteriorating house signifies loss and vulnerability. The decayed colonial mansion in Los soles truncos marks the collapse of a class and its way of life that the Burkharts and the families in Un niño azul para esa sombra and Cristal roto en el tiempo also mourn. Cuban family plays from the 1950s also portray a society in transition but with less nostalgia for the past. The following chapter examines how Cuban plays of the late 1950s through the mid-1960s exhibit a vertical tension between generations within families. While Puerto Rican works of this period show how horizontal love relationships between husbands and wives and among siblings fall apart leaving their houses in ruins, the tensions in the Cuban plays are found mostly between parents and children. These plays portray Cuban families from middle- and landowning- classes just before the 1959

revolution, and the conflict between generations and the oppressive space of the house provide metaphors pointing to revolution.

Notes

¹ I use the Spanish term puertorriqueñidad to signify Puerto Rican identity throughout, because its English translation, “Puerto Ricanness,” is somewhat awkward.

² Throughout this study, all dates following the play titles refer to the year of their première. I note cases in which there is a significant gap between the production date and the publication of the play.

³ La peregrinación de Bayoán (1863) portrays Eugenio María de Hostos’s desire for Puerto Rican independence and the creation of an Antillean Federation. The novel is the closest example of a nineteenth-century romance in Puerto Rico.

⁴ The strongest nationalist challenge to Spanish domination was the 1868 Grito de Lares led from Saint Thomas by the Puerto Rican-born and French-educated doctor Ramón Emeterio Betances.

⁵ According to Blanca G. Silvestrini, by 1928

U.S.-owned centrales controlled approximately 80 percent of the sugar lands and processed more than 60 percent of the sugar exported. The peso devaluation and scarcity of currency made it very difficult for Puerto Rican colonos, the sugarcane growers who supplied the centrales, to expand or modernize their farms in competition with foreign investors. (149)

⁶ Ángel G. Quintero Rivera states that this formed a triangular political conflict between the agricultural workers, the hacendado class, and the colonial power (217). Later, however, “it had become clear to the island’s proletariat that its real class enemies were the great absentee North American corporations which controlled the sugar industry” (221). The triangular relations created by colonialism created class conflicts and weakened the bonds between Puerto Ricans, perhaps making the island more vulnerable to North American domination.

⁷ In his essay, “Insularismo e ideología burguesa,” Juan Flores places Insularismo within the philosophical and ideological currents of its time, such as José Enrique Rodó’s latinist arielismo, José Ortega y Gasset’s elitism, and Oswald Spengler’s racism, in order to explain how Pedreira’s vision of Puerto Rican identity “es ejemplo clásico de la ideología burguesa” (107).

⁸ For the debate on which cultural values were chosen to represent puertorriqueñidad, see Dávila (43-59). Ultimately, the PPD’s definition of national culture was very similar to those of the writers of the Generation of the 1930s. The PPD promoted a spiritualist, romanticized vision of Puerto Rico’s agricultural past that included the harmonious blend of the Indian, Black, and Spanish races as the building block for Puerto Rican culture.

⁹ Of course, the nationalist violence of the 1950s was not a new

phenomenon. Throughout the 1930s there were several violent events. In 1936, the chief of insular police was killed, and Puerto Rico's most famous nationalist leader, Pedro Albizu Campos, was tried for sedition and sentenced to a federal penitentiary in Atlanta. The following year, police opened fire on a nationalist parade in what is referred to as "The Ponce Massacre".

¹⁰ Of the three main political positions, pro-commonwealth, pro-statehood, and pro-independence, the majority of writers and intellectuals of the 1950s identified with the independista cause.

¹¹ Pedreira in Insularismo, of course, had already pointed out Puerto Rican docility. Marqués expands upon the theme to explain how the island's docility leads to self-destructive behavior.

¹² Marqués cites many of his own works as well, both narrative and drama.

¹³ Marqués's dedication is as follows: "A la juventud puertorriqueño de hoy, con la esperanza de este volumen, [. . .] pueda aclarar algunos problemas fundamentales que a esa juventud (debido a condiciones artificialmente creadas por otros para ella) despista, desorienta o confunde" (11).

¹⁴ Puerto Rico's geographic position between two continents and its

status as a small island are major factors that contribute to what Pedreira terms its insularismo: “No somos continentales, ni siquiera antillanos: somos simplemente insulares que es como decir insulados en casa estrecha” (51).

¹⁵ For more on the political interest in national culture, see Marqués’s essay “Pesimismo literario y optimismo político: Su coexistencia en el Puerto Rico actual.”

¹⁶ Vejigantes forms part of a trilogy of plays including Bolero y Plena (1956) and Sirena (1959). The trilogy, entitled Máscara puertorriqueña, develops the mask motif and the theme of race.

¹⁷ The turban is the most obvious sign of Marta’s obsession with being white. She unconsciously constantly adjusts it with her hand.

¹⁸ In his article “Cortijo’s Revenge: New Mappings of Puerto Rican Culture,” Juan Flores examines how writings from the 1980s on Puerto Rican identity valorize African and working-class culture. Arriví’s interest in this aspect of Puerto Rican identity pre-dates this trend by two decades, but, inexplicably, Flores does not include him as a precursor.

¹⁹ The tourist industry was just beginning to develop during this period. The legalization of gambling in 1948, the construction of the Caribe Hilton in the 1950s, and the diplomatic rupture between the United States and Cuba in 1962 all contributed to jump start the island’s tourist industry.

²⁰ The presence of locas and the absence of the Puerto Rican male in the play could be usefully examined with Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé's theory of how the island lacks a heterosexual desire to build the nation. For more on Cruz-Malavé, see chapter 3.

²¹ Bill's stereotyped characterization further weakens his presence in the play. He is almost a parody of a southern racist.

²² Palm Sunday (1949), La carreta (1954), Juan Bobo y la Dama de Occidente (1955), La muerte no entrará en palacio (1956), Un niño azul para esta sombra (1958), Los soles truncos (1958), La casa sin reloj (1960), Carnaval afuera, carnaval adentro (1960), El apartamento (1964), and Mariana o el alba (1965) all deal with Puerto Rico's domination by a foreign power on some level.

²³ González examines the predominance of the urban scene in Puerto Rican works from the 1950s in his 1987 essay "On Puerto Rican Literature of the 1950s".

²⁴ Marqués's dramatic works have provoked much critical discussion. Ralph McLeod, Tamara Holzapfel, and Eleanor Martin, for example, have examined the evolution of the themes and techniques in his plays, as well as the influences of playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Eugene O'Neill. Matías Montes Huidobro, on the other hand, analyzes his

works within the context of other contemporary Puerto Rican dramas, mainly from a structuralist perspective.

²⁵ The audience never actually sees the tree, however, because by the play's present, 1958, Mercedes has had it cut down. In its place stands a six-foot iron trellis that supports a climbing plant.

²⁶ Thomas Feeny, for example, in his article on female characters in the works of René Marqués, writes that because "Marqués's male protagonists who share his dedication to Puerto Rican autonomy inevitably fail, he inflicts shame upon them as a form of retribution for their inability to gain independence" (193).

²⁷ Montes Huidobro sees Cecilia (as well as Mercedes) as a *femme fatal* in that she represents both sexuality and death. Her black dress and the tragic contents of her lullabies associate her with death, while the clean laundry associates her with sex (414). From my perspective, Marqués includes this detail to characterize Cecilia as more than a sister to Michel.

²⁸ Michael Issacharoff develops the concepts of mimetic and diegetic dramatic space in Discourse as Performance. See especially chapter 5, "Space in Drama."

²⁹ This is the opposite effect of what Austin Quigley suggests in his theory of the world motif in theater. He maintains that as characters are

dramatized in contrasting spaces both they and the audience members are drawn to envision their worlds as permeable and changing (10-12).

³⁰ The “sombra” from the play’s title has multiple meanings. It refers to Michelín’s dream world as well as to living trapped between his parents’ ideologies, and, finally, to the island’s situation beneath the shadow of the North Americans.

³¹ The image of castration as a metaphor for Puerto Rico’s colonized status is also important in Marqués’s fiction. See, for example, his short story “En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado” (1970) and his novel, *La mirada* (1975).

³² Since my analysis of the play focuses on the themes of failed family romance and identity, I will not touch upon many elements of this complex work. For examinations of Marqués’s staging techniques (lighting, music, and use of multiple temporal planes), or his use of ritual, Christian symbolism, and myth, see studies by Bonnie Hildebrand Reynolds, Angelina Morfi, Eleanor Martin, and Tamara Holzapfel.

³³ Inés informs her of the affair because she is motivated by jealousy; she and Emilia love the Spaniard as well.

³⁴ It is never explicitly stated that the woman is black. However, a reference to the child’s blue eyes, the mention of the woman’s occupation and Hortensia’s extreme reaction to the affair make it clear that she is poor and of

African descent. The son produced in the romance between the Spaniard and a poor black woman (whose occupation as a yerbatera demands an understanding of native plants and herbs) is an example of the cultural synthesis that Francisco Arriví suggests in Vejigantes should be recognized as a fundamental part of Puerto Rican identity.

³⁵ For a study on the theatricality of Los soles truncos, see Howard Fraser's "Theatricality in the Fanlights and Payment as Pledged."

³⁶ Since the decade of the 1960s, Myrna Casas has written some thirteen published and unpublished plays that range from traditional realism-naturalism, to absurdim, and to post-modern metatheatricality and intertextuality. Critics have examined her works from a variety of approaches noting their experimentalism, female protagonism, and concern for Puerto Rican identity. Most relevant to my approach is the work done by Sandra Messinger Cypess, Matías Montes Huidobro, and Vicky Unruh that focuses on the issues of cultural and national identity in plays that address this theme explicitly and implicitly. For criticism less centered on the cultural specificity of Casas's work, see Raquel Aguilú de Murphy's study of the absurdist elements in her plays and Luz María Umpierre's feminist-semiotic reading of Absurdos en soledad.

³⁷ In an interview, Casas explains why she has not received as much

critical attention as her fellow national playwrights: “Por ser mujer y un poquito más allá, el no pertenecer a la claqué intelectual, pro independencia de este país, que es la claqué que controla la crítica seria, las revistas” (Pánico 418).

³⁸ Myrna Casas has two other plays from this period that also could be examined from the perspective of family romance: Eugenia Victoria Herrera (1964) and La trampa (1963). My study of family romance and house/nation in Cristal roto en el tiempo builds on Cypess’s study, “Eugenia Victoria Herrera and Myrna Casas’ Redefinition of Puerto Rican National Identity” in which she examines how Casas redefines the male-dominated discourse of the nation.

³⁹ Cypess, for example, writes, “The Voice accuses the women of cowardice as the explanation for their pitiful situation” (“Women Dramatists” 34).

⁴⁰ Louis Althusser uses the term “interpellate” in his theory of the subject. He writes, “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects [. . .]*” (173). The ideology of the patriarchy has, in a sense, “recruited” Manuela and transformed her into a subject. As a subject, she follows certain practices and rituals (ideology) because that is what she recognizes as the behaviors acceptable according to the patriarchy. In other

words, ideology and the subject constitute each other; ideology constitutes individuals as subjects, and ideology is only made possible by the subject.

⁴¹ Critics have pointed out evidence of an incestuous relationship between Hortensia and her father in Los soles truncos as well. This aspect of the play is very subtle, but it does support the idea that the Burkharths were too “inward” looking in their relationships.

Chapter 2:

Tearing Down the House: The End of an Epoch in Cuba

Puerto Rican dramatic works from the mid-twentieth century contribute to a dialogue on national and cultural identity through the enactment of failed romances. The plays examined in chapter 1 show Puerto Rico's quest for identity to be foundational; repeatedly staging potential love matches is indicative of a constant effort to form a hegemonic national family that never developed historically. The failure to do so, which we have seen in plays by Francisco Arriví, René Marqués, and Myrna Casas, highlights dissension on Puerto Rico's political status and conflicting views of national culture. Cuban family plays from the same period, in contrast, display conflicts between generations. This chapter explores how the tensions between parents and their children relate to what Gustavo Pérez Firmat has termed the "translational" character of Cuban identity.

The discord between parents and their children dramatized in Cuban family plays from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s exemplifies what Fernando Ortiz calls cubanía, the conscious will to be Cuban (95). The younger generation attempts to differentiate itself from its parents, to do, in playwright José Triana's words, "what our parents have not done" (Doggart

83). That is, the children seek to create a politically and economically autonomous nation able to chart its own destiny, a task their parents' generation failed to complete. Two plays written before the Cuban revolution (1959), Lila, la mariposa (1954) by Rolando Ferrer and Aire frío (1958) by Virgilio Piñera, portray sons and daughters struggling to break free from their parents' modes of behavior, whereas the children in two plays written after the revolution, El robo del cochino (1961) by Abelardo Estorino and La noche de los asesinos (1965) by José Triana, openly rebel against their family. In all four works, the conflictive and stifling atmosphere of the family home is a sign of the disintegrating Cuban Republic (1902-58) and the need for national redirection. Tearing down the house, or the project of rebelling against parental authority, implies a restructuring of the institution of the family along with the rest of society.

Ortiz invents the term cubanía to contrast with the concept of cubanidad, which one achieves by virtue of being Cuban. In other words, cubanidad denotes passive national identification or a civil status while cubanía comprises a spiritual condition: "cubanidad plena, sentida, consciente y deseada [. . .]" (Ortiz 95). I will use the term cubanía throughout because I focus on how generational conflict serves as a metaphor for the desire to affirm national identity. Throughout the first half of the twentieth

century, historical circumstances kept the search for national and cultural identity at the center of Cuban intellectual discourse. As we will see, the process of negotiation between literary models Pérez Firmat calls translation manifests cubanía, the desire to create a Cuban identity. In drama, the literary genre most subject to contextual factors, forming a distinctively Cuban voice was a lengthy process. Moreover, both cubanía and translation point to the unfinished and constructed character of Cuban identity, as do the plays analyzed in this chapter. In the pre-revolutionary plays Lila, la mariposa and Aire frío, as well as works written after the revolution, El robo del cochino and La noche de los asesinos, the children's conflict with their parents is emblematic of Cuba's continued pursuit of self-definition.

Explorations of a Mutable National Identity

In his book The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature (1989), Gustavo Pérez Firmat develops a theory of translation as Cuba's national style. Pérez Firmat fashions his argument by building on concepts from Jorge Mañach's essay El estilo en Cuba y su sentido histórico (1944). In this essay, Mañach proposes that Cuba lacks a sense of national selfhood because as an island, its vulnerability to the outside world made it unable to form an insular, or cultural separateness necessary

for a strong national consciousness. Pérez Firmat argues that:

one important result of Cuba's lack of insularismo is what I have called a 'translation sensibility.' Because of the island's peculiar history, the Cuban writer or artist is especially sensitive to opportunities for translation, in both the geographical and linguistic senses of the word. Not having a native store of cultural goods, and conditioned by history to the ways of the transient rather than the settler, the Cuban writer has the habit of looking outward, of being on the lookout for opportunities for displacement, graphic and topographic.¹ (4)

Pérez Firmat chooses works of various genres from writers belonging to the first and second generations of the Republican period to show how a distinctive Cuban voice emerges from the translation of foreign models. Works by writers such as Fernando Ortiz, Carlos Loveira, Nicolás Guillén, and Alejo Carpentier are examples of what Pérez Firmat calls "critical criollism" in that they consciously manipulate and recast or, "translate" European literary traditions as they create their uniquely Cuban expression (9).

The essays from which Pérez Firmat draws his theory of translation and the works he examines from this perspective belong to Cuba's period of

cultural nationalism of the 1920s-1930s. The first twenty years of the Cuban Republic established a pattern of institutionalized political corruption and economic dependency on the United States, which resulted in interventions to protect American interests in the Cuban sugar industry. Like other areas in Latin America, Cuban nationalism reawakened by the 1920s, and students at the University of Havana began demanding political and administrative reforms. Their discontent spread and soon other areas of society, such as labor unions and newly formed political parties, joined in the call for change. Intellectuals including Jorge Mañach, Juan Marinello, Rubén Martínez Villena, and Alejo Carpentier formed associations such as the Grupo Minorista and published manifestos, first against the Alfredo Zayas government (the 1923 Protesta de los Trece), and later against dictator Gerardo Machado's regime (1924-33).² In arts publications such as Revista de Avance (1927-30), editors combined explorations of vanguardist currents with a deep concern for the nation. In order to regenerate the Republic, writers sought to understand Cuba's idiosyncrasies. Consequently, many well-known essays of the period examine Cuban identity including Ramiro Guerra's Azúcar y población en las Antillas (1925), Jorge Mañach's Indagación del choteo (1928), Juan Marinello's Americanismo y cubanismo literarios (1932), and Fernando Ortiz's Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el

azúcar (1940). Summarizing the subject matter of these diverse writings, Pérez Firmat finds four central areas of study: “the ‘Cuban character,’ the meaning of national culture, the tension between Cuba’s Iberian and African heritage, and the effects of U.S. imperialism” (6). In particular, the rise of Afro-Cubanism in the 1920s constitutes an important component in the expression of cubanía during this period of cultural nationalism. In her study of race and the erotics of Cuban nationalism, Vera Kutzinski points out that artists such as Alejo Carpentier “perceived Afro-Cuban secular and religious culture as a cultural alternative to North-Americanization and as a political vehicle for national integrity and survival” (142). The investigation of Cuban identity from a variety of perspectives, in short, formed part of a movement for cultural regeneration that intellectuals hoped would have political repercussions.

Pérez Firmat constructs his theory of Cuba’s translation sensibility in part on Americanismo y cubanismo literarios (1932) by poet and literary critic Juan Marinello. In this essay, Marinello considers the issue of language in the construction of national identity. For Marinello, all Latin American writers are caught in the paradox of writing about the New World in the language of the Old World: “*Somos a través de un idioma que es nuestro siendo extranjero*” (97). To escape this idiomatic imperialism, criollo writers

must find their original voice in the tension between the two worlds.

Pérez Firmat argues that criollist literature “emerges from a reading, a repossession--call it also a ‘translation’--of the master texts of the European tradition” (12). That is, the criollist writer must make Spanish his own language by transforming “la entraña idiomática con golpe americano, haciendo cosa propia lo que hasta aquí fue préstamo” (Marinello 99). What I would like to highlight in Pérez Firmat’s notion of Cuban translation is the idea of process. If the Cuban inclination is to translate from models, then a fundamental factor in Cuban identity is its mutability and constructed character. Cubanía is an activity rather than a state. To possess it one must want it and make it, a notion akin to Pérez Firmat’s theory of Cuban translation.

The idea of Cuba as a culture-in-the-making is best exemplified by Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation. In his short essay, “Del fenómeno social de la ‘transculturación’ y de su importancia en Cuba,” Ortiz considers the island’s history as a record of continuous cultural exchanges. The term transculturation expresses

los variadísimos fenómenos que se originan en Cuba por las complejísimas transmutaciones de culturas que aquí se verifican, sin conocer las cuales es imposible la evolución del

pueblo cubano, así en lo económico como en lo institucional, jurídico, étnico, religioso, artístico, lingüístico, psicológico, sexual y los demás aspectos de la vida. ("Del fenómeno" 129)

Throughout the history of Cuba, the contact between the indigenous peoples of the island, white immigrants from a variety of nations, African slaves, and to a lesser extent, peoples of Asian descent, has forged a uniquely Cuban culture. Ortiz prefers the notion of transculturation to acculturation, the traditional term used for the exchange between cultures, because it captures the complexity of the process of constructing a syncretic culture like Cuba more fully. Transculturation includes deculturation, the destruction, or loss of certain elements of a culture as it enters into contact with another, and acculturation, a period of readjustment and ultimately the creation of a new culture, a neoculturation (Ortiz 134-5). Pérez Firmat points out that the neologism transculturation is critically criollo as it recasts or translates acculturation, a term used in North American sociology (20). More importantly for my purposes, the concept transculturation underscores the transitional and "unfinished" character of Cuban identity that we will see in the form of generational conflict in Cuban drama.

Although Pérez Firmat does not discuss Jorge Mañach's essay Indagación del choteo (1928) in conjunction with his theory of Cuba's

translational aesthetic, what Mañach describes as the national tendency to mock authority also underscores the mutational qualities of the Cuban character. Mañach examines Cuban choteo from a variety of perspectives. By looking at etymologies of the word choteo, the geographically determinist and psychological causes of the phenomenon, and at its social consequences, Mañach arrives at the following definition: “El choteo es un prurito de independencia que se exterioriza en una burla de toda forma no imperativa de autoridad” (41). The desire to buck authority and to abolish hierarchy relates to Pérez Firmat’s concept of translation that implies the mediation between two systems by the translator who can transform, or at times, make fun of a model through imitation. In a similar way, the choteador mocks an authority figure (or a situation that traditionally commands respect) and thus undermines any sense of hierarchy. Although choteo is ostensibly humorous, it also involves a conflict between two forces and the impulse to assert one’s identity over another’s. Similarly, in the generational conflicts in Cuban plays from the mid-fifties and the mid-sixties, the children’s rejection of the model of their parent’s generation expresses their cubanía, their wish for an economically and politically self-governing Cuba.

Mañach’s ultimate objective is to show that choteo manifests a national spiritual and moral crisis. As Gabriela Ibieta notes, if choteo is an individual

reaction to authority, “es precisamente porque al nivel público, y por extensión, nacional, no existía tal independencia, o, mejor dicho, existía solamente en forma, en apariencias” (75). Throughout the first three decades of the Republic, the debasement of national ideals (primarily in the arena of politics) resulted in a nationwide attitude of irreverence and mockery. For Mañach, choteo loses its humorous and beneficial qualities “cuando no es una reacción esporádica, sino un hábito, una actitud hecha ante la vida. Este choteo por antomasia resulta entonces una perversión del gracejo criollo [. . .]” (70). Choteo became a defense mechanism, a mask adopted to escape from unpleasant national realities. Mañach blames many of the island’s problems on the improvisational quality of the young Republic:

La improvisación tuvo que regir por mucho tiempo en todos los sectores de la vida cubana; y así como se crearon, de la noche a la mañana, instituciones y apoderados que se hicieron cargo, bien o mal, de las funciones públicas, así en otras zonas, en las docentes, en las profesionales, en el arte y en la literatura, se improvisaron también órganos y agentes de satisfacción escasamente idóneos [. . .]. (63)

For Mañach, improvisation signifies unpreparedness and incoherence rather than inventiveness or ingenuity. Much like the concepts of transculturation

and translation, however, improvisation denotes impermanence and change. From Mañach's perspective, the nascent Republic was in the process of inventing itself and was yet to be completed. Consequently, Mañach ends the essay on a positive note, for he believes that, as a systematically skeptical attitude towards Cuban public life, choteo belongs to a historical period that will end as Cuba's new institutions mature (75).

Historical and Theatrical Contexts

History has shown that Mañach's optimistic perspective in his 1928 essay was premature. The problems that plagued the early years of the Republic never disappeared, and the island continued to struggle to define cubanía, a sense of national selfhood. In several national identity essays, we have seen the translational process in the colony's effort to separate culturally from the madre patria. From a historical perspective, the transformational quality that characterizes cubanía should not be surprising. In fact, Louis Pérez argues that Cuban national culture is distinguished by an inclination towards revolt:

Whether in the name of liberty, or equality, or justice, Cubans of diverse origins [. . .] on one occasion or another, often in concert but just as often in conflict, mobilized to challenge the premise

and practice of iniquitous authority. These themes dominate Cuban history, and recur with remarkable regularity [. . .] . (vii-viii)

The struggle for independence from Spain, for example, spanned three decades (1868-1898) and involved two generations of Cubans. When North Americans intervened, however, the war for national liberation became the Spanish-American War, and the emergence of a politically and economically autonomous nation was thwarted. Instead, under United States occupation, Cuba produced its first constitution in 1901 in which the Platt Amendment made the island a de facto United States protectorate.³ In sum, the Cuban independence movement had “achieved self-government without self-determination and independence without sovereignty” (Pérez 192). The long war of independence, however, had instilled a strong sense of cubanía. The impulse to determine collectively the nation’s identity and destiny had become part of the Cuban experience.

United States economic domination, particularly of the sugar industry, created problems that prevailed in Cuba until the 1959 revolution: the dependence on a mono-export economy vulnerable to boom-bust cycles, institutionalized political corruption, and the erosion of Cuban culture. The structural weakness of the nation’s economy and the instability and

corruption of its political system produced cycles of rebellion and authoritarianism. The first strongman to rise to power in the Cuban Republic was General Gerardo Machado. The demand for national regeneration during the 1920s period of cultural nationalism ended in Machado's election in 1925, and for the first few years of his term, he ran an honest government that acted in the best national interests. Nevertheless, by ensuring his re-election in 1928 by outlawing his opponent's party, Machado made an unmistakable step toward dictatorship. However, the 1929 Wall Street crash deeply affected his second term because Cuba's economy was entirely dependent on the American market. As the economic crisis grew, so did political unrest, and in the 1930s Machado answered with increasingly violent measures. Finally, in 1933, amidst a general strike in Havana, the United States withdrew its support of the regime, and Machado resigned and went into exile.

In the ensuing months, an uneasy coalition of military men and radical students proclaimed a revolution under the banner of "Cuba for Cubans." The brief revolution failed, however, for the government reforms did not go far enough for the leftists and they had gone much too far for the Cuban elite.⁴ Military man Fulgencio Batista emerged as Cuba's new leader thanks to the machinations of United States politicians. As the backing behind

puppet presidents, as elected president, or as dictator, Batista dominated Cuban politics from 1934 until the 1959 revolution. Under Batista, the acquisition of personal power and wealth soon took precedent over resolving the nation's problems. In the 1940s, unprecedented corruption including embezzlement, graft, and malfeasance of public office was pervasive in all levels of government, and a new word was invented to describe the violence of Cuban politics: "gangsterismo" (Pérez 284). The attitude of cynicism and resignation that followed the failed revolution of 1933 colored the public's reaction to Machado in the 1920s and Batista in 1930s-50s differently. Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith write, "In reality, Cuban politics saw little change between 1934 and 1959. The futility of the electoral system was repeatedly demonstrated as the perennial strongman (yesterday Machado, today Batista) worked his will" (257). Neither dictators nor North American imperialism could obliterate cubanía, however, and as long as there were forces that impeded self-determination, Cubans would continue to buck authority in an attempt to gain control of Cuba's destiny as a people. Years of disillusionment following the failed 1933 revolution finally gave way to a renewed surge of nationalism, as a new generation of revolutionaries led by Fidel Castro, disgruntled students, and exiled politicians organized throughout the 1950s to overthrow Batista.

The dramatic action of all four of the plays examined in this chapter takes place during the final years of the batistato, 1952-59. The society portrayed in these plays was weak and divided. Economically, by the 1950s the sugar industry was stagnant and had ceased to be a source of economic growth. The upper class maintained its privileged position and the lower class, especially the rural sector, remained poverty stricken. The middle class was very insecure; by economic standards it was small, and in terms of self-identification it barely existed (Ruiz 146). Politically, Cuba had reached the end of an era. Political dishonesty had discredited all traditional political parties and most Cubans looked at politics with skeptical dispassion. Traditionally strong Latin American institutions, the Catholic Church and the Military, did not serve as cohesive forces. The army was “a personalist military force lacking close links with either the wealthy or the poor” (Ruiz 159) and the Church failed to attract a mass following because it marginalized rural (especially Afro-Cuban) followers. The family constituted the dominant social institution because other institutions such as the Church, school, and community were weak (MacGaffey and Barnett 62). In other words, the traditional family appeared strong only by default. Thus, the familial disintegration we will see in the plays of this period exemplifies another manifestation of Cuba’s splintered society.

The final years of the Batista regime provided playwrights with bountiful material with which to examine Cuban society. Matías Montes Huidobro considers the family a basic thematic component of the nation's theater: "La familia parece ser el punto de vista preferencial de la dramática cubana. Todos los dramaturgos insisten en ella" (25). He argues that in Cuba there is a tendency to idealize the family and to equate it with "la gran familia cubana" or the nation. Playwrights oftentimes contradict this vision of the united family, however, by staging a dark and often violent image of a household engaged in fraternal and paternal conflicts (Montes Huidobro 25-26). The family home, then, serves as a space from which dramatists can scrutinize the nation. Both Montes Huidobro and Rine Leal cite José Antonio Ramos's Tembladera (1917), a realist play that deals with a family divided over the sale of their sugar mill, as the first play to use the private family conflict to signal a larger, collective problem (Montes Huidobro 80; Leal 105). Many critics consider this play the best that Cuba had to offer until 1947, when Virgilio Piñera wrote Electra Garrigó, another play featuring the family that is best known for its cubanization, or in terms of Pérez Firmat, its Cuban translation of the Greek myth.

Like the Cuban nation's struggle to direct its destiny, the efforts to create an autochthonous theater movement dominate the history of theater

during the Republic. Cuba's strong nineteenth-century theater tradition regressed during the Republican years during which the context of political frustration translated into "frustración de nuestra escena" (Leal 102). Magaly Murguercia finds five general factors that impeded the development of a strong national theater: the rapid proliferation and subsequent disappearance of small theatrical groups, the lack of state support, a colonized mentality that oriented theater practitioners towards foreign works, the resulting dearth and poor quality of native authors, and an atmosphere of skepticism that discouraged socio-political theater (77). Two landmark moments, however, helped build the foundation for a national theater. The first took place in 1936, when Luis Baralt's theatrical group La Cueva, Teatro de arte de la Habana initiated a "Teatro de arte" movement. This movement produced a decade of theatrical education in which more than fifteen new private theater institutions trained theater technicians, directors, and actors.⁵ During this period, in their quest to modernize Cuban theater, most of the theatrical groups performed works by foreign authors. In the late 1940s, however, playwrights Carlos Felipe, Virgilio Piñera, and Rolando Ferrer, who combined modern techniques with national themes, signaled the future of Cuban drama.

The brief period of "teatro de salitas" between 1954-58 constitutes the

second significant moment in Cuban Republican theater. Teatro de las Máscaras, a group with roots in the “teatro de arte” movement, initiated the new trend with the four-month run of their 1954 production of Jean Paul Sartre’s The Respectable Prostitute (1946). Until then, the plays produced by groups lasted only one or two nights. Following the Las Máscaras success, a variety of small theaters that offered consecutive performances opened in Havana. This little theater movement created a larger spectatorship, allowed the artists and technicians to fine-tune their performances, and provided a somewhat more stable financial situation for the groups. Again, given the culturally paralyzing climate under the Batista dictatorship in the 1950s, the plays performed were primarily foreign.

The theatrical activity during the Republic failed to create a strong national theater movement because it catered to a small urban public and did not produce a body of national dramatists.⁶ It did produce, however, theater practitioners schooled in the latest international theater currents.

Consequently, there were many well-prepared artists ready to participate in the institutionalization of Cuban theater that came with the 1959 revolution.

The revolution’s Marxist ideology dramatically altered the socio-political and cultural structures of the island. Government subsidies and the decommmercialization of the arts immediately produced a new generation of

theater schools, groups, and dramatists. For example, the government created the Teatro Nacional de Cuba as early as 1959 and the Escuela Nacional de Arte in 1962. For the first time in Cuba, politicized groups such as Teatro Estudio emerged and produced plays by Bertolt Brecht. In addition, the Festival de Teatro Latinoamericano (1961) and Conjunto, a theater journal founded by Manuel Galich in 1964, made productive connections between Cuban drama and other Latin American theater movements. As an indication of how much the prospects for Cuban theater had changed, in 1960, forty-nine Cuban works were performed (Leal 131), compared to the twenty-seven during the four years preceding the revolution (Muguercia 171). With the revolution, Leal writes, “el teatro cubano conquista su identidad” (129).

In contrast to Perez Firmat’s study of Cuban identity based on literary works from the formative years of the Republic, this chapter considers playwrights who, at the very end of the Republican period, were still struggling to assert their cubanía. In the plays I will examine, the characters’ struggle to voice their identity plays out as a conflict between generations. The outcome of this conflict varies depending upon when the play was written and the author’s position concerning the revolution. Rolando Ferrer and Virgilio Piñera are “dramaturgos de transición” in the sense that,

although they continued to work after the revolution, much of their significant work in the theater was done before 1959. For Leal, these transitional dramatists treat common themes: “Su mundo teatral pertenece a la pequeña burguesía, a sus conflictos familiares y psicologistas, a un universo cerrado, asfixiante y sin posible salvación, que se contempla a sí mismo con angustia, frustración y escape onírico” (141). After the revolution, in works by a new generation of playwrights (including José Triana and Abelardo Estorino), the family theme persists with a slightly different focus: “ahora se muestra su desintegración, sus falsos valores, y su resquebrajamiento ante el impacto revolucionario” (Leal 149). The plays examined this chapter, Lila, la mariposa, Aire frío, El robo del cochino, and La noche de los asesinos, enact a young generation voicing its cubanía or desire for a different Cuba by struggling against parental authority. The confining family and the stifling space of the house become metaphors for the need to knock down the house and rebuild a new family and by extension, a new society.

The Hovering Butterfly: Sentimental Dictatorship in Lila, la mariposa

Rolando Ferrer (1925-76) participated in the formative years of Cuban theater in the 1940s and 1950s in a variety of roles: as a stagehand, actor, assistant director, and budding dramatist. After the revolution, he joined the

National Theater in the Amateur Department, taught theater courses, adapted many classical texts, and continued to write his own plays. Lila, la mariposa (1954), Ferrer's most important pre-revolutionary play, portrays a sentimental dictatorship imposed by a mother (Lila) upon her son (Marino). The play depicts a deformed Cuban society because, as in the case of Marino, its natural development has been held back by authoritarian figures and North American neo-colonialism. Thus the family conflict, the mother's sentimental dictatorship, points to the larger problem of a nation's struggle for autonomy. Lila's death at the end of the play liberates Marino and situates the Cuban family, like the nation, in a moment of transition. As Eberto García Abreu notes, the play suggests that "La familia como patentizadora de modelos de conducta ahistóricos está en extinción" (289). Lila, la Mariposa leaves the audience with questions regarding what kind of family Marino will form to replace his formerly incarcerating one.

Lila, la mariposa premiered in 1954 at Teatro de las Máscaras under the dictatorship of Batista, a period during which artists made very little overt commentary on contemporary national realities. As we will see, however, the play's family thematic foregrounds issues such as racism and imperialism that Ferrer frequently writes about after the revolution.⁷ Lila, la mariposa stands out in the 1950s salitas theater movement for its cultural specificity in a moment

when foreign texts dominated. The play constitutes an example of Cuba's translational aesthetic, Ferrer employs structures and figures from Greek tragedy and myth, as well as poetic language reminiscent of Lorca, to write a distinctly Cuban play. Like Marino, who wishes to distance himself from his mother, on a textual level, the play constitutes an example of Cuban dramaturgy striving for an independent voice.⁸

As the title of the play indicates, Lila, like a butterfly, hovers around her son Marino in a desperate attempt to bind him to her. Marino is her only reason for being, and when it becomes apparent that he desires his independence, she commits suicide. The family unit in Lila, la mariposa also includes Lila's sister-in-law Hortensia. The play's mimetic space—the space perceived by the audience—consists of the bottom floor of their home, which doubles as a dressmaking shop. The house/shop is located on Havana's seaside avenue, the Malecón. This torments Lila, because the sea constantly reminds her of the womanizing husband who left her, and of what she considers the inevitable loss of her son. The shop is named La Mariposa, after a book of poems written in honor of Lila by a poet who fell in love with her twenty-five years ago. Prefiguring her relationship with her son, the poet had envisioned Lila as a creature who fluttered around the object of her desire, never able to touch it without destroying herself. In the shop, three costureras, Lola, Clara, and

Meche, and a maid, Marina, work for Lila and Hortensia. The combination house and shop mixes the private family space with the public work space, highlighting the connection between family and nation. As much as Lila would like to shield her son from the outside world, the business creates an atmosphere in which the larger society constantly permeates the home.

Ferrer satirizes the parade of characters who pass through Lila's house to create an almost grotesque vision of society. The most memorable character outside the family with a significant role in the plot is Señora Estévez, called La Cotorrona for her gossipy chatter. Ferrer includes this esperpentic character, along with her monstrous daughter El Energúmeno, to criticize the materialism and self-absorption of the upper class. He adds a note of anti-imperialism by emphasizing the fact that the woman's husband works for a foreign company, the All Sea Company. Fully aware of Lila's debilitating fear of losing her son to the sea, La Cotorrona selfishly offers Marino a job with her husband's company only because she wishes to make amends for her daughter's inappropriate behavior during an earlier visit. Other characters that round out the play's construction of Cuban society include Cabalita, a drunk who speaks in nonsensical riddles, a Pregonero who insists he is not black in hopes of making more sales, and other neighborhood members, who during Lila's wake, tell jokes, gossip, and contemplate whether the casket might fall.

The play's dramatic action moves inexorably towards tragedy. The costureras, who serve as a chorus in the style of Greek tragedy, frame each act with a riddle about a tree: "Adivina, adivinador. . . , ¿Cuál es el árbol que no echa flor?" (295). At the end of the first act, the following answer clearly refers to the play's main conflict, Lila's stifling influence on Marino:

CLARA. El que no se riega.

MECHE. El que no le abonan la tierra.

CLARA. El que le cortan las ramas. (312-13)

As we have seen in the Puerto Rican plays in chapter 1, the tree embodies family and regeneration. Lila is literally killing her family by not allowing her son to grow up. The second act uncovers a secret that leads to the play's climax. Hortensia finally reveals to Marino her opinion of his mother: "tu madre te engaña, tu madre es una egoísta, pero es también una mujer enferma, y los enfermos son débiles y fuertes, abusadores, tiranos" (329). She also informs him that he is really fifteen years old, not thirteen as Lila had led him to believe. At some point during the second act, one of the costureras places a pair of sharp scissors in Lila's bedroom, preparing the scene for her suicide. The third act begins with Lila's wake and ends with Marino contemplating his future with his aunt Hortensia and girlfriend Adelfa. The answer to the concluding tree riddle: "¿Qué hace el árbol?" suggests a hopeful future for Marino:

CLARA. Crece.

LOLA. ¿Qué tiene adentro?

MECHE. Otro árbol. (345)

The play's most intriguing dramatic device is the chorus of costureras because it is fundamental both to the plot and to the play's examination of the Cuban family. The women resolve the conflict between mother and son by arranging Lila's death. Thus, the mythical dimension of the costureras affects the historical realities of the household, for Lila's death allows Marino the liberty to determine his own destiny.

The presence of Lola, Meche, and Clara in the house, and their status as seen but unseen characters implicitly comments on "la gran familia cubana." Marina, a servant, is the only character to see the costureras in their magical guise beyond their roles as workers. The play's initial stage directions describe them as a part of Lila's home: "*Llegaron con los muebles, con la boda, o sabe Dios cuándo. Negra, mulata y blanca, son, en el religioso mundo de la criada, mágicas encarnaciones de fuerzas naturales desencadenantes de la tragedia*" (295). The women literally form part of the structure of the house, but in many respects they have not been seen and understood. The women's speech, full of verbal play in the form of riddles and refranes, identifies them with Cuban choteo and the popular classes. Their mysterious origins, their occupation, and their role in

Lila's death make them an obvious Cuban version of the Greek Three Fates.⁹

However, as white, mulatto, and black, the costureras embody the Cuban pueblo. In addition, their garments are adorned with aquatic images such as shells and coral, and each woman is identified with a natural element.

Although it is impossible to identify each character with a particular orishá, a goddess in the Afrocuban santería pantheon, these details and the women's seemingly magical powers suggest their association with the religious-magical realm of black culture.

When Marina points out Lola, Meche, and Clara's "brujerías," Hortensia dismisses her fears. For Lilian Clemons Franklin, this expresses an implicit view on class and race: "In literature it is the members of the lower economic strata, both black and white, who exhibit evidence of superstition and belief and 'black magic'. In contrast, Hortensia, as a representative of the hardworking white middle class, has little time or interest in the folly of superstition" (179). Hortensia sees the costureras in their capacity as workers but is unable to see their influence in the house or the possibility that they have a critical vision of her class or her family. The costureras are instigators of change and their destructive act has as its goal to rebuild the family. They counter Marina's accusations of their destructive powers, insisting that they serve "Para adelantar" and "Para construir" (312). These women form a part of the Cuban

family or nation that has been made invisible or powerless by its class and/or race. The play implies that this very group can serve as an agent for change and that space must be made for them in the national family. In this sense, Lila, la mariposa anticipates the events of the Cuban revolution.

The conflicts between parents and children provide the most pervasive evidence of the need to renovate the family and, by extension, a troubled society. The play offers several authoritarian parent-child relationships. Two relationships have produced “monstrous” uncontrollable children. La Cotorrona, trapped in a vicious cycle of authoritarianism and permissiveness, cannot control her daughter. She labels her child alternately a monster, a savage, and an imbecile, and laments there is no school on weekends: “Deberían tener clases las veinticuatro horas del día, y los sábados, y los domingos, y los días festivos. (*El Energúmeno hace una seña fea con el dedo mayor.*) Me va a enfermar” (303). As the gesture indicates, the daughter counters her mother’s insults with inappropriate bodily behavior.¹⁰ Marina’s relationship with her daughter is also tense. She calls her daughter La Boba, not as an affectionate nickname, but to signal her mental disabilities. La Boba acts out verbally, and her repeated exclamation (probably in reference to the casket) at Lila’s wake—“Sapiti pon, que no tiene tapón...”--embarrasses Marina (333).

The relationship between Marino's friends Adelfa and Capitán and their parents is strained as well, but neither of these siblings display such abnormal behavior. Capitán argues with his father, and as Adelfa notes, both attempt to escape parental control physically: "yo corro y mi hermano corre. (*Suspira.*) Algún día seré bailarina: la cintura bien apretada y baile y baile. . ." (315). Capitán plans to leave home to work on a ship and Adelfa says one day she too will abandon her family to achieve her dream of becoming a dancer. Here dance, like El Energúmeno's bodily transgressions, expresses the independence that colonialism suppresses.¹¹ The parental dictatorships all of the children suffer in the play evoke a colonialist situation. Comparing colonialism with motherhood, Franz Fanon writes that on the unconscious level the colonized do not view colonialism as "a gentle loving mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather as a mother who unceasingly restrains her fundamentally perverse offspring from managing to commit suicide and from giving free rein to its evil instincts" (211). Colonialism impedes societies from developing on their own terms and often produces deformed relationships and psychological complexes. Consequently, the children either seek to escape from their families or they stay, accept their supposed inherent inferiority, and behave accordingly. As we will see, Lila's colonialist tyranny is hardly motivated by her belief that

she must save her child from his own destructive behavior.

Lila's sentimental dictatorship creates a stifling atmosphere in the house much like that of Cuba under a military dictatorship. The characters' perceptions of the family home create a sense of heaviness and entrapment. The mood inside the house contrasts with the streets outside of it. The house is surrounded by activity, on one side the constant motion of the sea, and on the other the bustle of cafés and traffic on the malecón. Inside the house, however, the stage directions note that nothing has been altered since Lila first moved there twenty years ago (295). Hortensia, among others, complain about the house's stifling heat, but Lila limits the opening and shutting of doors and windows because she cannot bear to look at the sea (301-02). The sea, a sign of freedom for Marino and Capitán, has an asphyxiating effect on Lila. After recounting a nightmare she had about the sea, Lila demands a fan, but at the same time, she also asks Hortensia to close the window (326). Unlike the house in René Marqués's Los soles truncos, however, here there can be no attempt to convert the house into an impenetrable, timeless space, for it also serves as a shop.

Since Lila cannot keep the world from entering her home, she tries to keep her son from leaving the house. That is, what Lila says and does is more imprisoning than the space of the house itself. When Marino is out of her

sight, she constantly calls out for him. In the mornings she awakens him by calling to tell him his breakfast is ready, but unlike most mothers, her voice is “*miedosa, obsesiva, demasiado dependiente del hijo*” (301), and his slow response provokes a fit of tears. Lila is jealous of Marino’s sleeping hours because she cannot know what he is thinking. Likewise, Hortensia adds: “No le guste que juegue, porque no sabe qué está pensando, ni que estudie, porque no sabe lo que está aprendiendo” (303-04). Lila also tries to control her son physically. When Marino finally does come down for breakfast, she circles him until she traps him for a kiss (307), and when she senses his desire to distance himself she physically clings to him (328). Hortensia reveals that Lila keeps her son inside by telling his friends he is not home when they come to visit (320). But the most significant way Lila manipulates her son is by lying about his age and treating him as though he were a helpless little boy. She has convinced herself that he is thirteen when he is really fifteen and has asked his teachers to hold him back in school even though he has passed his exams.

Lila’s falsehoods contradict her public image as an ideal mother and expose her weaknesses. As Montes Huidobro has noted, “La madre es uno de los elementos más tradicionalmente reverenciados e idealizados por la tradición sentimental del pueblo cubano” (26). From the perspective of those

who are not close to her, Lila appears to be the traditional self-sacrificing mother. She presents herself this way to her clients: “Se sofoca con tanto trajín. Levantarme, ocuparme del hijo, volverme a ocupar del hijo. Luego el ajeteo del taller [. . .]” (301). Furthermore, at Lila’s wake, mourners describe her as “alegre” and “ligera,” as an extraordinary woman, a magnificent wife, and an exemplary mother (336-37). In reality, Lila is hardly a powerful matriarch or a lighthearted doting mother. Although the shop is named for Lila, Hortensia and the costureras do all the work, as Lila’s obsessive fear of losing her son makes her mentally fragile and prone to nervous attacks. When Hortensia tells Marino that La Cotorrona has offered him a job, Lila’s reaction reveals an important motive for holding her son back: “[Hortensia] Quiere que crezcas para que vivas. Y ¿qué es la vida? Los hombres dejan a sus mujeres por sus queridas, o se mueren” (329). Her fear of losing her son as she did her husband selfishly outweighs the supposed desire to protect Marino from a harsh world. The play thus demythifies an idealistic view of the Cuban matriarchy and, in fact, points to some of its negative effects.

Although Lila restricts Marino’s movements and thoughts, like so many dictators, her need to dominate ultimately destroys her. This leaves Marino the opportunity to develop his own identity. Because of Lila’s domineering behavior, Marino exhibits a weak stage presence; he has few

lines and appears indecisive. Stage directions throughout the play, however, suggest Marino's need to assert himself, as in his first entrance: "*Bajo una apariencia moderada, una gran fuerza interior pugna por manifestarse*" (307). When he tearfully complains of his lack of freedom--"me siento como si me tuvieran amarrado" (318)--his girlfriend Adelfa encourages him to leave his family because: "Te vas volviendo chiquito como una hormiguita, y alguien te podría aplastar" (318). He begins to counter his mother's verbal and physical attempts to control him by shrugging her off: "No te acerques, Mamá" (328), and by telling her he will not listen: "*(Tapándose los oídos.)* No te voy a oír, no te voy a oír" (329). Nevertheless, upon Lila's death, Marino clings to her coffin crying uncontrollably, and appears to be paralyzed without her.

Marino makes his first step towards independence after his mother's death when a visit from his friend Capitán provokes him to ask: "¿qué es un hombre. . . ? ¿Qué es hacerme un hombre?" (341). Suddenly Marino no longer feels the lure of sea nor the desire to leave his home. The stagnant atmosphere of the house ceases to weigh upon him, and he comments: "Esta casa es fresca. . ." (341). Marino chooses not to go out to sea with Capitán, and he tells Hortensia he will not work for the All Sea Company either. This implies a commitment to Cuba; he will not personally sell out by working for

a foreign company, and he does not have to abandon the island to become his own person. He notices the material condition of his home, and makes plans either to paint it or to move because, “Está muy vieja” (342). Whether Marino moves or renovates his present house, he will remain on the island to build a new family and home.

Lila’s death catapults Marino into a period of flux and uncertainty, but the hope is that his generation will be able to distinguish itself from that of his mother’s. As Randy Martin states, “Generational differences are convenient symbols for divergent historical moments that may introduce a new voicing that carries a distinct perspective” (171). In revamping the house, or Cuban society in the mid-1950s, Ferrer’s play makes clear that a different sort of family must accompany these changes. The Cuban national family must be more inclusive with respect to race and class and less authoritarian to effect any real transformation. Through a mother’s sentimental dictatorship, Lila, la mariposa implicitly suggests that free from repressive regimes, the nation can move forward and regain control over its future.

The Disintegration of la sagrada familia

Similar to the sentimental dictatorship in Lila, la mariposa, Virgilio Piñera’s Aire frío (1958) exposes family authority figures in a state of decline

to paint a less than idyllic portrait of the Cuban family and nation. Piñera (1912-79) constitutes one of the predominant voices in twentieth-century Cuban literature. Before the revolution he was involved in important literary groups and their publications such as Orígenes (1944-56) and Ciclón (1955-57), and he wrote poetry and fiction as well as drama. In the field of Latin American literature, Piñera is credited with experimenting with absurdist techniques (in both fiction and drama) before they became fashionable in European avant-garde literature.¹² Although Piñera won the Premio Casas de las Américas in 1968 for his absurdist play Dos viejos pánicos, his work came under criticism because its stance towards the revolution was unclear. He became increasingly uncomfortable with the artistic limitations imposed by the revolutionary government in the late 1960s, and as a result, for many years, his works remained unedited and unstaged.¹³

Most critics consider Aire frío Piñera's masterpiece (Leal 24).¹⁴ This long, three-act drama captures in minute realist detail eighteen years (1940-58) of the absurdly precarious existence of a middle-class Cuban family. As Piñera wrote in the prologue to his 1960 Teatro Completo, Aire frío is a play "sin argumento, sin tema, sin trama y sin desenlace" (qtd. in Boudet 13). The plot's lack of direction reflects well the stagnant state of the family and the nation, but Piñera's play does indeed have a theme, which he identifies at a

later date as “la inseguridad de la familia” (“Dos viejos” 69). In Aire frío, Piñera not only uses the family as a lens through which to examine critically Cuba’s social-economic and political panorama during the forties and fifties, but also portrays the “sacred family” as an institution that has contributed to the Republic’s general malaise. The play provides a complete picture of the stifling socio-economic and political atmosphere of the period, but focuses more sharply on the family unit’s role in a system that so desperately needed to change.¹⁵ Piñera demythifies the strength of the family institution, particularly the roles of the matriarch and patriarch. The children in the play strive to differentiate themselves from their parents’ values and behaviors, and although they display rebellious attitudes, they are as trapped as their parents are in a stagnant system. In 1958, the year in which the play was written, cold air, the work’s metaphor for change, had yet to arrive.

There is no simple way to sum up the plot of Aire frío because other than the slow decline of the Romaguera family over the course of two decades, there is no central action that drives it. Ángel and Ana head the family, he as an unemployed failure at fifty-five and she, a retired schoolteacher and classic self-sacrificing mother. Their oldest son, Enrique, is married and is the only financially stable member of the family. The play’s protagonist is his younger sister, Luz Marína, who is thirty and unmarried at

the start of the play's action. She supports the family as a seamstress and is closest to her younger brother Oscar, a poet who chooses not to work. Another son, Luis, lives in New York where he hopes to make a better living than is possible in Havana. Other than the day-to-day struggle to survive financially and emotionally—Luz Marina's obsession with combating the heat by purchasing a fan, Ángel's harebrained schemes to make it rich, and Oscar's dreams of publishing his poetry—very little happens in the play. Two life-altering events, Oscar's four-year exile in Buenos Aires, and Luz Marina's marriage at age forty-four, ultimately leave the siblings with the sense that nothing ever changes. The action ends in 1958 with the whole family gathered in the house awaiting Ana's imminent death.

Unlike in Lila, la mariposa, in this play a wealth of very specific contextual details serves to link the family's story to national history. Through the Romaguerras, Piñera sketches the Cuban middle-class odyssey during the first half of this century, from the security of land ownership and life in the pueblo to the economic uncertainty of urban unemployment, from hope and hard work to the skepticism and apathy of the 1950s. The family's conversations and every day experiences bring to light all of the problems of political corruption (including personalismo and gangsterismo), North American imperialism, and inflation. The multitude of contextual details

adds up to a picture of social frustration, economic loss, and political anger that highlight the lack of viability of the Cuban Republic.

My interest here, however, is in how the Romaguera family fails alongside the decline of the Republic. Martin argues that the play “merges corrupt state power with decrepit patriarchy and a malformed bourgeoisie, and paints these forces into the stilted spaces of the Romaguera home and patriarch” (154). Many moments in the play identify the family with nation and vice versa. In the first act, Luz Marina, painfully aware of what is wrong with both, bitterly remarks: “Cuba, paraíso tropical. . . (*Pausa.*) Visite a los Romaguera, en Animas 112, familia respetable que está encantada de la vida” (77). To visit the family is to expose in microcosm a national crisis. When Ángel denies a cockroach infestation in their home, Luz Marina exclaims, “¿Nada más que en la cocina? ¡La casa entera! Norte, Sur, Este y Oeste. Aquí no vive la familia Romaguera; aquí vive la familia Cucaracha” (149). She sums up her nation and her family’s loss of dignity in three words: “¡Calores, políticos y cucarachas!” (111). In one of the sadly ironic moments of the play, as Oscar departs for Argentina, his father says: “Si la literatura es tu meta, la familia ha sido la mía” to which Luz Marina adds: “¡Viva la familia Romaguera!” (109). She apologizes for her sarcasm but comments, “la verdad verdadera es que somos unos fracasados” (110). Unlike her father, Luz

Marina recognizes that not only have individual members of the family fallen short of their goals, the family as a unit has come apart as well.

The disintegration of the family is played out primarily between Luz Marina and Oscar and their parents. To be sure, Enrique's visits cause familial strife because his self-satisfied attitude and reluctance to support the family infuriate Luz Marina. There is also friction between Enrique (the materialist) and his poet brother, whose ideals he cannot admire. However, the overwhelming conflict is generational, between parents and children who often comment "Vives en la luna" to express their incomprehension of one another.¹⁶ The two outstanding living room decorations, a copy of the painting Whistler's Mother and a bust of Beethoven, suggest the nature of their conflict: Luz Marina hardly appreciates the image of motherhood projected in the painting, and Oscar is the typically misunderstood and under-valued artist. It is Luz Marina, however, who most struggles to understand her parents' values and who rejects the patriarchal family structure.

Ángel is a patriarch in decline. Throughout the play, he repeats with variations a phrase that sounds eerily like a dictator losing control of his country: "Esta casa es un relajo. Hasta el día que me decida a empuñar el látigo" (155). His threat to crack the whip is empty, however, because he is in

a state of physical and mental decay. In the first act he is dominated by a toothache and lust for his fifteen year-old-niece, and as the play progresses, he begins to lose his eyesight. He spends his days playing domino and plotting with dubious characters unrealistic schemes to make money. Luz Marina is the only member of the family to criticize his behavior: “¡Me tienes llena! [. . .] Yo trabajo mañana, tarde y noche. Y tú, ¿qué haces todo el día? Fumar y tomar cafe. Y por la noche, lo otro. . .” (59). Her vociferous disapproval of his infidelities unnerves him:

LUZ MARINA. (*Lo interrumpe, se para.*) No vas a darme ninguna bofetada. No tienes fuerza moral. Consulta tu conciencia. (*Pausa.*) Lloverían sobre ti las bofetadas.

ÁNGEL. (*Dando un puñetazo contra la mesa.*) Eres una descastada. Maldita sea la hora en que te hicimos. (*A Ana.*) Desde el día primero volveré a tomar la dirección de esta casa. El dueño de esta casa soy yo, Angel Romaguera. Y sé lo que tengo que hacer. (73)

Nevertheless, Luz Marina’s quick wit always matches Ángel’s attempt to assert his authority. For example, when Oscar asks her if she would like to accompany him to Jacinto Benavente’s play La malquerida, she takes the opportunity to embarrass her father by pointedly mentioning some of the

details of the plot, such as the incestuous relationship between the step-father and his much younger step-daughter (74).¹⁷ For all of Ángel's verbal threats of abuse, Luz Marina's intelligence and economic contribution to the household render him powerless.

Luz Marina also distinguishes herself from her father by her realist outlook on life. While she may occasionally be swept up in lottery fever, she keeps her dreams small. The fact that Luz Marina's hope of owning a fan is a far-flung fantasy highlights the absurdity of her middle class family's poverty. Her father, on the other hand, has grandiose plans for recuperating lost property and striking it rich in the business of selling toilets that vary according to the size of their owners. He tells his family that they will soon be swimming in gold, but Luz Marina writes to her brother in Argentina that "Yo creo que vamos a nadar en otra cosa" (115). Ángel defends his dreams, but notes that his children always criticize his quixotic plans (112). From his perspective, the younger generation "es demasiado realista" (96). Consequently, it has settled for a cynically apathetic outlook with little faith in justice and the government. For example, when Ángel insists that the family's land will be restituted because "La Justicia es una sola, y está de parte nuestra" (117), Luz Marina bursts into laughter. She rebels by distrusting all institutions, particularly the government, the family, and the

Church.

Luz Marina blasphemously refers to her troubled family as “la sagrada familia” (154). Luz Marina and Oscar’s irreverent choteo-like attitude, which serves as an escape or way to cope with unpleasant realities, clashes with their parents’ religious faith. For example, responding to a letter from Oscar, Luz Marina commiserates: “¿Así que en tercera viajaban ochenta monjas y veinte curas? ¿Y más de cien niños? Viejo, eso es peor que el infierno” (115). While this probably will provoke a laugh from her brother, their mother automatically reprimands her: “Luz Marina, déjate de faltas de respeto con la religión” (115). On a more serious note, the lack of faith of the children’s generation reveals their fatalism. Ángel and Ana’s religious beliefs have helped them to endure difficult times, but now the children have no hope and have become numb to misfortune. As Luz Marina tells her father: “Dios aprieta y Dios ahoga, papá . [. . .] Antes me desesperaba, ponía el grito en el cielo. Ahora: a otra cosa mariposa” (122). Luz Marina’s rejection of religion also relates to her desire to distinguish herself from Ana, the typical long-suffering mother who finds refuge in religion.

Neither her father nor her mother provides the kind of family model Luz Marina wishes to emulate. She resents her father for his mistreatment of her mother, but she also blames Ana for her passivity. Statements such as:

“Seguiré sufriendo en silencio” (67), and “Yo estoy resignada; que sea lo que Dios quiera” (76) define Ana as the martyred mother par excellence. As Oscar puts it, “Mamá es la estatua del sufrimiento” (141). Ana is the family peacemaker who smooths over any unpleasantness to maintain the façade of a harmonious household. She rarely complains in front of the men of the house, but she does confide in Luz Marina. Her daughter, nevertheless, vocally opposes her mother’s capacity for suffering. She flatly rejects her mother’s behavior, especially her passive acceptance of Ángel’s infidelities:

Ahora se enamora de la sobrinita y mamá que sufra, ¡qué importa! (*Pausa.*) ¿El honor de la familia, la paz del hogar, tu salud, hasta tu propia vida? Todo esto le tiene sin cuidado. (*Pausa.*) Y eres tan boba que lo sigues adorando: que a Ángel no le falten los cigarros, que no salga sin la peseta en el bolsillo [. . .]. No hablemos más de este asunto. Ya tengo parado el desayuno en la boca del estómago. (68)

Luz Marina is the family’s voice of dissent. She challenges her father verbally, rejects her mother’s defeatist disposition, and is the most expressive critic of her family’s economic crisis. As Montes Huidobro observes, in Luz Marina, “Hay un sentido de búsqueda vigorosa y de rebeldía [. . .] es, en el marco familiar, la revolución” (178).

Luz Marina's rebellion is not all just talk, however, for she also acts rebelliously. She, not the patriarch, supports the family economically by sewing and tutoring. In addition, unlike her father and her brother Enrique, Luz Marina appreciates and supports Oscar's artistic goals. Most notably, she departs from the typical patterns set for young women with her attitude towards marriage. When her mother chides her for rejecting suitors, Luz Marina replies: "año tras año, en el triste espejo de ustedes dos, me ponía los pelos de punta; me ponía la carne de gallina. . . A lo mejor paro en el convento, como tía Josefa" (94). She would rather not marry at all than endure the kind of relationship her parents have. Eventually she becomes fed up with the burden of supporting the family and her lack of liberty, and in a sudden defiant gesture, she marries at the age of forty-four.¹⁸ By marrying, Luz Marina does not escape financial woes, but she does manage to shock the family. It is probable that the guagüero with whom she chooses to spend the rest of her life is black, and most certainly from her family's perspective, the liaison represents a step down in class. With her husband, however, she enjoys the freedom of riding along in his bus and accompanying him to baseball games. Luz Marina knows this upsets her mother, but she tells Oscar: "¡Que le vamos a hacer! Ella hizo su vida; yo tenía que hacer el pedazo de vida que me queda" (141).

As much as Luz Marina sets herself apart from her parents, her rebellion does not move beyond the confines of the family. As she tells her mother, “Nos pasamos la vida hablando del calor, pero no nos atrevemos a poner los puntos sobre las íes. Y entretanto, nos vamos muriendo poco a poco” (76). The play implies that for Cuba to break out of a cycle of social, economic, and political crisis, the family must also change. The Romagueras, however, are trapped in a downward spiral and their sense of entrapment exemplifies society’s stagnation. Rosa Ileana Boudet affirms that one of the technical achievements of the play is the manipulation of time: “la concreción de un tiempo (un no-tiempo estacionario) y una atmósfera, la opresiva y alienada de la familia Romaguera [. . .]” (15). The passage of time is irregular between acts; ten years may have passed or just one. The same holds true within the acts; seven days or two years may have passed between scenes. This has a disorienting effect on the spectator and creates the sensation that historical progress has been suspended. The repetitive nature of the dialogue also contributes to a sense of timelessness. As Enrique points out, and as the spectator soon notices, his conversations with Luz Marina concerning his financial contribution to the family are virtually identical over the course almost two decades: “Luz Marina, por favor. . . Eres inmutable como las pirámides. No veo el momento de verte poner otro tema sobre el tapete”

(155). In addition, nothing in the home's decor alters in eighteen years other than the light bulbs, visually reminding the audience that nothing significant has changed for the family. As Oscar sums it up: "Siempre vuelvo al punto de donde partí" (142).

Although the entire play takes place in the central room of the house (the sala-comedor), family members and visitors enter and exit freely. As in Lila, la mariposa, this limitation of space does not literally trap the family; rather, how the characters express their perceptions of their world creates the climate of oppression. The motif of the heat provides the most evident example. The first line of the play, Luz Marina's exclamation: "¡Qué calor! (Pausa.) ¡Qué calor!" sets a paralyzing mood for the whole play. The heat helps create the play's static quality by being a perennial source of conversation for the family and neighbors. The immobilizing heat also contributes to the absurdity of the Romaguera's circumstances, that is, the fact that they have sweltered in growing poverty for eighteen years with no real change. In moments of great frustration, the characters express outright that they feel trapped by their situation. Ángel feels "acorrolado" (119), Ana says she is "encerrada" (89), and Luz Marina swears she will not have her family "verme sepultada entre estas cuatro paredes" (135).

As Martin suggests, the misery of the heat might be the only thing that

holds the members of the family together (152). A family photograph taken near the end of the play in honor of Ángel and Ana's fiftieth wedding anniversary is an empty representation of a united family on a supposedly celebratory day. Behind the static photograph of the happy family lies another story of the chaos of arranging the blind family patriarch, the sickly matriarch, and their deaf son Luis, along with the rest of the siblings and spouses, to pose for the photographer.¹⁹ The family is even uncomfortable being together in close physical proximity, and the photographer repeatedly has to tell them to gather closer to one another for the photograph (162-63). This brief moment of false unity cracks as Ana agonizes on her deathbed seven days later, and the children argue over their father's future and the details of their mother's wake. Oscar ends the argument on a non-cooperative note: "Parecemos salvajes. ¿Es que olvidan que la pobre mamá está allí agonizando? (*Pausa.*) Bueno, hagan lo que quieran" (174). In contrast to the family photograph, *Aire frío* ends with the silent visual image of the siblings moving in opposite directions towards different rooms.

In the end, Luz Marina does get the cold air she so desperately yearns for in the form a fan (provided by Enrique) to comfort Ana during her last days. But as Montes Huidobro eloquently points out: "el aire del ventilador no será ciertamente vivificante y llegará demasiado tarde, para confundirse

con el aire frío de la muerte" (177). With Ana's death, however, the household will crumble and perhaps make way for the birth of a new sort of family. On another level, her death, which takes place in 1958, signals the demise of the Cuban Republic. As I have argued, the patriarchal family is just one more component in a landscape of faltering institutions. In Luz Marina, and to some extent all of her siblings, however, we witness an impulse to live their lives differently than their parents, a change that bodes well for the country's future. Luz Marina, especially, works to form an identity that departs from the traditional definition of woman. In this sense, she seeks a different way to be Cuban. Indeed, as we will see in Abelardo Estorino's play El robo del cochino, her rebellion against parental authority augurs the massive transformation of the Cuban family/nation that will come with the revolution.

To Rob the Pig: A Cuban Housecleaning

Abelardo Estorino (b. 1925) left a career in dental surgery to become a professional writer after the 1959 revolution. Many consider Estorino Cuba's most important contemporary playwright because for over twenty years he has continued to write and produce plays within the revolutionary context. Estorino began his career in the 1960s writing a series of realist plays he called

“variaciones machistas sobre familias provincianas” (qtd. in Arias 8). As in Aire frío, the treatment of gender roles in Estorino’s El robo del cochino (1961) suggests that change in relations between the sexes constitutes one of the major renovations needed in the Cuban family. In the 1980s, Estorino broke with his illusionist style by employing intertexts and metatheater in plays such as Ni un sí ni un no (1980) and Morir del cuento (1983). George Woodyard points out, however, that Estorino’s works have retained common thematic concerns: “family units and marital issues, the need for openness, fairness and above all, equality in human relationships” (62).

In El robo del cochino, Estorino’s most popular play, the tensions within a provincial family reach a crisis point when the supposed theft of a pig links the household to a national conflict: the incipient Cuban revolution. El robo plays out the generational conflict primarily between Cristóbal, a landowner who has scaled the socio-economic ladder and his twenty-year-old son, Juanelo. Cristóbal refuses to intervene on behalf of a guajiro who works on his land and is falsely accused of stealing a pig, thus causing an irreparable rift between father and son. By the end of the dramatic action, Cristóbal and his wife Rosa have come to embody everything Juanelo rejects in favor of the revolution. While the youth of the nation moves towards the future, Cristóbal and Rosa represent a generation trapped by the retroactive

social conventions of provincial society and the fear of losing their status. By rejecting the models of behavior and ideologies of his parents, Juanelo distinguishes himself from them and implicitly asserts his desire for a more just and egalitarian society.

Unlike Ferrer and Piñera, who made an impact on Cuban drama during the Republican period, Estorino's dramaturgy is a product of the Cuban revolution. El robo thus reflects the revolutionary optimism of the period. Lila, la mariposa and Aire frío, in contrast, given the frustrated and skeptical climate of the Batista regime in which they were written, contain more ambiguous generational conflicts than plays written during the revolution's euphoric first years. The desire for change in Cuba highlighted in Ferrer and Piñera's plays does not necessarily translate into revolution. The dramatic action of El robo, however, takes place during the summer of 1958, the very moment the Cuban revolution began to move towards victory. The problems of Cuban society depicted in the earlier plays reappear in El robo, but here the younger generation breaks free of the stifling parental influence because the revolution provides them with support and direction.

The action of El robo transpires in a small town in the province of Matanzas during one day. Rodríguez, a guajiro (Cuban peasant) who has worked for Cristóbal for years, arrives with the news that his son, Tavito, has

been taken away by the Rural Guard for stealing a pig. The fact that Juanelo is home because the university in Havana has been closed due to political unrest and that Cristóbal refuses to help free Tavito reveals the tense climate of the summer of 1958.²⁰ In the second act, underlying family conflicts come to a head as the crisis with Tavito intensifies. Juanelo witnesses an argument between his parents in which he learns unpleasant details about their relationship. Rodríguez interrupts the quarrel when he bursts in to report that the Rural Guard plans to take Tavito to the provincial capital. Although everyone understands that this signifies Tavito's torture and possible death, Cristóbal again refuses to help, especially when the real motive for Tavito's persecution becomes apparent. His family has aided a wounded university student obviously implicated in revolutionary activities. He pleads for Cristóbal's help, hoping the landowner's high-level connections in the community will free Tavito. The act ends with Juanelo's defiant decision to accompany Rodríguez to the jail.

In the meantime, Juanelo's relationship with a woman involved in the revolutionary movement has prompted him to examine his family's beliefs, and by extension, the ideology of his social class. Throughout the play, he becomes increasingly contentious with how his father handles the Tavito situation, and in the third act, the father and son finally confront each other.

In the middle of their discussion, Lola, the family's servant, arrives and announces that the Rural Guard has killed Tavito. No longer able to tolerate his family's "no meterse" policy, Juanelo abandons the house to join the revolutionaries. As Emilio Bejel argues, the play's open ending makes the audience the object of its revolutionary agenda, inviting it to participate in the revolutionary process (69). By involving the audience, Estorino underscores the inseparability of family and nation in El robo. Just as Juanelo rejects his father, the play calls for the audience to reject Cuba's Republican past and to join in the revolution.

One of play's weak points, however, is the separation of the family space of the house where the entire play takes place, from the pueblo, the national space. Critics have noted that dialogue dominates scenic action and that rather than showing what happens, the characters recount action (Montes Huidobro 268; Castagnino 241). I would argue that this is due to an unbalanced use of theatrical space. According to Hanna Scolnicov, in realist theater, characters typically "congregate in the family drawing-room coming from far-off places, thereby complicating the plot that is developing in the perceived space" (91).²¹ In Estorino's play the opposite is true. The plot that develops in the *conceived* space--what the audience does not see--instigates the family conflict in the *perceived* space, which the audience sees on stage.

The family conflict and the national conflict become intertwined, but the audience never sees what happens outside of the living room. Key events that occur outside of the home lose dramatic effect because the characters' dialogue fails to construct this space vividly. Given the effect Tavito's crisis has on the family, the play could have been more powerful by making visible on stage some of the events involved in the arrest. This would have provided more spatial balance to reflect the connections between the private and public conflicts that the plot elaborates.

Nevertheless, the play's spatial dis-unity creates the sense that while the nation outside is on the verge of major upheaval, nothing inside the house changes. Circumspect references to "la cosa"--the shortages of meat, electricity outages, and the closure of the university--indicate a growing national chaos that contrasts with the static atmosphere of the house. The house comes to be identified with traditional paternalist agrarian Cuba, a world that the revolution is about to transform. This world belonged to Don Gregorio, Rosa's father who had lost his fortune by the time she married. As Cristóbal puts it, "Mucho título, mucho respeto, mucha servilleta en la mesa, pero cuando se murió, ésta no cogió ni un kilo" (61). The large house and its contents, particularly the furniture and Don Gregorio's silver-topped walking canes, however, constitute signs that communicate to the audience power and

tradition. Cristóbal provided the family with more capital, but resented having to live in a home he never felt was really his, with a father-in-law who made him feel inferior. Yet, as a self-made man, Cristóbal is trapped by his desire for the prestige that the house and all its contents bring him. From Rosa's perspective, Cristóbal should not feel burdened by her family's lineage; after all, he spends most of his time outside of the house, whereas she is always: "aquí, con estas paredes y estos muebles, que son los mismos de siempre. . ." (82). Rosa's reply to Cristóbal's suggestion that she change the furniture underscores how important her home is to her sense of identity: "No, son los muebles de mi casa, donde se sentó mi padre. ¿Qué me queda entonces?" (82). Thus, she is equally caught up in her need to maintain family heritage.

The house and the values it embodies are precisely what the play suggests that the revolution would like to make obsolete. Any kind of change, from the way women and men relate to each other, to a new class structure, threatens Cristóbal's position in society. Cristóbal is an authoritarian figure who tries to instill fear in his employees and is impatient and demanding with his wife. Cristóbal tells his own son that he is not suited to work on their land: "tratas a la gente con una confianza desde el primer día ¡qué te pierden el respeto!" (57). Moreover, by refusing to help Rodríguez,

Cristóbal breaks the typical paternalist relationship that characterizes the agrarian sector. Puzzled, Rodríguez exclaims: “llevo años trabajando para usted” (87), but Cristóbal’s response shows he feels no paternalist bond with the guajiro: “Está bien. Hemos hecho negocio. Tú trabajas y yo te pago” (87). Although Cristóbal aspires to have the prestige of a Don Gregorio, he embodies a shift from the landowning patriarchs of the past, who saw themselves as fatherly caretakers of the nation, to a self-serving upper-middle class.

Cristóbal never establishes a paternalist relationship with his workers because he suffers from a complex from having earned his authority by illegitimate means. Unlike Don Gregorio, who was born into the upper class, Cristóbal had to work his way up to gain respect and social standing. His constant explanations as to how he arrived at this point in his life reveal his insecurities. Even though he now occupies Don Gregorio’s powerful position, he feels like an impostor, and when he confesses to his son that he climbed the social ladder in part by stealing--“Pues robé, ¡coño!, tuve que robar o me aplastaban. Si no, no había forma de salir de aquella mierda” (99)--he all but admits that his claim to power is illicit. Consequently, he has a defensive philosophy of life: “Hay que pelear todos los días. Cuando te levantas por la mañana tienes que pensar, ¿contra quién estoy hoy?” (101). In

Cristóbal's opinion, the best way to defend his land and his home is absolute independence: "Cada cual a lo suyo, a su trabajo, a su familia, deja el mundo correr" (74). While he is not a supporter of the Batista regime, Cristóbal believes if Tavito is in trouble, he brought it upon himself by becoming involved in the opposition movement. The play's message, however, is that one must take sides, as Juanelo does by rejecting his parents' ideologies.

Juanelo begins as an unformed character whose own personality takes shape as he begins to distance himself from his father. In the beginning of the play, there is considerable emphasis on the similarities between father and son. As Rosa's friend comments, they look alike: "¡Es igualito a su padre ese muchacho! De ti no sacó nada" (66). Juanelo flatters Cristóbal's vanity by pointing out that they seem like brothers and that he attracts female attention on the streets (58-59). Although Juanelo is different from his father in that he is not destined to become a patrón, he seems to have adopted some of his father's mannerisms and machista behavior.²² Lola complains: "¡Eres igual que tu padre, pone los pies donde quiera y después tiene uno que estar pasando la bayeta, no se acaba nunca!" (75). Reminiscing about the past, Cristóbal defensively labels one of Rosa's potential suitors "la mariquita," partly because he played the piano but mostly because he felt threatened by

the other man's social stature. When Rosa shows Juanelo a picture of herself and "la mariquita," father and son laugh hysterically, driving Rosa to tear up the photograph (63). In a later scene, Rosa reveals the hurt she feels from her complete exclusion from the pair: "Qué bien se llevan, qué bien se llevan. ¡Todo el mundo venía a decirlo, ¡qué bien se llevan! Parecen hermanos, no parecen padre e hijo . . . ¡Y cómo se ríen juntos!" (84).

As Bejel and Bravo Elizondo have stated, the affirmation of Juanelo's identity is contingent upon the symbolic death of his father (Bravo Elizondo 91; Bejel 67). The disagreement over how to handle the incident with Tavito is the most obvious catalyst for Juanelo's transformation, but his changing relationship with women is another influential factor in this process that highlights Juanelo's growing social consciousness as well as the changing roles of women in Cuban society. Throughout the play, he has contact with women representative of different backgrounds. For example, Rosa is the model of a long-suffering mother in a male-dominated family. Completely alienated from her husband and son's close relationship, Rosa finds solace in the memory of her daughter who died eighteen years ago. Rosa's domain is the house, where she spends so much time that her servant Lola comments that before she started to work there: "yo decía, esta mujer debe estar enferma. Yo jamás la he visto a usted en la calle" (53). When she does leave

the house, it is only to attend mass and to visit her daughter's grave. Rosa has spent her life as a spectator by the window, waiting for a change that would make her life more fulfilling (92). Juanelo becomes increasingly aware that the kind of change the revolution could bring would involve less narrowly defined roles for wives and mothers.

El robo offers other models of womanhood that prophesy a more flexible vision of gender roles that the revolution could provide. Although Lola is poor and black, on many levels she has far more freedom than Rosa. Unlike Rosa, who stands at the window listening to the music of a party outside, Lola stays out all night dancing. She enjoys the independence of living alone and refers to her latest boyfriend as "Flor de un día. . ." (75). Rather than denying the seriousness of Tavito's situation, Lola stands up to Cristóbal's frequent commands to "cállate" by repeatedly condemning the Rural Guard for its actions against Tavito. She understands the implications of the changes taking place and tells Rosa that women have an important role in them: "En Santiago se reunieron un montón de mujeres y salieron. Vestidas de negro. ¡Y la policía no pudo con ellas!" (93).

As a middle-class intellectual, Juan's girlfriend Adela also constitutes an alternative model of woman. Their relationship has scandalized the community because she is divorced, an older woman, and a professor who

has had to leave Havana for political reasons. Adela is a major influence on Juanelo's growing awareness of the workings of race, class, and gender in his country. He tells Lola that with Adela he has learned to express himself and to examine the world in which he lives: "Ahora estoy mirándolo todo como si lo acabara de comprar. Como cuando el viejo trajo la maquina, que levanté el capó y lo miré todo hasta aprenderme cada tornillito" (77). Not only has Juanelo begun not only to think about the relationships in his family, but also his new insights on life have allowed him to make connections between people he would not ordinarily think have much in common. For example, he tells Lola that her self-confidence and independence remind him of Adela. In other words, the play communicates the idea that people like Lola (a black servant) and Adela (a white middle-class intellectual) must work together in joining the revolution that will transform both lives for the better.

Juanelo's growing relationships with women other than his mother and the discovery that his father has had a long-time lover help him to define himself as different from his father. Juanelo has known that Cristóbal has had a long-time querida. However, he does not realize the extent to which this other woman has been a part of Cristóbal's life until Rosa reveals that, as their baby daughter lay dying, she had to drag Cristóbal away from this other

woman. Cristóbal tries to explain his double life by blaming Rosa's piety:

"Rosa estaba siempre en la iglesia. Y era muy bueno irme allá, a la otra casa y tirarme en camiseta y hacer cuentos y reírme" (86). Nevertheless, Juanelo has already begun to question the closeness of their relationship and reflects, "Si estamos. . . si andamos siempre juntos, ¿a qué viene eso ahora?" (86).

Juanelo's dismay at his father's treatment of Tavito finally provokes a confrontation during which he asserts his independence and cubanía, his will to be a different sort of Cuban than this father. Unlike his Cristóbal, Juanelo no longer wishes to be a passive spectator to the events going on around him. Cristóbal makes explicit his motives for refusing to help one of his laborers by asking: "¿Crees que voy a exponer todo lo que tengo por ese guajiro?" (96). At this point, Juanelo's disagreement with his father has gone far beyond the specific incident to include a fundamentally different outlook on life. He realizes that he has followed his father's footsteps much too closely: "¡Yo estaba detrás de ti! ¡Siempre detrás de ti! [. . .] Yo estaba mirando siempre con los ojos tuyos, con los ojos de ellos. Y muchas veces no me gustaba lo que estaba mirando. [. . .] Yo creo que nunca he dicho lo que pienso" (100-01). Juanelo, for the first time, criticizes Cristóbal's Machiavellian attitude and attachment to a vicious cycle of materialism: "Trabajas para tener, tener más, tener, siempre tener y tener. Lola disfruta más que tú, cualquiera disfruta

más que tú” (96). In the end, Juanelo chooses the revolution over his father and his family’s class interests. He sides with the guajiros and Lola (the working class), and his girlfriend (the middle-class intellectual) in hopes of creating a Cuba that represents the Cuban national family more equitably.

Similar to Lila, la mariposa, a comment about the material condition of the family home points to the future course of action of the characters and the nation. Like Marino, who contemplates moving or at least painting the dirty walls of his home, Rosa exclaims several times throughout the play that the house is in need of a good cleaning, and the play ends with her remark: “Esta casa está que da asco” (103). At this moment, unbeknownst to Rosa, her son is abandoning the house for that very reason--he finds the values that the house embodies “disgusting.” Ironically, Rosa’s suggestion takes place in the form of a revolution. Rather than interpreting the title El robo del cochino simply as a direct reference to Tavito’s alleged crime, the act of robbery and the presence of pigs evoke other meanings as well. The title could just as easily refer to Cristóbal, the “pig” (materially greedy) and the “robbing” to the revolution that would seek to distribute wealth more equally. He who robbed to climb the socio-economic ladder is about to be robbed by the revolution. In this reading, Juanelo’s separation from his family, especially his from his father, becomes the play’s central dramatic movement. After all,

from Cristóbal's viewpoint, he has lost his son to the revolution. The play's position, however, is that the benefits from a Cuban housecleaning outweigh the subsequent ruptured family relations. Juanelo's rejection of his father implies that a new society will demand a new family, one with more egalitarian relationships between men and women, and Cubans of different classes and racial backgrounds. The process of finding his own identity leads Juanelo to discover a revolutionary way to be Cuban.

"Hay que tumbar la casa": Collapsing the Generational Conflict

Four years after the successful rebellion against parental authority portrayed in El robo del cochino, José Triana's La noche de los asesinos (1965) presents children who repeatedly perform the societal roles they wish to destroy. Triana's play underscores the similarities between the parents' and the children's generations, suggesting that the Cuban family and nation after the revolution is not so different after all. Triana's own experience as an artist during the post-revolutionary period also puts into question whether the revolution ever freed Cubans from a cycle of authoritarian governments. Triana (b. 1933) began to write his first plays and some poetry while studying in Europe in the mid-1950s. Upon the defeat of the Batista regime in 1959, he returned to join the revolution. He served as a literary advisor to the Consejo

Nacional de Cultura and the publishing house Letras Cubanas, and began to immediately produce his plays. Triana's drama combines traditional Cuban forms with elements related to the theater of cruelty, ritual theater, and the theater of the absurd. La noche de los asesinos made him Cuba's best-known playwright internationally, and although the play won the Casas de Américas prize, its ambiguous message led critics to question Triana's ideological stance. Along with playwrights Virgilio Piñera and Antón Arrufat, Triana was accused of privileging individual artistic commitment over political responsibility to the revolution. Consequently, despite Triana's stature as one of Latin America's major playwrights, much of his work after 1966 remains unedited and unperformed in his home country.²³

La noche de los asesinos is a metatheatrical two-act play in which three young adults, Lalo, Cuca, and Beba, repeatedly rehearse the murder of their parents in a squalid attic or basement.²⁴ The enigmatic nature of the play has created a critical debate over the meaning of the work, mainly over its position with regard to the Cuban revolution. Because the dramatic action takes place in the 1950s, it can be interpreted as denouncing Batista's dictatorial regime or other institutions of power such as the family and the judicial system. Some, however, consider the play as a criticism of the revolutionary process itself, which imposed a new system of oppression.²⁵ La

noche completes the cycle of plays discussed in this chapter, in which the tension between parents and children manifest first pre-revolutionary frustration, then revolutionary optimism, and finally the questioning of just what kind of new family the revolution has actually created. Cubanía, the Cuban impulse to create an identity, is present in all of the works, and the fact that Triana envisions La noche as “un estudio de nuestro carácter, de la personalidad, de la conducta” (Estorino, “Destruir” 6) suggests that for some Cubans, the search for identity did not end with the revolution. That is, although the revolution ostensibly freed Cuba on a national (political and economic) level, some individuals struggled with the new definitions of what it was to be Cuban in a Marxist society. In La noche, through role playing, Lalo, Cuca, and Beba parody the authoritarian constructs of the family and the justice system. However, the children are unable to translate their parents’ behavior into an identity that would distinguish them, and in effect, are trapped in the very roles and structures (embodied by the house) that they try to destroy. In this respect, the opposition between parents and children falls apart, because the children’s game indicates that they simply replace their parents and repeat their authoritarian behavior. Triana’s play poses interesting questions about the possibilities of Cuba ever breaking away from a cycle of oppression and highlights the contradictions of

revolution.

Beyond La noche's collapse of generational conflict, the play blurs other types of dichotomies as well. Triana's text exemplifies cubanía and Cuba's translational aesthetic, for it constantly negotiates between models to fashion its own unique vision. The genesis of the play can explain in part the diversity of interpretations it has provoked. First, Triana began to write La noche as early as 1958 but he did not finish it until 1964.²⁶ This erases the opposition between the play's supposed pro or counterrevolutionary stance. The richness of the play is precisely that it embodies both positions. From the perspective of 1958, La noche serves as a criticism of the oppressive Batista regime, and the children's quest to kill their parents is a necessary evil to achieve freedom. By 1964, however, Triana had witnessed the progressive institutionalization of the revolution and was troubled by its authoritarianism; the children had begun to repeat the errors of their parents. In an interview Triana explains that while no one in his generation wanted the return of the Republic, there was "un deseo de limpieza, de cambio real, verdadero, más profundo, pero con más tacto, con menos histeria, con menos represión" (Escarpanter 2-3). That is, if the play criticizes anything, it is the abuse of power, and this existed in both the pre- and post-revolutionary periods.²⁷

What had started out as a simple “*boceto en una forma muy naturalista de las relaciones familiares: la madre, el padre, los hijos, es decir, en un ambiente lo más real posible*” moreover, became a highly experimental piece in the vein of Artaud’s theater of cruelty (Estorino, “Destruir” 7). In the final product, the central theme of generational conflict remains the same, but the style for communicating the theme drastically changes. Again, due to the play’s evolution, it is difficult to sustain one reading to the exclusion of another. The play does contain the seeds of a domestic drama, but in terms of structure and character development, one could hardly interpret the play from a realist perspective. The theater of the period, however, was used as an instrument of the revolution and as such demanded that the plays portray a recognizable social reality. In comparison to other plays by Abelardo Estorino, Héctor Quintero, and José R. Brene from the early 1960s, Triana’s work stands out for its lack of realism. Thus, Triana expresses his concerns with the revolution’s use of power on both a thematic and aesthetic level. Not only is he in dialogue with the artistic tenets of the revolution, he also underscores his relationship to the European avant garde and “converts First World artistic products into vehicles for the expression of his own specific cultural and historical concerns” (Taylor 66). In short, La noche embodies cubanía, the desire create Cuban identity. It is a translational text that

manipulates literary styles to express a singularly Cuban voice.

Translation, the negotiation between two systems or models, necessarily implies the collapsing of dichotomies, both thematic (the play's stance on the revolution) and stylistic. In the same vein, furthermore, the opposition between parents and children also disappears because in their attempt to reject the models of their parents, the children imitate them.

In La noche, therefore, Triana removes the family from the realist haven of the middle-class living room and places it in a marginal space of the attic or basement. The play's cyclical structure makes it impossible to sum up the dramatic action sequentially as one could a typical well-made play. In the first act, Lalo both directs and stars in the performance of the murder of his tyrannical parents. We never witness the crime because it never takes place; indeed, the children repeatedly rehearse the violent act as a ritual that one day they hope to translate into real action. The balance of power among the three siblings appears to be weighted in Lalo's favor as he forces his unwilling sisters to participate in the bloody game, but references to both past and future performances indicate that they alternate occupying the dominant position. Although only three actors appear on stage, with little warning, Lalo, Cuca, and Beba step into the roles of a variety of characters to create a more complete scenario of the murder that includes its motives and

consequences. As a result, before the first act ends when Lalo symbolically stabs a table, the siblings enact the crime by rapidly assuming and then dropping the roles of their tyrannical parents, gossipy neighbors, policemen, and a newspaper vendor.

In the second act, Cuca takes control of the game. She and Beba play the part of policemen and prosecutors who interrogate Lalo to force him to confess his crime. Although they are supposedly dead, the parents reappear to defend their treatment of the children. This time the siblings portray them as weak and petty, no longer the cruel oppressors depicted earlier. Similarly, the formerly defiant Lalo breaks down under his sisters' emotional taunting and pleads for love: "si el amor pudiera. . . Sólo el amor. . . Porque a pesar de todo, yo los quiero" (201). The final line of the play--Beba's "Ahora me toca a mí"--leaves the children's future open (201). Not knowing what Beba will do with her "turn" allows the audience some degree of hope; perhaps she will break free from the pitfalls of the victimizer/victim paradigm in which she and her brother and sister are trapped.

As Diana Taylor observes, *La noche* "gives us nothing to hold on to" in terms of orienting the audience in time and space (68). The stage directions do indicate that the play takes place during the 1950s, but as for the play's internal action, it is impossible to determine a beginning and an end, or even

how long the characters have sequestered themselves in this peripheral space of the house. In this room, the audience sees an assortment of objects that could belong anywhere: a table and chairs, a vase, a dust rag, and a knife. No one enters or exits the rather mysterious space, and there is no verbal construction of an outside world that would help situate the house. Therefore, some critics do not associate the play with a specific socio-historical context.²⁸ Despite the lack of contextual clues, however, the connection between family and nation, specifically the Cuban nation, is apparent, particularly when we consider La noche in relation to the other plays we have been discussing in this chapter. In La noche, we see the same expression of cubanía in the children's desire to affirm their identity as well as the identification between house and nation.

Priscilla Meléndez notes in her study of dramatic space in La noche that the oppressive space of the house has its parallel in the asphyxiating social, economic and political order of Cuba of the 1950s (29). I would add that the play extends the metaphor of the incarcerating house into the 1960s as well. If one considers the construction of theatrical space, La noche seems to undertake a dialogue with the 1961 revolutionary optimism of El robo, and, in fact, picks up where Estorino's play left off. El robo ends with Rosa's comment about the filthiness of her home, and in Triana's play, the first

reference to the house highlights its lack of cleanliness:

CUCA. Deberías ayudarme. Hay que arreglar esta casa.

Este cuarto es un asco. Cucarachas, ratones, polillas, ciempiés.

.. el copón divino.

LALO. ¿Y tú crees que sacudiendo con un plumero vas a lograr mucho?

CUCA. Algo es algo. (140)

If in El robo Juanelo abandoned his “casa asquerosa” (the embodiment of so much that was wrong with Republican society) to join the revolution, why does Triana, in 1965, imply that house/nation still needs “cleaning”? La noche insinuates that either the revolution did not do away with Republican “filth” or that it replaced it with a different set of problems: a new infestation of cockroaches as Luz Marina from Aire frío would suggest.

The characters’ management of the room’s objects reflects different approaches to the nation’s problems. Despite Cuca’s insistence that “El orden es el orden” (140), Lalo takes command in the beginning of the play by demanding that certain household objects be moved. As Frank Dauster maintains, the desire to move the furniture represents “their need to make their own world, without prefabricated regulations” (182). The arrangement of the house represents the established order that Lalo desperately wants to

destroy:

LALO. Tú no te das cuenta que lo que yo propongo es simplemente la única solución que tenemos. *(Coge la silla y la mueve en el aire.)* Esta silla, yo quiero que esté aquí. *(De golpe pone la silla en un sitio determinado.)* Y no aquí. *(De golpe coloca la misma silla en otro lugar determinado.)* [. . .] Papá y mamá no consienten estas cosas. Creen que lo que yo pienso y quiero hacer es algo que está fuera de toda lógica. Quieren que todo permanezca inmóvil, que nada se mueva de su sitio. . . (149)

During his trial, Lalo explains that he had become obsessed with arranging the house his way, and that voices (the house) demanded that he rebel: “La sala no es la sala, me decía. La sala es la cocina. El cuarto no es el cuarto” (190). To impose his order on the house would not be enough, however, because he would continue to be haunted by his parents’ image: “Si me sentaba en una silla, la silla no era la silla, sino el cadáver de mi padre. Si cogía un vaso de agua, sentía que lo que tenía entre las manos era el cuello húmedo de mi madre muerta” (191).

In the end, Beba, playing Lalo, calls for complete destruction of the house: “Hay que quitar las alfombras. Vengan abajo las cortinas. La sala no es la sala. [. . .] ¡Hay que tumbar esta casa!” (200). The other options, to

continue to clean the house or to rearrange its furniture, signify working within the same problematic structures the revolution has sought to destroy. The play also rejects the alternative of exile. To abandon the house is to go into exile, and as Lalo mentions, he has tried to leave but feels too lost outside of the house (153). Ultimately, the house must be entirely dismantled; otherwise, there will always be discontent brewing in its basement and attic. In this respect, Taylor sees the play as a criticism of the revolution: "The violent usurpation of political power did not guarantee social renovation. The challenge of the revolution was to create a new system of power that would not reproduce the oppression and dependency of the ones before" (79).

Thus, beyond being trapped on a national level in a cycle of authoritarianism, it seems doubtful that the children will reinvent themselves individually because they are not able to distinguish themselves from their parents.²⁹ Like Marino in Lila, la mariposa and Juanelo in El robo, the siblings in La noche lack a strong sense of identity and a will to act. Unlike the children in the other plays, however, Lalo, Cuca, and Beba are undeveloped characters without unique psychologies, and they slip in and out of different identities (including each other's) with ease. In Lalo's opinion, they are like interchangeable objects: "¿Qué importa esta casa, qué

importan estos muebles si nosotros no somos nada, si nosotros simplemente vamos y venimos por ella y entre ellos igual que un cenicero, un florero o un cuchillo flotante?" (150). If the siblings ever bring their game to completion, they will secure at least one identity: as assassins. But, as Beba points out, they keep going in circles, caught in their own game: "Vine aquí a ayudarlos o a divertirme. Porque no sé qué hacer. . . Vueltas y más vueltas. . . Uno parece un trompo" (155). The murder ritual traps in a cyclical pattern that provokes frustration and an even stronger sense of oppression than what they claim to suffer at the hands of their parents. At times they become so wound up they snap and break away from the game: "Quiero hacer algo. Quiero explotar. Quiero irme. Pero no soporto este encierro. Me ahogo" (164).

Parricide is an extreme measure for Lalo, Cuca, and Beba to free themselves from their parents. The characterization of the parents is contradictory, and because they only appear through the eyes of the children, it is not very reliable. On the one hand, the play portrays the parents as tyrants who physically and verbally abuse their children. Lalo, as his father, barks: "Lava los platos, lava los manteles, lava las camisas. Limpia el florero, limpia el orinal, limpia los pisos. No duermas, no sueñas, no leas" (187). Later, as himself, Lalo tells the judge that, "Me gritaban, me golpeaban, me

castigaban, horas interminables en un cuarto oscuro [. . .]” (188). On the other hand, the mother defends herself as one who sacrificed everything for her family: “Señor juez, si usted supiera las lágrimas que he derramado, las humillaciones que he recibido, las horas de angustia, los sacrificios. . .” (193). All in all, the parents come off more as hypocrites, disillusioned with each other and their bourgeois aspirations, than as tyrannical monsters. There is enough evidence to explain why their progeny do not want to see themselves in their image, but even more to suggest that they are doomed to do so.

In their search for self-definition and in the course of the murderous game, Lalo, Cuca, and Beba try on a variety of roles. As Román de la Campa observes, the children play these parts “para parodiarlos y caracterizar sus valores de clase. De este modo, las figuras autoritarias que se imponen en sus vidas [. . .] simbolizan caricaturas de la sociedad” (27). For example, the children parody the conventions of a neighborly social visit by making small talk about typically unmentionable health problems. Lalo, for example, asks: “(Con sonrisa hipócrita.) Usted, Margarita, se ve de lo mejor. ¿Le sigue creciendo el fibroma?” (146). In a similar way, the children parody judicial discourse by exaggerating it. Cuca’s theatrical opening argument as a fiscal is a barrage of rhetorical questions: “¿Puede y debe burlarse a la justicia? ¿La justicia no es la justicia? Si podemos burlarnos de la justitica, ¿la justicia no

deja de ser la justicia?" (182). The children also mock the institution of marriage. They parody their parents' marriage by representing the bride (played by Lalo) and groom's hypocritical pre-nuptial conversation:

Sonríete. Ahí están el canchanchán del doctor Núñez, y su mujer. . . ¿Tú crees que la gente lleve la cuenta de los meses que tengo? Si se enteran, me moriría de verg➔enza. Mira, te están sonriendo las hijas de Espinosa. . . esas pu. . . (165)

These scenes, which seem to be parodic bits of the realist drama Triana began to write inserted into disorienting world of the ritual game, construct a picture of the society the children reject. Making fun of existing social roles, however, does not guarantee their subversion or the subsequent creation of more viable ones.

The process of creating their own voice is thwarted because the children are trapped in the very roles they despise. In her theory of parody, Linda Hutcheon points out that the prefix para can have two opposite meanings, "counter" or "beside" (32). There is always a model involved in parody that usually is repeated with critical distance to mark difference rather than similarity (Hutcheon 6). In La noche rather than "countering"--that is, deconstructing--the social roles, parody traps the children "beside" or "in" those very roles. Furthermore, Richard Hornby writes that in drama,

when a character takes on another role, ironically, the role is often “closer to the character’s true self than his everyday, ‘real’ personality” (67). Lalo, Cuca, and Beba’s “real” personalities are but fragments, and they lose themselves in other identities rather easily. While their intent is to reject their parents, the neighbors, and the justice system through caricature, we never see them act outside of these models of behavior. We see Lalo, Cuca, and Beba either as siblings in a power struggle over their murder ritual or as members of a society they detest. Parodic role playing in this work functions conservatively in that rather than providing models that the children “translate,” that is, recast to develop their own identities, it retains the children within certain patterns.

Parody and its limitations can also be related to the culturally specific Cuban phenomenon of choteo. Choteo, similar to parody, seeks a target to ridicule.³⁰ The choteo-like characteristics of the children’s game troubled Vicente Revuelta, the director of the original production of La noche. He cites the scenes in which the mother complains about her pregnancy as the choteo of Lalo’s very life and birth (Estorino, “Destruir” 12). For Revuelta, the mockery of a very serious occasion such as Lalo’s birth is but one form of choteo that “entre nosotros en toda una época ha sido una cosa terrible, porque en definitiva anulaba--como se ve en la obra--la acción [. . .]”

(Estorino, "Destruir" 13). He also recognizes that in revolutionary Cuba, choteo was likely to evolve and that its destructive instinct might have more positive results if aimed at "una serie de cosas que son dignas de ser choteadas" (Estorino, "Destruir" 13). In the end, the play itself is a choteo of the very concept of revolution. The Cuban revolution attempted an abrupt radical change on social, political, and economic levels, but the play foregrounds the concept in terms of revolving, or completing a cycle. Revolutions both require and cultivate a sharp contrast between past and present, and in Triana's play the children, like the spinning tops with which Beba identifies, endlessly repeat the victimizer/victim relationship they share with their parents.

In La noche Triana constructs a complex representation of the Cuban family and nation by employing "translational" techniques that demand multiple readings from the reader/spectator. Consequently, Triana's investigation of the Cuban character was decidedly unpopular from the viewpoint of the revolution because it blurred the dichotomies revolutionary ideologies require to sustain themselves. La noche breaks down the oppositions between Cuba's Republican past (the parents' generation), and revolutionary Cuba's present (the children). On an aesthetic level, the play mixes realism and experimentalism, making its meanings difficult to

ascertain and perhaps less vulnerable to censorship. From the play's perspective, the conflict between generations collapses because the rebellious children have become the oppressive parents of a new generation.³¹ As Martin indicates, this position was not popular with the revolution:

The metaphor of an incarcerating family could be appropriate for those disaffected by the revolution or its development, but this insular focus did not seem in keeping with the orientation of those who now constituted the theatrical (and political) public in Cuba. (156)

The conflict between generations, from a pro-revolutionary standpoint, became increasingly irrelevant in the new revolutionary society. After all, the past supposedly had been destroyed by the revolution. La noche, in contrast, suggests that the children were unable to create a revolutionary family free from the oppression that characterized Cuba's Republican family.

Conclusion

With La noche de los asesinos, the family play has come full circle. In the mid-1950s, in works such as Lila, la mariposa by Rolando Ferrer and Aire frío by Virgilio Piñera, family dynamics between parents and children serve as a tool to discuss national problems, specifically, the struggle for Cubans to

define themselves in a stifling neo-colonial society. With Abelardo Estorino's 1961 play El robo del cochino, the generational conflict clearly becomes an allegory of the revolution. In all three plays, escaping parental authority and the oppressive space of the family home implies the restructuring of what constitutes a family and how roles for men and women are defined. By 1965, José Triana's La noche de los asesinos raised doubts as to whether the Cuban family and nation had really been reconfigured by suggesting that the revolution had not dismantled the structures that supported Republican Cuba. Lalo, Cuca, and Beba's attempt to create identities for themselves perform a frustrated cubanía. Their efforts also highlight, however, the transitional and "unfinished" character of Cuban identity as conceptualized by Fernando Ortiz and Gustavo Pérez Firmat. And as José Triana states, it is Cuba's transformational qualities that creates its unique identity: "Nuestro pueblo sigue como caminado por su propio paso, casi aéreo, que va y se transforma, vuela, entra en otras naciones, parece que se deshace y vuelve y se reincorpora" (Escarpanter 10).

The generational conflicts in family plays from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s illustrate the mutability of Cuba's national character and presage works from the 1980s and 1990s examined in the latter half of this study. The following chapter investigates how recent Puerto Rican family plays address

issues of collective identity through history, metatheatrical modes, and the concept of performance to underscore the constructed and, therefore, changeable nature of identity discourses. In these plays, nationalist models of identity do not dominate. Consequently, the configuration of theatrical space takes on new meanings, and playwrights are less apt to construct an on-stage structure that houses a particular vision of the national family. This shift in the how playwrights stage the family contributes to the new paradigms of national community currently debated in Puerto Rico.

Notes

¹ Pérez Firmat points out that in Puerto Rico, Antonio Pedreira drew exactly the opposite conclusions, that Puerto Rico's excessive insularismo or isolation impeded the development of a strong sense of national identity (3).

² The Grupo Minorista's 1927 declaration demands national renovation and makes clear the group's anti-imperialism, and solidarity with other Latin American nations. For an in-depth study of intellectuals and the activities of this group, see Ana Caro's, El grupo Minorista y su tiempo.

³ The Platt Amendment, in effect until 1934, gave the United States the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the right to maintain a naval base at Guantánamo Bay, and the right to oversee Cuba's economy. The amendment also curbed Cuba's ability to conduct foreign policy (Skidmore and Smith 250).

⁴ Under the leadership of university professor Ramón Grau San Martín, in four months the revolutionary government abrogated the Platt Amendment and passed more social legislation than in all the previous history of independent Cuba.

⁵ Some of the longer lasting groups were Teatro Pueblo (1943), ADAD (1945), and Prometeo (1947). For a complete list, see Muguercia (44-45).

⁶ Over seventy percent of the plays produced between 1936-50 were

foreign (Muguercia 70).

⁷ Critics commonly divide Ferrer's dramatic works into two stages. Before the Revolution, Ferrer wrote several three-act poetic plays from a psychological perspective, whereas following the revolution, he wrote politically committed one-act dramas. Although many of Ferrer's post-revolution works have been popular with audiences, most critics agree that the plays from his second period are poorer in dramatic quality and tend to overstate the playwright's socio-political intention (García Abreu 290; Montes Huidobro 206-07). I would argue that the tendency to divide Ferrer's works into separate periods downplays the themes the plays share, particularly the socio-political concerns of his early works.

⁸ In his book on socialist theater, Randy Martin discusses a much-transformed 1986 production of Lila, la mariposa by Teatro Buendía. He notes that the new production "acknowledges the history of Cuban national dramaturgy in its struggle for independence in the 1950s" (171). I would add that the 1950s version embodies this struggle as well.

⁹ The Three Fates, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, were goddess too old for anybody to remember where they came from, and they determined how long each mortal would live by snipping off a thread they had spun to measure the mortal's life span (Graves 20).

¹⁰ In another (off-stage) scene El Energúmeno challenges her mother by blowing her nose on a lace tablecloth

¹¹ See Jill Netchinsky's study of madness and colonization in Rosario Ferre's La bella durmiente for her theory on the connection between dance and colonialism.

¹² See Raquel Aguilú de Murphy's book, Los textos dramáticos de Virgilio Piñera y el teatro del absurdo for a discussion on Piñera's early use of absurdist techniques.

¹³ In the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, Cuban critics and theater practitioners have shown a renewed interest in Piñera's drama. This is partly due to a more lenient cultural policy.

¹⁴ Aire frío was written before the revolution, but not staged until 1962 because of its critical vision of Republican society. Not surprisingly, the play's primarily realist dissection of pre-revolutionary Cuba has made it Piñera's most frequently staged work. In contrast, because of the tendency to focus on Piñera's absurdist style, the body of criticism on the work is disproportionately small. What makes Aire frío a fine play, however, is precisely its combination of absurdist elements and realism.

¹⁵ In this sense, I depart from Elías Miguel Muñoz's vision of the play: "El texto criticará, primero y principalmente, los gobiernos corruptos que

pasaron por Cuba a lo largo de tres décadas” (41).

¹⁶ Ángel is the first to say this to Oscar in act 1 (79). At some point, all of the inhabitants of the house use the phrase.

¹⁷ The play serves not only as the Shakespearean trick to “catch the consciousness of the king” but also as a commentary on the state of theater during this period. Many theater practitioners were concerned with the effects of 1950s invasion of radio and television on the theater. A neighbor present during this conversation automatically assumes La malquerida must be a radionovela.

¹⁸ Montes Huidobro suggests that Luz Marina hesitates to marry for so long because she is in love with Oscar (181). This would help to explain why she finally marries while he is in Argentina. A more plausible explanation is that Luz Marina hesitates to marry simply because she does not want to become her mother. In addition, it is widely known that Piñera was gay and that the play is on one level autobiographical. Oscar’s trip probably has more to do with his repressed homosexuality than a love for his sister.

¹⁹ Luis is the son who lives in New York. His deafness was caused by an illness that resulted from eating canned spoiled food.

²⁰ On the historical context Pedro Bravo Elizondo writes: “Batista desata en mayo de 1958, la única y mayor ofensiva contra los rebeldes en la

Sierra Maestra y la eliminación sistemática de sus opositores en la Habana. Esta situación histórica justifica la huida de Adela de la capital, la indecisión del pueblo de sumirse a la revolución, la persecución de los enemigos del regimen, y la brutalidad represiva de la policia" (80-81).

²¹ Scolnicov's use of the terms perceived and conceived space, or the theatrical space within and the theatrical space without, are similar to Issacharoff's diegetic and mimetic space. Perceived space is on stage, within the field of vision of the spectator, and conceived space is off stage (3).

²² In this regard, I disagree with Montes Huidobro's assessment that Juanelo and his father's relationship is "de índole positiva" (270).

²³ Since 1980, Triana has lived in exile in Paris.

²⁴ The stage directions describe them as adults, "*y sin embargo conservan cierta gracia de adolescente, aunque un tanto marchita*" (138). The text also indicates that Lalo is thirty and that Beba is twenty. It is important to note that they are not children, for Triana states that they are "la gente de mi propia generación. Escribí La noche de los asesinos cuando tenía 33 años, es decir que a partir de esta edad es que creo que debe concebirse a sus personajes" (Escarpanter 2).

²⁵ The criticism on La noche generally falls into three lines of inquiry. The first focuses on the play's anti-illusionist techniques and themes with

little emphasis on its socio-historical context. For example, studies by Anne Murch, Frank Dauster, Isabel Álvarez-Borland, and David George have examined the play's use of myth, ritual, and games. In addition, Kirsten Nigro and Priscilla Meléndez have analyzed from a semiotic perspective how the structures of the play communicate its meaning. Other critics consider the work in relation to the Cuban revolution. This approach has produced divergent readings. Montes Huidobro and Eduardo Lolo, for example, consider the play a critical commentary on revolutionary Cuba whereas Román de la Campa sees it as a condemnation of pre-revolutionary society. He does not view La noche as a pro-revolutionary play however, for "La visión crítica del pasado pre-revolucionario que Triana mantiene es vista como algo estático, que no evoluciona y le impide reflejar la realidad social transformada por el nuevo sistema" (14). Finally, recent studies by Jerry Hoeg and Diana Taylor examine how the play is about revolution in general rather than limiting its stance as either pro or contra revolutionary.

²⁶ In a 1967 interview Triana stated that he began the piece in 1958, put it away until 1963 when he attempted again to work on the text, and then in 1964 finally finished it (Estorino, "Destruir" 6). Triana also speaks of the process of writing La noche in a 1993 interview with Sebastián Doggart.

²⁷ In this respect, I find Diana Taylor's reading of the La noche helpful

because she maintains that the play cannot be seen in isolation from its revolutionary context as it is an examination of the very concept of revolution from neither a clear pro nor contra position (66-67).

²⁸ Dauster, along with other critics, examine the play's central conflict on a more existential or "universal" level than I do:

Obviously, this is not simply a presentation of the unpleasantries of a single family but a dramatic metaphor of a decaying institution, a great blasphemy against the foundations of social life. [. . .] This is no social drama in the usual political sense but rather in the sense that it presents in almost unique fashion the terrible conflict of generations that is literally shaking the roots of society in our world. (182)

I see the generational conflict as a special dramatic metaphor that defines a series of plays during a particular period in a specific culture.

²⁹ Taylor argues that the children are unable to define themselves because they exist in a context of crisis:

The blurring of boundaries and the collapse of the frameworks that would allow for differentiation, associated with the objective systematic rifts in crisis, are accompanied by the subjective, personal experience of crisis in Assassins. Lalo,

Cuca, and Beba try to define themselves in the absence of a concrete, objective other, either individual (parents) or social.

(74)

³⁰ It is important to note that parody does not always serve to ridicule.

Hutcheon writes: “parody can obviously be a whole range of things. It can be a serious criticism, not necessarily of the parodied text; it can be a playful, genial mockery of codifiable forms. Its range of intent is from respectful admiration to biting ridicule” (15-16).

³¹ Eduardo Lolo explains:

Los hijos y los padres de La noche de los asesinos eran [. . .] los mismos personajes--tomados en épocas diferentes--pero semejantes--y yuxtapuestos en el tiempo por el artificio que la obra crea; eran, en fin, los jóvenes oprimidos de los 50 enfrentados a su propia imagen de opresores en los 60. En este sentido, los personajes de Triana se quedaron en una sola generación [. . .]. (44)

Chapter 3:

Imagining Community through Performance and Nostalgia:

Puerto Rican Drama of the 1980s and 1990s

In 1984, Edgar Rodríguez Juliá wrote a series of essays based on family photographs from the turn of the century to the present for the San Juan newspaper El Reportero. He later compiled more photographs and added narrative texts to compile Puertorriqueños (Álbum de la sagrada familia puertorriqueña a partir de 1898) (1988). Rodríguez Juliá's album pieces together a history of the Puerto Rican family, which, in turn, captures the socio-economic, political, and cultural evolution of the island. The persistence of the family as a metaphor for nation attests to the desire of the only colony in the Western Hemisphere to imagine itself as a national community. The family album, in short, exemplifies the themes of history and national self-image prevalent in Puerto Rican cultural discourse of the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter 1 demonstrated that while in the 1950s Puerto Ricans never agree on what kind of family should embody the nation, writers nevertheless attempted to define a Puerto Rican collective experience. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, Puerto Rico underwent social, economic, and political changes that gave rise to a shift in how intellectual discourses

address the problem of identity. Playwright Roberto Ramos-Perea, for example, contends that recent Puerto Rican writers no longer endeavor to pin down the character of the nation nor engage in an existential examination of the national psyche because “Ya sabemos lo que somos” (“De Cómo” 56). Thus, to defend and affirm whatever this identity may be constitutes the new challenge for contemporary artists. Rodríguez Juliá’s Puertorriqueños illustrates this new perspective, for the photo album offers a history of the island viewed through multiple lenses, underlining the many subjectivities that make up puertorriqueñidad.

By the 1980s, nationalist models of identity no longer dominate representations of Puerto Rican collective identity. In plays from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, rather than staging a family that embodies a limited vision of national culture, playwrights portray families that dramatize the processes that form various Puerto Rican communities and what is at stake by maintaining or contesting these images of puertorriqueñidad. Plays by Antonio García del Toro, Roberto Ramos-Perea, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and Myrna Casas expose identities in a constant process of creation and negotiation. Like the tension created in Rodríguez Juliá’s family album by simultaneously displaying nostalgia for the past and laying bare the constructed nature of identity, these plays follow two seemingly

contradictory directions. Hotel Melancolía (1986) by García del Toro and Callando amores (1995) by Ramos-Perea exhibit a sense of nostalgia and an interest in preserving cultural and national traditions. Through the use of intertexts, however, these works critique identity stories from the 1950s and imply the need for new ways to explore collective identity. In Sánchez's Quíntuples (1984) and Casas's "El gran circo eukraniano" (1988), on the other hand, the presence of traveling acting troupes highlights the performance and the mobility of Puerto Rico's national community. Despite the self-conscious performance of an unstable identity, Quíntuples and "El gran circo eukraniano" also betray some nostalgia for origins and a more rooted identity. Plays from the 1950s examined in Chapter 1 anticipated this focus on identity as performance in their occasional use of metatheatrical techniques to create worlds and identities for characters seeking to form an alternate vision of the nation and the family. The prevalence of intertexts and performance in works from the 1980s and 1990s, however, suggests that there is no essential model of the nation or the family to which to return.

The changing socio-cultural and economic conditions in the 1960s and 1970s have shaped how recent cultural theorists approach the concepts of nation and identity. This is true of many parts of the world where emerging social movements and increasing globalization facilitated by mass media and

transnational capitalism have made it impossible “to interpellate convincingly the entirety of the socius on the basis of traditional master discourses [. . .]” (Flores, Franco, Yúdice ix). In Puerto Rico, the master discourses that have framed investigations of Puerto Rican identity, nationalism and colonialism, have given way to the interplay of practices and discourses of class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and migrant experience as organizers of puertorriqueñidad. For example, in his essay on Rafael Cortijo, Puerto Rico’s most famous plena musician, Juan Flores suggests a relational model for imagining community that would assess Puerto Rico’s African heritage as a part of a shifting cultural geography and “aim to identify not some originary identity but the contacts and crossings experienced by the culture as social practices” (98). Similarly, the contributors to Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism (1997), edited by Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, propose alternative strategies and spaces from which to construct puertorriqueñidad not bound by a colonialist/nationalist polarity. The nostalgic and performative representations of the family in recent Puerto Rican drama participate in some of the new debates and discourses that challenge the view that there is a particular, identifiable Puerto Rican cultural identity and that there is consensus on its meaning.

Unraveling a Fragile Consensus: Historical and Cultural Contexts

While dissension on what constitutes cultural and political identity marked Puerto Rican society in the 1950s and 1960s, historian Fernando Picó also labels this period “la década tranquila” (260). Under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín and the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), between 1955 and 1965, the island experienced a period of relative social peace as crime rates and emigration decreased, the middle and working classes grew, the standard of living improved, access to health care and education increased, and cultural activities flourished. Nevertheless, a 1967 plebiscite on political status revealed that in spite of its many successes, the PPD never achieved consensus on this issue, for 38.9 percent of the vote went to the supporters of statehood.¹ In 1968, Luis Ferré, leader of the Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP), a pro-statehood party, narrowly defeated the PPD candidate for governor, breaking the twenty-year political hegemony of the PPD and inaugurating a bipartisan era. Since 1968, estadistas have won in 1976, 1980, 1992, and 1996, whereas pro-commonwealth candidates have won in 1972, 1984, and 1988.

The growing popularity of the statehood party has evolved in great part because of economic factors. Although initially beneficial for many Puerto Ricans, in the long run, the industrialization program developed by

the PPD created a dependent economy and massive unemployment.

Aarón Gamaliel Ramos explains:

The initial phase of the industrialization process in the late 1940s relied mainly on the implantation of labor-intensive U.S. industrial enterprises. [. . .] as the colonial industrialization process became more tied to multinational capital, the program of industrial attraction was reoriented towards the highly mechanized capital-intensive industries that made little usage of the enormous supplies of labor. (267)

Phasing out the agricultural economy, however, did create a new social sector involved in services, in government, and in industrial occupations.

Economically linked to the United States, this group became ideologically inclined towards statehood. At the same time, those marginalized by the industrial transformation of the island migrated to urban centers and grew dependent upon Federal Aid to survive. These groups, displaced by the reorganized economy, became equally interested in strengthening ties with the United States through statehood while the economically successful estadistas championed their cause (Ramos 267-68).

The PPD and the PNP shared leadership throughout the decade of the 1970s, but neither party could resolve the economic problems brought on by a

recession and the world oil crisis (1973-74). Between 1970 and 1977, unemployment intensified, and more formerly self-sufficient families began to depend on federal funds for their income. Inflation and a drop in the quality of life translated into wider social problems: an increase in emigration, violent crimes, drug abuse, environmental pollution, and poor public service (Morales Carrión 313). At the same time, the youth of Puerto Rico, radicalized by international events such as the Cuban Revolution (1959), the military coup in Chile (1973), and the war in Vietnam (1965-75), protested a wide range of social injustices. On the home front, student movements clashed with police while protesting obligatory military service and the presence of the R.O.T.C. on the University of Puerto Rico campus. The suspicious death of two young militant independentistas in 1978 revealed the depth of tensions on the island and sparked public concern about political repression beyond the protests of a confrontational young generation. The incident, which came to be called the “Caso Maravilla,” breached the people’s trust in their local government and police force because in 1983 questioning on live television revealed a government cover-up by disclosing that Puerto Rican police agents had executed the militants.² In this tumultuous decade, only the outrage provoked by the events of the “Caso Maravilla” and the sorrow over the 1980 death of Puerto Rico’s great twentieth-century political

leader, Luis Muñoz Marín, briefly united the nation.³

By the 1980s, the debate over the political identity of Puerto Rico was less urgent than the need for resolving social and economic crises. Rather than focusing on the long-standing issue of status, which tended to divide Puerto Ricans, political campaigns instead hinged on socio-economic problems and the programs to remedy them proposed by candidates (Picó 268; Morales Carrión 309). In the cultural arena, this shift away from the status question intersected with new approaches to investigating identity. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, competing interests and ideologies stretched to the breaking point the colonialist/nationalist paradigm that limited many Puerto Rican intellectuals during the 1930s-1950s. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé points out:

It is not until the early 70s when, as a result of the crisis of Puerto Rico's model of economic development, the unitary concept of a Puerto Rican national culture, which had underwritten it, began to appear as a more restricted (and restrictive) term, as a class construct. [. . .] it seemed incredible that we Puerto Ricans had for so long lived within the paradoxical confines of the *casa solariega*, or patrician home, of our colonial modernity. (139)

As we have seen in Chapter one, the national house built by writers during the 1930s and 1950s periods of cultural nationalism was not only class-based but also paternalist and Hispanocentric. In the 1960s and 1970s, voices excluded from this construction of the nation made themselves heard, problematizing hegemonic discourses of collective identity.

Marxist historians including Ángel G. Quintero Rivera and Juan Ángel Silén switched the focus of Puerto Rican historical studies from celebrated political leaders and their stance on the status of the island to the development of class conflicts (Quintero Rivera 213).⁴ As the working class and other marginalized groups gained new visibility, they appeared as the subject of literary works, such as Luis Rafael Sánchez's En cuerpo de camisa (1966). This collection of short stories serves as an introduction to many themes popularized in Puerto Rican literature in the 1970s. During this decade, José Luis González and Isabelo Zenón Cruz, through their stories and essays, highlighted Puerto Rico's African heritage, while the Nuyorican poetry of Tato Laviera added the significant migrant perspective to the Puerto Rican national community.⁵ Rosario Ferré and Manuel Ramos Otero, also attentive to issues of race and class, investigated the themes of gender and sexual orientation as well.⁶ Josefina Rivera de Álvarez calls the literature of the times "testimonial y desacralizadora" because it captures the socio-

political activism of the period in formally and thematically innovative ways (659). By incorporating the voices of socially marginalized groups such as blacks, homosexuals, immigrants, drug addicts, and prostitutes, these writers use a language that challenges the linguistic norms of the dominant classes and forges a space for new perspectives.

The national house--or the theater--that the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña and playwrights like René Marqués, Francisco Arriví, and Emilio Belaval had constructed during the 1940s and 1950s loomed large over the dramatists of new generations. By the late 1960s, young playwrights felt stifled by the state-sponsored Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño because, as Rosalina Perales observes:

siempre representaban los mismos autores--ya consagrados-- obras que versaban sobre los mismos temas: la nostalgia por el jíbaro, el conflicto de nuestra identidad, la evocación del pasado perdido, el eclecticismo social etc. Las técnicas y estructuras eran tradicionales y las puestas en escena satisfacían a un público ya oficializado. (74)

As we have seen, the 1968 elections that broke the political hegemony of the PPD ushered in an era of generational rupture, deep ideological divisions, and a sense of instability. Playwright Roberto Ramos-Perea labels the theater

that evolved in this context “La Nueva Dramaturgia Puertorriqueña” (NDP). Perales, in contrast, uses the phrase “teatro de la fricción” to refer to this theater because it captures the confrontational nature of the performances of the period and the context in which they took place.⁷ For Ramos-Perea, the foundation of the performance group El Tajo del Alacrán (1968) marks the beginning of the NDP movement. The group’s name refers to a street weapon, and the names of subsequent groups such as Anamú (1969) and Moriviví (1972) (named after persistent weeds), and Teatro de Guerrillas (1969) suggest their combative stance (Reynolds 148).

Popular theater and collective creation define the first cycle (1968-75) of the NDP movement. Directors, actors, and playwrights worked together to create performance pieces using an anti-poetic, streetwise language new to the Puerto Rican stage.⁸ Like writers of all genres during this period, these theatre practitioners dramatized politicized topics and socially marginalized groups to raise consciousness about specific Puerto Rican problems. Unable to stage their works in traditional venues, these groups performed on the streets, in public parks, and in other non-conventional performance spaces. By abandoning formal theater stages, they freed themselves of cumbersome sets and technical equipment and created a closer, more active relationship between the work and the public. This new audience/actor connection and

the collaborative nature of the texts emphasize the unique ways performance can work to raise collective consciousness.

With its new themes, modes of expression, ideological base, and didactic intent, the new movement undoubtedly renovated Puerto Rican theater.⁹ For Ramos-Perea, the treatment of the problem of identity differentiates the new playwrights from former generations. He concedes that playwrights who examined Puerto Rican culture, such as Francisco Arriví and René Marqués, were writers concerned with the conflicts of their times, but argues that new dramatists who denounce injustices and who question social, economic, and political problems produce more committed works ("Teatro" 90). The NDP movement worked under the assumption that first, there was no need to search for an identity that Puerto Rico already possessed, and that second, a variety of discourses formed this identity. Consequently, the artists asked: "¿Qué vamos a hacer para defender nuestra puertorriqueñidad? ¿Qué armas, argumentos o decisiones tanto en el teatro como en la realidad, vamos a esgrimir en la defensa de nuestro acervo particular y nuestra idiosincrasia?" ("Teatro" 91). They recognized that many subjectivities made up the Puerto Rican character, and unlike in the 1930s and 1950s, that nationalism did not have to constitute the foundation for discussing identity. The newly recognized heterogeneity of

puertorriqueñidad led writers from the 1960s on to articulate the question of national community through discourses other than that of the nation and the family. Consequently, although family was certainly an implicit theme in the youthful rebellion against authority, the family unit was not a major image in the theater of the 1960s and 1970s.

By the mid-seventies, the NDP movement moved into a second phase that continued well into the 1980s. In this period, playwrights maintained a socially conscious focus, but the performance activity turned to more traditional theater spaces and modes of writing (Ramos-Perea, "Perspectiva" 22).¹⁰ Perhaps the most important aspect of this second cycle was the impulse to document and study the NDP movement.¹¹ In addition, for the new dramatists to gain recognition and support, they knew that they had to interact more productively with the influential cultural organizations that until then had not supported their work. The Sociedad Nacional de Autores Dramáticos (SONAD) was founded in 1984 to seek better conditions for producing plays in Puerto Rico and to provide a forum for more dialogue among playwrights of different generations. Thanks to this organization, in 1986, the ICP-sponsored Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño included the Primer Festival de Nuevos Dramaturgos and in 1987, the Centro de Bellas Artes celebrated the Primer Festival de Teatro Puertorriqueño

Contemporáneo. Ironically, by the time the new dramatists found their way into the most respected stages of the island, their movement had lost its steam.

The participation in government-funded festivals and the task of inscribing the efforts of the NDP movement in Puerto Rican theater history marked a new phase for Puerto Rican theater.¹² After years of finding material for their plays in the immediate social, political, and economic crises of the island, in the mid-1980s dramatists turn to the past and once again to the family to shed light on the problem of identity. As we will see in plays from the 1980s and 1990s, the representation of the family itself shares many similarities with works from the 1950s. That is, family quarrels, failed romances, and an interest in the past reappear in the contemporary plays. How the playwrights employ the family to examine collective identity however, reveals historical changes in the modes of representing families as a metaphor for national community and, as a result, important changes in long-standing debates about national self-image. In the new plays, for example, the construction of multiple performance spaces and the decreasing predominance of a set distinguished by the family home, a structure that could delimit a particular construction of the nation, highlight a desire to investigate and defend identities not bound by nationalism. The de-emphasis

of nationalist discourses results in less paternalist and more diverse representations of the family and the nation. Likewise, the presence of performing families in plays from the 1980s and 1990s underscores the constructed nature of identity and, ultimately, more flexible models of family and nation.

Wistful with a Wink: Nostalgia in the 1980s

The projects of contemporary writers such as Edgar Rodríguez Juliá, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Ana Lydia Vega, Magali García Ramis, Carmen Lugo Filippi, and graphic and performance artist Antonio Martorell share with former generations a desire to examine the island's search for identity, but they approach this task with a different spirit and with different objectives. A nostalgic look to the past characterizes many Puerto Rican artistic works of the 1980s and 1990s, but it contrasts with the longing to return to the land and the class-based nostalgia of the generation of 1930 (Antonio S. Pedreira) and the generation of 1950 (René Marqués). Nationalist discourse colors many of the accounts of political colonialism and cultural holocaust (Americanization) by authors from these earlier periods of cultural nationalism. Magali García Ramis notes that the persistence of history in Puerto Rican literature constitutes, in part, an anti-colonial gesture, and argues, as have other critics,

that the impulse to reconstruct the past aims to form an identity and history obscured by the island's colonial situation (63).

In their treatments of history, contemporary authors deflate totalizing anti-colonialist narratives by using humor and multiple points of view. These techniques manifest a postmodern environment in which master narratives have become suspect; they also underscore how the authors take issue with hierarchal constructions of identity. For example, in her essay "La manteca que nos une," García Ramis pokes fun at solemn and prescriptive visions of national identity by proposing that Puerto Ricans are bound together by a diet laden with fat: "un tun tún de grasa y fritanguería recorre las venas borincanas, nos une, nos aúna, nos hermana por encima de la política y los políticos, los cultos y las religiones, la salsa y el rock, el matriarcado y el patriarcado" (83). Her humorous catalog of greasy Puerto Rican foods and suggestion that the country's slogan be "Por mi grasa hablará mi espíritu" contrasts with the taxonomic and paternalist tones of national identity essays (89).¹³ Other works, such as Ferré's Maldito amor (1986) and Rodríguez Juliá's El entierro de Cortijo (1983), focus on recuperating the histories of marginalized groups neglected in bourgeois versions of Puerto Rican history. Many of these narratives blend fact and fiction, and, rather than detailing major historical events, they record the island's intrahistoria, the practices of

everyday life that make up the idiosyncrasies of Puerto Rican culture.

This approach to recording collective identity implicitly evokes the family because it is the ideal site for remembering the customs of daily life.

Consequently, family figures prominently as a site for exploring national history in works from the 1980s. This trend is in line with Antonio Martorell's idea that the intimate and subjective point of view of the crónica, as opposed to traditional narrative or journalism, best illustrates the history and personality of a people (García Ramis, "Quiero" 60).

Martorell puts into practice his view on chronicling Puerto Rican culture through his plastic art. His 1972 portfolio of woodcuts, Catálogo de objetos, for example, records commonplace household objects used before the 1950s and indirectly comments on the cultural changes that North American industrialization had forced upon Puerto Rican culture (Rivera 69). Similarly, Martorell's 1978 exhibit Álbum de familia consists of a series of drawings based on photographs taken from family albums. In 1992, Martorell again uses the family to explore Puerto Rican identity in his collection of environmental installations called La casa de todos nosotros displayed at New York City's Museo del Barrio. The exhibit brings together individual houses that Martorell presented in different locations on the island throughout 1992. The multimedia show consists of a series of inventive

houses built of various materials. Fittingly, “Kamikaze,” a house-bed that recalls family origins, opens the exposition. Other structures include a house made entirely of dollar bills, “La casa verde,” which brings to mind Puerto Rico’s economic dependency, and a house in the form of a plane, “La casa en el aire,” a reference to the circulating Puerto Rican population. The exhibit reminds the viewer of the common bonds of puertorriqueñidad while the separate houses allow for individual imagination and nostalgia. Martorell’s mode of representing the family embodies a changing view of family as nation, for as his exhibit suggests, there is no longer one single house that can hold the heterogeneous “gran familia puertorriqueña,” but there is a house for everyone.

Rodríguez’s Juliá’s Puertorriqueños (Álbum de la sagrada familia puertorriqueña a partir de 1898) also represents the crónica style of recording collective experience. Like Martorell’s work, Rodríguez Juliá uses the family to examine the nation’s past with humor, yearning, and a critical eye. Through photographs, postcards, and verbal recollections, Rodríguez Juliá recreates the history of Puerto Rico via images of the family colored by “la burla y la compasión” (11). On the one hand, the ironic tone created by the textual commentary juxtaposed with the photographs makes many middle-class traditions captured in the photographs seem suspect; on the

other hand, the album tries to resurrect positive cultural values besieged by contemporary social problems: “pretendemos rescatar la compasión, pretendemos rescatar el vecindario, la familia y la comunidad a pesar de haberle hipotecado el alma a la Mastercard y los cupones; [. . .]” (172). A potentially nostalgic essay by Ana Lydia Vega, which recounts her visit to the parking lot where her childhood house used to stand, shares this ironic tone:

¡Pero y qué un párking! ¡Qué cafre destino el de mi madre casa! ¡Ay, San René Marqués, patrono de añoranzas hacendadas! [. . .]

¿Y yo? ¿Me entrego? ¿Me dejo cabalgar por las contradicciones y este deseo tristón de trascendencia? ¿O canto la oda del que-se-joda y boto mis precarios ahorros en un chalet Massó? Pero qué va. Más nunca será igual. Un pasadillo pre-tratado. Un come-back pre-fabricado. Episodio cerrado. (295-96)

In contrast to René Marqués, Vega and Rodríguez Juliá do not wish for what they know is an impossible (and undesirable) return to the past, but like Marqués, they do regret the loss of community and the fragmentation of the family that resulted from rapid modernization and urbanization.

By recording Puerto Rico’s unique features, these writers attempt to create a sense of community while recognizing the fundamental diversity of

the national family. It is significant that Rodríguez Juliá's album was originally published as a series of newspapers articles, for it recalls Benedict Anderson's argument that the development of print capitalism such as newspapers and books created print communities, laying the foundations for national consciousness (22-36). Rodríguez Juliá's photographs and short evocations of traditions such as the quinceañera party or of family events like the move to a modern suburb reached a wide readership, reminding Puerto Ricans of the many common bonds they share in a historical moment of deep divisions. An attempt to strengthen community through reading also appears in "Relevo," a column published in the newspaper Claridad throughout 1985. "Relevo" was conceived as a literary relay race in which seven authors traded turns contributing articles on a wide range of themes: art and literature, contemporary socio-political events and problems such as AIDS, crime, and pollution, as well as popular topics such as food, medicinal herbs, and points of interest on the island. Despite the divergent themes and points of views, read as a collection, the pieces reflect the sensibility of a generation of writers (and their readers) who came of age in the 1960s, and who now view their 1950s childhood and youthful rebellions with some nostalgia (Vega 3). Much like the "Relevo" column, Vega's short story "Cuento en camino" (1991) constitutes a sort of collaborative crónica. In the

story, the driver of a carro público asks his passengers to tell stories to keep him from falling asleep at the wheel. The heterogeneous group narrates tales that derive from the oral tradition and create a dialogue as listeners offer their opinions and, at times, a different version of the same story. The jokes, gossip, and legends document Puerto Rican popular culture and serve to make connections among people of different backgrounds.

Performances of plays by Antonio García del Toro, Roberto Ramos-Perea, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and Myrna Casas in the 1980s and 1990s also reveal a desire to recuperate a sense of community. Following the relative absence of the family play during the 1960s and 1970s, the family unit reappears, signaling a desire to bridge rifts among ideologies and generations, past and present. The return of the family, however, does not signify a new brand of paternalist nationalist discourse. The characters in García del Toro's Hotel Melancolía and Ramos-Perea's Callando amores yearn for the past and desire to preserve tradition and cultural identity, but they critique former models of the national family. Role playing in Rafael Sánchez's Quíntuples and Myrna Casas's "El gran circo eukraniano" highlight how the performance of Puerto Rican identity changes in accordance to shifting contexts. Like other artistic works of 1980s and 1990s, the nostalgic and performative representations of the family in the plays

examined in this chapter point out the constructed character of identity and the absence of an originary epoch to which to return. In line with a postmodern outlook that has shaped recent cultural production, these new theatrical inquiries into identity consciously offer only provisional and limited answers to the problem of identity in Puerto Rico.¹⁴

Productive Nostalgia: The Value of Melancholy

Antonio García del Toro's dramaturgy, like that of many Puerto Rican playwrights preceding him, addresses the destiny of the island. García del Toro (b.1950), who also directs and teaches theater, entered this national theater tradition in the 1980s in full dialogue with the works of René Marqués. He won the 1986 Premio Fundación René Marqués for Hotel Melancolía (Nostalgia en dos tiempos), a new version of Marqués's classic play, Los soles truncos.¹⁵ Through a glimpse of the lives of four elderly siblings who reside in an old colonial home, Hotel Melancolía suggests that nostalgia for the past can be productive, unlike the nihilistic outcome it produces in Los soles truncos. Whereas the Burkhart family in Los soles truncos refuses to participate in a national romance, the siblings in Hotel Melancolía break out of the confines of family to celebrate their role in the national community and work to involve others in appreciating history and

tradition. The introduction of an unsolved mystery, however, infuses the play with an indeterminacy that problematizes truth claims. The play values nostalgia for its capacity to maintain a sense of identity, but never limits this identity by defining it.

The world represented on stage in Hotel Melancolía consists of a realistically constructed nineteenth-century home converted into a hotel. The residents and owners, the Landrón y Rojas family siblings,--Cofó (eighty-six), Filo (eighty-three), Lita (eighty-one), and Copo (seventy-nine)--rarely accept guests anymore, but during the timespan of the performance, the audience itself becomes a guest in this "mundo donde gobiernan los recuerdos y la nostalgia" (13). Three other characters also visit the house: a detective (Leonardo Mendoza), a journalist (Daniel), and a photographer. These characters provide dramatic tension and clarify the play's temporal framework. In the opening scene, which takes place in the present of the 1980s, Daniel pays a visit to the house and to Gertrudis, the housekeeper. They refer to a recent past when the siblings still lived there and witnessed a murder. This crime creates the play's little action: visits by detective Mendoza and Daniel to investigate the murder. The two acts begin in the present of the 1980s, and end in the recent past, also sometime in the 1980s, with some confluence of time throughout. The scenes in which Daniel and

Gertrudis appear always mark the present, but the majority of the play's action takes place as a flashback to the time when the household became involved in the murder investigation.

Hotel Melancolía does not mirror Los soles truncos in terms of plot, but it does engage in a dialogue with the earlier play in its use of theatrical space, its characterization, and its themes. The old mansion and large second-floor window with venetian blinds described in the stage directions immediately recall the Burkharts' San Juan residence in Marqués's play. The well-kept condition of the house and its contents, however, differentiates the two homes. Although the Landrón y Rojas family, like the Burkharts, lives immersed in nostalgia, they also participate in the contemporary world. They face the reality of financial survival, and their decision to use their home as a hotel contrasts with the Burkhart's rejection of this possibility, which would open them to the "gran familia puertorriqueña" of the nation. By allowing the public access to their historical home, the Landrón y Rojas family embodies a more flexible and inclusive vision of Puerto Rico than the Burkharts. Furthermore, the Landrón y Rojas siblings move easily between the world of the present and their carefully cultivated world of the past. The set construction, verbal references to multiple unseen spaces within the house and outside of it, as well as character entrances and exits from the street,

mark the permeability of borders between different worlds and ideologies. Thus, the first line of the play is an invitation to enter: “¡Adelante! Pase por aquí. Perdone que todo esté tan oscuro. En estos antiguos caserones, si se mantienen cerradas las ventanas, entra muy poca claridad” (15). Unlike Emilia in Los soles truncos, the siblings neither avoid natural light nor veil themselves from the outside world. Despite their interest in the past, the Landrón y Rojas family does not lead a cloistered existence in the shadows of modernity.

The Landrón y Rojas siblings do share some similar life events and personality traits with the Burkhart sisters, but how they have come to live in the Hotel Melancolía indicates their fundamentally different philosophies of life. Like the Burkharts, the four remaining Landrón y Rojas siblings have suffered a failed romance on some level. Lita’s failed love affair with a capitán and her subsequent refuge in books recalls Emilia’s unrequited love for the alférez and her predilection for poetry, and Filo’s divorce from her husband after discovering he had lover and a child, parallels Hortensia’s experience with her fiancée. Copo, for her part, is a widow, and Cofo has never married. Aside from the failed romances, in each family, the most beautiful sibling has died of cancer. Copo’s reference to the death of a younger sibling strongly echoes the sister’s reaction to Hortensia’s death in

Los soles truncos: “¡Maldita enfermedad! Destruye lo hermoso y

convierte en víctimas a todos por igual” (49). The Landrón y Rojas siblings, however, handle the death of their parents differently. In Marqués’s play, the death of Mamá and Papá Burkhart signifies the destruction of a world in which Emilia, Inés, and Hortensia felt safe. When they retreat from society, the sisters do so joined by fear, guilt, and resentment. In contrast, after the death of their mother, the Landrón y Rojas siblings, already in their fifties, have chosen to live together to ward off loneliness. Copo explains:

La unión, hermosa experiencia que ha sido símbolo de nuestras vidas. Aquí, en el Hotel Melancolía, nunca hemos dejado que el silencio traicione la bella melodía de la vida. Nunca hemos soñado con olvidar el dolor, únicamente hemos sabido siempre calmarlo con nuestro amor. Aquí, en esta casa, que fue de nuestros padres, hasta la melancolía ha participado en nuestra alegría de vivir. (96)

Rather than spending the past thirty-two years alone and saddened over the death of family members or the lack of a partner, these siblings have shared their melancholy for the past in a home characterized by love, humor, patience, and hope.

Although the Landrón y Rojas siblings have converted their home into

a hotel for pragmatic reasons--to maintain its expensive upkeep--the hotel also helps them to maintain contact with the community. While the siblings indulge in nostalgia for times past, they are also invested in the destiny of contemporary Puerto Rico. Unlike the Burkharts, they participate in the national economy, and as we will see, they consider their house part of the national patrimony. Cofo, for example, makes his first entrance holding a pile of newspapers and magazines and listening to the news on a portable radio. He complains of crime, government corruption, and other typical Puerto Rican problems of the 1980s (17, 42, 56). Filo's exclamation indicates the depth of Cofo's obsession with the news: "¡No puedo tolerar tu continua crítica social! Cuando no hablas de la política. . . que si este partido es malo, que si este otro político es un pillo. . . invades la casa con tus noticias sobre desastres sociales y naturales" (41). Furthermore, to the dismay of Copo, Cofo insists on filing all the printed materials he buys. She plots with the housekeeper over how to dispose of the papers: "Le diré que los hemos regalado a la biblioteca estatal y que pondrán una placa en la entrada con su nombre. Eso le agrada" (25). This solution underscores the Landrón y Rojas family's respect for history and their sensitivity to opportunities to record events and information. As Emilio González suggests, the play's main theme is the need to recognize the confluence of tradition and modernity (8).

The sibling's unusual lifestyle constitutes an extreme example of cultivating a nexus between the past and the present. Copo explains:

No somos cuatro seres enajenados. No vivimos ocupándonos a diario del mundo que nos rodea. Aquí, en el Hotel Melancolía, establecemos las normas nosotros. Afuera el mundo gira y cada cual vive; y con su individualidad hace de la colectividad un mundo que tenemos que sostener para no hundirnos nosotros mismos. (66)

In addition to keeping up to date on current affairs, in the past, the siblings have shown their interest in contemporary society through their contact with hotel guests. In the play, a murder serves as a device to connect the siblings with people beyond their home, because at their advanced age, they no longer take in many guests. Late one evening, all four of them partially witness the murder of an actor on the street outside their home. Consequently, Copo invites detective Mendoza over to report her story about what happened. Daniel, a journalist, also comes to the house to investigate, but under the pretense of writing an article about the Landrón y Rojas family. These characters serve as an audience for the siblings' reminiscences about the past. The detective is an ideal listener because he is not from the capital: "no conozco bien las costumbres capitalinas y menos a su gente" (26), and

because he needs the information concerning the murder and must be patient with the family to receive it. Copo humorously manipulates their interview, drawing it out as long as possible in order to educate her listener about the illustrious Landrón y Rojas heritage. She points out a portrait of her uncle who was an important politician: “Detrás del paño que lo cubre. . . hay más historia que en toda la capital junta” (28). She informs the detective about her family’s involvement with important historical events (26, 35), and about how the house was once a center for important writers and politicians. The siblings also describe unusual family traditions such as moving each time that a family member dies and leaving everything behind except for Nena’s piano (48-49). For Cofo, the piano embodies an important part of cultural identity: “La música es el alma de un pueblo. Es ese aliento que evita la caída final. Sin la música todo estaría perdido” (47).¹⁶ The detective, in contrast, states that he has never had time for music (47).

Passing on national history and family heritage has a didactic purpose. Copo tells Mendoza: “Sabe, a veces la juventud no conoce verdaderamente el porqué de tantas cosas. La historia pasada es tan importante como la que vivimos a diario” (36). By emphasizing the relationship between the past and the present, Copo attempts to bridge the gap between generations. The magical atmosphere of the house and Copo’s lessons are most effective with

the journalist, Daniel. As with the Burkharts, the London y Rojas's family romance has failed in the sense that they have produced no future generations. Daniel, however, becomes the grandchild the siblings never had. He admits that his initial interest was in the murder, not in the family, but he becomes so drawn to them that he drops his investigation:

Desde que entré aquí por primera vez entendí que este viejo edificio verdaderamente tenía la capacidad de conducirte por los caminos del recuerdo. Nunca imaginé, sin embargo, que después de aquella primera visita mi vida cambiaría. (55)

For Daniel, the Landrón y Rojas family has served as a living crónica that passes on history to a younger generation. His newfound appreciation for the past has helped him forge a stronger sense of identity and belonging to the national community. Lita's insistence that Daniel will one day marry underscores the continuity of history, the future of the national family romance (58).

Although Cofo, Lita, Filo, and Copo attribute their contentment to having "sabido encontrar nuestra verdadera identidad," the play never makes explicit the exact nature of this identity (66). Contrary to many plays from the 1950s, the characters in Hotel Melancolía do not embody particular positions on the debate over national identity. Rather, the play suggests the

importance of history in recognizing a collective Puerto Rican experience without privileging a specific vision of the island's past. Furthermore, the vagueness with which García del Toro treats historical figures and events distinguishes Hotel Melancolía from a traditional historical or documentary play. The audience and the visitors never see the portrait of the famous uncle, because it is wrapped up in preparation for its sale to the national museum. We know that in the past, the siblings' mother fended off an angry mob that intended to destroy the painting, but no one explains the context. The play neither spells out the politics of past events nor reveals the family's ideological stance. The clues provided by Hotel Melancolía lead the audience to piece together a picture of the past that only provokes more questions: how and when did the Landrón y Rojas become a prominent family? Who was the uncle and what did he do for Puerto Rico? This ambiguity encourages the process of historical inquiry and allows the play to celebrate history and family without using them to posit a political position or an essential Puerto Rican identity.

By raising the problem of historical truth, Hotel Melancolía further exemplifies a new approach to family and nation in Puerto Rican drama that reevaluates totalizing accounts of identity. The play is full of history-making discourses that highlight history as a human-made narrative.¹⁷ Cofó's

archives of newspaper and magazine articles compile information that will one day form the basis of historical narratives. Similarly, the journalist's job is to seek facts that will form "true" stories with the aid of a photographer who visually records these stories. The detective, in turn, collects evidence in hopes of building a narrative that uncovers the truth of a crime. The journalist, the photographer, and the detective all aim to make sense of a particular event, to shape a representation of the truth by ordering the information they receive via interviews. To expose this process implies that no one version of history exists and that the Landrón y Rojas story does not embody the only Puerto Rican national family romance.

The murder of television actor Manolo Santini outside of the Landrón y Rojas home adds another layer of indeterminacy to this effort to record the truth. The crime also creates dramatic tension in a play driven by memories of the past rather than action. The majority of this tension derives from the possibility that the detective has taken part in the murder. Although the audience does not know this until near the end of the play, Copo has specifically requested that Mendoza come to investigate because she suspects that he might be linked to the murder. García del Toro characterizes Mendoza with such ambiguity that his response, "¿Todo?" to each sibling's affirmation that he or she witnessed the murder can be viewed with

suspicion, or taken at face value. The detective's possible involvement in the crime underscores the bias implied in documenting events. If the detective is involved, then his report will surely hide this truth.¹⁸ Similarly, the conflicting narrative accounts given by the siblings highlight perspectivism and the impossibility of piecing together a version of the event that coincides on each point.

Finally, whether intentionally or not, the play's end raises questions about the supposedly solved mystery. The final scene draws together (a bit too neatly) the murder and another minor subplot, the sale of the uncle's portrait. The museum administrator's son arrives with the message that his father will not be able to buy the painting after all because he is setting up an exhibit out of town. This relieves Copo because she has secretly suspected that she saw the administrator at the crime scene (at this point she has eliminated the detective as a suspect). She believes the museum administrator's absence gives him an alibi. The audience, however, learns that this conclusion is incorrect, because a scene in the present between Daniel and the family housekeeper (the majority of the play is a flashback) clarifies the outcome of the investigation: the museum administrator had indeed committed the crime. Thus, at the end of the play, Copo's celebratory toast to faith in the truth has an ironic ring: "Y nosotros continuaremos

compartiendo la dicha del recuerdo y el triunfo de la verdad” (96).

Hotel Melancolía portrays a complex relationship between history and identity. By positing nostalgia for the past as a productive method for affirming collective experience, García del Toro reworks René Marqués’s Los soles truncos. How the families in these plays handle vertiginous socio-political, economic, and cultural changes depends on their ability to adapt and still retain their heritage. In this sense, from the perspective of the 1980s, García del Toro is much more optimistic than Marqués, who in the 1950s equated modernity with the destruction of traditional Puerto Rican culture. Hotel Melancolía advocates a living history, because the task of remembering, recording, and sharing the past affects the present and the future of the Puerto Rican community. The play’s approach to history, however, suggests that there is no one unifying historical narrative on which to base a homogenous national identity. Unlike the Burkharts in Los soles truncos, a representative play of the 1950s, the 1980s family in García del Toro’s work embodies a more flexible and more hopeful vision of Puerto Rican identity. The Landrón y Rojas family and home, visited by characters in the play, and by the audience as well, embodies but one family’s history in the multiplicity of histories that form puertorriqueñidad.

“Nostalgia rencorosa”: The Performance of Errors Past

If García del Toro’s Hotel Melancolía demonstrates how nostalgia for the past can promote community building and maintain a sense of identity necessary for the cultural survival of Puerto Rico, in Roberto Ramos-Perea’s Callando amores (1995), memories endow a mother and her son with a “nostalgia rencorosa” that leads them to repeat conflicts of the past. This play is but one of many works by Roberto Ramos-Perea that uses historical and social themes to question what he calls “la supervivencia moral de nuestra nación” (“Escritura” 382). As Puerto Rico’s most visible and prolific contemporary playwright, Ramos-Perea (b. 1959) has been involved in Puerto Rican theater as a critic, researcher, director, actor, and dramatist for over twenty years.¹⁹ In Callando amores, Ramos-Perea uses as a blueprint an oft repeated situation in Puerto Rican literature—a family divided over the sale of their land—to discredit the nationalist and annexationist/colonialist discourses that have structured thinking about identity in Puerto Rico. Through intertexts and a performance that highlights the characters’ self-conscious choice to resuscitate and repeat past disagreements, Ramos-Perea makes both the nationalist and annexationist positions unsatisfying options for the positive resolution of the play’s dramatic conflict. Callando amores implies that as long as Puerto Ricans adhere to identity arguments no longer

viable in the present, they will continue to “callar amores” and polarize families.

The family conflict portrayed in the play has begun fifteen years prior to the opening scene when the father, a senator and member of the political party in power at that time, denounced the illegal sale of fertile land to a United States chemical company. This act alienated him from his colleagues and embarrassed his class-conscious wife (Victoria). She, and one of their sons, Luis, have disowned him whereas Mario, the other son, has stood by what he considers a heroic act. Mario, however, has abandoned the ruptured family, and at the start of the play, he has returned after learning that his father has died. Victoria and Luis have plotted to sell what was most sacred to the father, the family land, to a United States pharmaceutical company, but Mario’s arrival potentially stymies their plan. With the help of Gina, Luis’s wife, Mario obtains documents that would create a scandal if the family were to sell the land.²⁰ Victoria, in turn, produces a file on Mario that reveals he is a fugitive from a Spanish prison. Evidently this does not cause a stalemate, for the final scene shows the mother at the groundbreaking ceremony of a new factory along with Mario in handcuffs.²¹

Ramos-Perea’s story reaches its outcome rapidly with an economy of brief scenes. The stage directions are also sparse, and indicate only a few

items on stage: a table and chairs, a telephone, and a balcony. The dialogue communicates that the play takes place in the family home, but unlike Hotel Melancolía and many plays from the 1950s, Callando amores does not emphasize the space of the house in communicating the work's themes. Instead, character soliloquies constitute the play's most compelling theatrical element. They take place at the beginning or the end of a scene and are marked by a burst of light resembling a camera flash and sometimes by music. Like the family album Victoria pages through during one scene, these short scenes and flashes of light form snapshots of the family's history. During the soliloquies, the characters break the fourth wall of dramatic realism and address the public directly. This joins the theatrical space of the play with the theater space of the audience, forcing the public to face its role in a national family feud that has plagued Puerto Rico for decades.

At the beginning of the play, Mario's voice announces "Esta es la historia de mi país" (5). The story of this family divided over Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States exemplifies the autonomist and annexationist positions that have been at odds since the late nineteenth century. Ramos-Perea has asserted that the Ateneo's 1938 contest for national playwrights established the favored theme in Puerto Rican drama as "nuestra tragedia cotidiana de ser colonia de Estados Unidos" ("La dramaturgia" 161).

Not to address this theme, or worse, to question Puerto Rican nationalism, runs the risk of negative public reception (Dávila-López 154-55). Since the late 1960s, however, new themes have appeared on the Puerto Rican stage, and playwrights have begun to address the colonial issue by scrutinizing the discourses that support nationalist and colonialist constructions of identity. In Callando amores, for example, Ramos-Perea examines these discourses by creating flawed characters with questionable motives. There is no hero or heroine in this play, nor is there a morally appealing outcome. In this regard, the audience must confront the limitations of the status options embodied by Victoria and Mario. The representation of the family in Callando amores provokes the audience to question the validity of the discourses espoused by the characters, whereas in the 1950s, plays tended to present these discourses as natural, downplaying their ideological and constructed character.

Victoria argues that selling the family land to a United States company will provide jobs for their economically depressed town. Even though the land is sterile, Mario opposes his mother and endlessly repeats his father's greatest conviction: "¡La tierra no se vende! ¡Porque si la compran, nos compran también a nosotros!" (53). Mario, an independentista intellectual, believes in "Pasado, orgullo, patria, honor" (36), which characterizes him, in his mother's opinion, as the prototypical idealist martyr (19). However,

Mario is neither an ideal patriot nor a particularly honorable person.

Rather than confronting a family (national) crisis, he escapes to Spain, and within days of his return, ruins his brother's marriage by having an affair with his wife. Mario's sexist and condescending treatment of Gina hardly befits his idealistic poet persona. Most importantly, as the following dialogue indicates, Mario's cynicism devalues his integrity:

MARIO. Tal vez construya un castillo justo en medio del Valle.

Eso. Un castillo con un gran casino, una barra, un prostíbulo, algo apestoso y sucio que nos recuerde de lo podridos que estamos.

MADRE. ¿Sabes cuántas familias podrían salir de la miseria si esa fábrica se construye allí?

MARIO. Ya conozco la perorata. Gina también me la recitó. Pueblo pequeño, miseria grande. ¿Qué culpa tengo yo de todo eso? Eso no tiene remedio. (30)

In essence, Mario's anachronistic ideals seem egotistical and fatalistic. His mother calls them "mentiras que tú necesitas para justificar tu odio, tu cerrazón, y tu venganza" (36).

Likewise, vengeance for what Victoria considers her husband's "traición" inspires her supposed concern for the town's future. On the

surface, Victoria's plan to sell the land appears practical and generous, but other details about her character make her motives suspect. Her marriage to Mario's father was political—it represented a national family romance, a wedding of aristocratic bloodlines with political power. Thus, when Victoria lost her place in the elite social circles because of her husband's political act, she sought revenge by having an affair with one of the men he had denounced. Now that her husband has died, Victoria's sale of the land, according to Mario, constitutes another form of revenge: "Es como una reivindicación. ¡Justo su Valle!, para dar la impresión de que él, desde el otro mundo, pide perdón a todos quienes hizo mal" (33).

Mario also doubts Victoria's interest in the well being of the pueblo and labels her plan: "Ambición disfrazada de liberalismo." (36). Certainly, her reasoning for selling the land reveals her lack of faith in the Puerto Rican working class: "¡Hay que venderla porque hemos sido demasiado vagos, indolentes, y cobardes y no tenemos la mínima voluntad para ponerla a producir!" (33). Moreover, this statement on Puerto Rican docility reveals her colonialist mentality (and implies her annexationist stance) by suggesting that foreigners will manage the land better. A final character nuance includes the rapidity with which Victoria's disposition towards Mario and Gina changes. She presents herself as a doting mother-in-law and loving mother one minute,

and in the next, she verbally abuses Gina. We should also recall that when Mario left, she erased his very existence from the family. In the final analysis, Victoria is equally as unlikable as her son, for her cynical pragmatism matches his cynical idealism. As her name predicts, Victoria wins this particular battle, but the damage it does to her family must disconcert the audience and lead them to question whether any of the options presented by the play are best for the nation.

To morally ambiguous characters and a questionable dénouement, Ramos-Perea adds theatrical intertexts and the theme of performance as repetition to foreground the awareness with which the characters replay a conflict that has no satisfying outcome. On a most general level, the themes of the search for identity and nostalgia for the land from earlier literary generations serve as intertexts for Callando amores. In particular, the play shares similar dilemmas and characters with Myrna Casas's Eugenia Victoria Herrera (1964) and René Marqués's Un niño azul para esa sombra (1958). In Casas's piece, siblings disagree over the future of the family land, but she subverts the typical patriarchal identity story by having the daughter rather than the son defend the family heritage. The 1890s "discurso de la tierra" espoused by Eugenia Victoria and her father find their counterparts in Mario and his father in Callando amores. Likewise, the matriarchal malice and

nostalgia for the absent nationalist father in Ramos-Perea's play recalls the LeFranc family in Un niño azul para esa sombra. Mario stands in for a grown up Michelin in his resentment towards his mother for her sexual and political betrayal of his (idealized) father. Both plays also contain the self-destructive nationalist character in Puerto Rican literature identified by Marqués in "El puertorriqueño dócil." The question is, why does Ramos-Perea, in the 1990s, re-stage these stories, and how are they different? The composition of the family itself has not changed in striking ways, and neither have the issues that divide it. I would suggest that the play implies that the stories do not differ enough. To dramatize the same conflict in the context of the 1990s reveals the crisis of the discourses that have fueled the debate over national identity for over a century.

Self-reflexivity distinguishes Ramos-Perea's contemporary version, for the characters are evidently aware that they are re-playing a story to an audience who also already knows how it will end. In addition to the play's Puerto Rican intertexts, references to the plots of telenovelas, and literary works such as Hamlet and Jorge Manrique's coplas, foreground the character's lack of creativity in constructing their own life plots. As Mario complains, his situation "Es una historia tan conocida. Como la letra de un bolero. Como el final de una noveleta mediocre. Bah... la literatura está llena

de historias como ésta. Uno las lee, las mofa, y de pronto, se encuentra uno en medio de ellas, tan predecibles, tan acechantes” (13). Mario believes that everything is known, that there is no surprise ending to his story, yet he continues to play the pre-fabricated part of the wayward son who returns home to claim his inheritance. The conflict he confronts because of his mother’s plan allows him to play a doubting, Hamlet-like character as well. Unlike Gina, who suggests that, as in a telenovela, the convoluted plot will turn out well in the end, Mario fears the real-life aftermath of his decisions. Like Hamlet, he begins to ponder the consequences of his actions: “Estamos en el fin del siglo, cobramos por ser idealistas” (44). Mario is a former writer who has rejected literature because “se convierte en un vicio sin sentido, en la constante y aburrida repetición de una pervertida frivolidad” (14). Ironically, Mario’s own life and that of his family’s have become a repeating text. Thus Mario’s criticism of literature echoes Ramos-Perea’s call for Puerto Rican writers to explore new themes in their works. The blurring of the boundaries between art and life also de-naturalizes, in a postmodern fashion, the annexationist and nationalist discourses that organize the status debate in Puerto Rico.²²

Similar to the use of intertexts, performance as repetition serves as a strategy that questions the hegemonic discourses that have long been

considered givens in the investigation of national identity. Repetition becomes a motif in the first scene of the play from the moment Gina notes that Victoria repeats herself. Victoria tells Gina: “Uno repite para reafirmarse” (7). Gina, however, asks: “¿Y qué pasa cuando se repiten los errores?” (7). Similarly, when Victoria reminds Mario that no one remembers his father, he replies: “por eso repetimos los mismos errores” (49). Mario associates errors with a lack of respect for the past. For him, selling land betrays the nation and induces historical forgetfulness. On the other hand, Mario’s memories are not particularly productive. Despite being aware that simply repeating his father’s famous credo—“la tierra no se vende”—means little, he persists: “Es una frase desabrida, vieja, hueca, retórica. . . [. . .] Sí, una verdad tan rancia que de tanto repetirla se vuelve falsa” (19).

Although Callando amores does not advocate Victoria’s materialist position over Mario’s nationalist stance, the play targets nationalism for its critique by focusing on the father and son parallel. Mario’s repetition of his father’s actions and ideology constitutes a performance according to Joseph Roach’s definition of the concept:

Performance [. . .] stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace. Hence flourish the abiding yet vexed affinities between performance

and memory, out of which blossom the most florid
 nostalgias for authenticity and origin. (3)

Besides repeating his father's political discourse, in several scenes, Mario re-plays family episodes from the past. Like a director, he recalls the physical arrangement of the cast of characters, and reviews the dialogue: "Y las palabras de papá. . . 'Tengo que hacerlo, Victoria. Si no lo hago, no podré mirar a mis hijos a la cara jamás.' ¿Lo recuerdas?" (31). Mario even copies his father's actions by denouncing Victoria's sale of the land. In Mario's attempt to be a surrogate for his father, he performs him, but, as Roach's view of performance suggests, Mario cannot ever really replace his father, because he only performs a selective memory of him. For example, he remembers his father's "gran acto de honestidad" and would like to replicate it, but Victoria has to remind him how his father used to criticize his adolescent attempts at poetry (31). Similarly, Mario tends to forget his father's role in the family rupture by blaming his mother. When Victoria asserts that the breakup of the family was his father's fault, Mario avoids acknowledging his father's part in the conflict (31). In his desire to perform his father, Mario's memories surely construct a picture of him more admirable than reality.

Roach argues that performances never repeat themselves exactly, that "they must be invented or recreated at each appearance. In this

improvisatorial behavioral space, memory reveals itself as imagination”

(25). Much like the siblings in José Triana’s La noche de los asesinos, whose parody of their parents failed to invent new roles for themselves, Mario’s performance of his father limits him to repeating conflicts from the past. The only difference between his father’s situation and his own is the contemporary context and cynicism with which Mario pursues “¡el gran sueño de libertad por el que ya nadie quiere dar ni una esperanza!” (50). Memory, for both Victoria and Mario, does not yield to imagination in the sense that they never discover a way to rewrite the scenarios of the past. As the following statement indicates, Victoria has failed to recognize her part in supporting the ideological “walls” that divide Puerto Ricans: “¡Muros, hijo! Los muros del odio que ahora andan cayéndose por todo el mundo, todavía están de pie en tu corazón” (35). Victoria’s stance has afforded her economic success, but both mother and son are trapped in an old national family quarrel.

Callando amores enacts a story of familial disintegration all too recognizable for Puerto Rican audiences. Ramos-Perea’s version distinguishes itself by flaunting its textual repetitiveness and staging the self-conscious performance of worn out discourses and a morally unappealing conflict. The play challenges and frustrates the audience because it locks its

characters into repeating errors of the past, and characterizes the annexationist-nationalist polarity that has framed Puerto Rican identity debates as unproductive. Callando amores puts the burden of imagining new ways to confront the issue of Puerto Rican identity on the audience. Read within the context of Ramos-Perea's involvement in the NDP movement and his other plays that have staged new perspectives on national events, the play implies the need for new texts that reflect diverse modes of perceiving Puerto Rican identity. The most conspicuously silent voice in Callando amores is that of the pueblo that would be most affected by Victoria and Mario's actions. Perhaps in the absence of this perspective, the play signals the need to recognize the working class as a potential site for breaking free from an old family conflict, thus moving national history forward.

Subverting the Patriarchal Family Script

Although Ramos-Perea and Luis Rafael Sánchez (b. 1938) have very different literary projects and occupy distinct roles in the development of Puerto Rican drama, their plays Callando amores and Quíntuples (1984) share an urge to examine paternalist conceptions of the family and the nation. Mario's unproductive repeat performance of his father's independentista role suggests a need for new ways to consider identity that fit Puerto Rico's

current context. In Sánchez's play, the Morrisons, a family acting troupe composed of a father and his quintuplets, stray from Papá Morrison's pre-written libretto to perform improvisational monologues. Their subversion of this script undermines the cultural authority of the paternalist family that Juan Gelpí has shown to be a key metaphor in Puerto Rican nationalist discourse of identity.²³ Both Ramos-Perea and Sánchez reject the paternalism of former literary generations, but unlike most playwrights in Puerto Rico's dramatic tradition, Sánchez approaches the island's preoccupation with identity through humor.

Most critics consider Sánchez Puerto Rico's leading contemporary literary figure. He made his mark in Puerto Rican theater as an author, director, and actor in the late 1950s and 1960s. Since then, although only two new plays by Sánchez have been published and staged--Parábola del Andarín (1979) and Quíntuples--, he has continued to exert a significant presence in Puerto Rican drama.²⁴ Sánchez's works, which intersect with the NDP movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, distinguish themselves from this political and popular theater in their focus on experimentation with language and literary traditions. Ramos-Perea has criticized Sánchez's plays for their lack of overt social commitment: "Un teatro amparado exclusivamente en la 'innovación' del lenguaje por el lenguaje mismo, muy poco servicio rinde al

compromiso con la realidad que exige su correspondencia en el arte” (“Perspectiva” 51). Many other critics, however, have contradicted this view that Sánchez lacks a social perspective by illuminating how he explores Puerto Rico’s colonial condition not only through language and literature, but also through themes of popular culture, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.²⁵

In Quíntuples, Sánchez focuses explicitly on theatrical performance and gender performativity to explore nation as an unstable and heterosexist construct. As many essayists argue in the collection Nationalisms and Sexualities (1991), a problem of gender and sexual identity oftentimes enacts a crisis of the oppositional polarities supporting nationalist and colonialist discourses.²⁶ In Quíntuples, the complicated sexual identities performed by the Morrison family produce what Judith Butler calls “gender trouble,” that is, they decenter and destabilize gender and sex categories based on binaries (Butler x). Through improvisation rather than repetitive performance, the children reveal problematic sexual identities that subvert Papá Morrison’s patriarchal script for performing a heterosexual national family romance. Moreover, intertexts, parody, and metatheater undermine the authority of the paternalist, author-like voice identified as L.R.S. in the play’s prologue and expose the role of representation in positing identities.

The two-act play presents a series of monologues delivered by the Morrison quintuplets, Dafne, Baby, Bianca, Mandrake, and Carlota, who form a traveling acting company led by Papá Morrison. Rather like a circus troupe, the family itself forms the spectacle, and their performances treat “el relato de sus vidas llenas de sorpresas” (35). Tonight, however, Dafne has proposed that they improvise monologues because they have a special audience, conventioners at a Conference on Family Affairs. Thus, the spectators who form the audience of Sánchez’s play are unknowingly cast as conference participants. In six separate scenes, each member of the family delivers an improvisational monologue on the themes of love and imagination that reveals much about their individual identities and their family relationships. The audience discovers its theatricalized role when the actor’s monologues solicit its participation. The exposed stage, which contains a table with a podium and a pitcher of water, as well as the same lighting on the stage as in the auditorium, constitute visual signs hinting at the audience’s role in the play. The actors perform a similar double role by stepping out of their characters (performing quintuplets) and speaking as family members; for example, Papá Morrison complains, “El esfuerzo de la improvisación, la tensión de estar frente a ustedes sosteniendo el personaje. . .” (72).²⁷ The show’s ending adds a third metatheatrical level by exposing all theatrical

artifice when the actor who plays Papá Morrison exclaims: “No puedo construir más peripecias de unos quintuples inventados y del Padre también inventado que los acompaña” (77). He and the actress who plays the three female roles then remove their make-up on stage.

Before Papá Morrison performs, his children’s monologues have already constructed his character. He likes redundancy, however, and introduces himself as: “Papá Morrison, el Gran Divo Papá Morrison, Padre de los Quintuples Morrison, Director Escénico de las Veladas Donde Triunfa el Buen Arte de los Quintuples Morrison. Fantaseador” (68). As this list of titles and his nickname, El Gran Semental, indicate, Papá Morrison is a truly paternal figure, author of both the family and the show.²⁸ According to Baby, Papá Morrison’s libretto addresses “las grandes ilusiones de la vida en familia, sobre la urgente necesidad de amar. . . (*Tierno y cursi.*) sobre los recuerdos de haber crecido juntos como una familia de pollitos. . .” (23). Bianca’s monologue provides more information about the contents of the family show:

Ocurrencias, situaciones inverosímiles que surgen entre las personas que crecen juntas, la declamación de poemas finos de Rubén Darío, Alfonsina Storni y Luis Lloréns Torres--y poetas más recientes--integran al repertorio artístico y humano de la

agrupación. Nada grosero encuentra entre ellos lugar. (35-36)

Positive family values and good taste characterize Papá Morrison's script. The actual improvisational performances, however, reveal a rather different picture of the family. Baby's description of the chaos that ensued when Dafne suggested that they improvise—"¡Todos nos salimos de las casillas! ¡Todos nos descompusimos! ¡No sé improvisar!"—suggests the gap between Papá Morrison's dutifully performing quintuplets and their true family relations (24).

As Priscilla Meléndez has observed, the monologic structure of the play insinuates a lack of communication among family members (10). There are many less subtle indications of the family's problematic relationships as well. Bianca's monologue reveals that Papá Morrison censures the content of his show by excluding politics from his scripts. The children's automatic apologies when they use language that could be construed as "grosero" indicate that Papá's scripts also carefully monitor their choice of words. By talking about how they once endorsed baby products, Bianca emphasizes how Papá Morrison has economically exploited his children: "Papá Morrison dijo el que no trabaja no come. Y nos puso a los quintuples Morrison a sudar la gota gorda" (38). The fact that both Baby and Dafne confess that they plan

to leave the family to join the el Gran Circo Antillano also indicates that the family members are not as united as Papá Morrison's libretto suggests. Without the script dictating their lines, even Papá Morrison fails to uphold the façade of a happy family. He tells the audience that "el matrimonio es una institución penitenciaria. Yo lo descubrí pronto. Pero enviudé pronto gracias a Dios" (72), and then tries to cover up his slip with a coughing fit. In the end, confessions such as these cause Papá Morrison to call Dafne's plan to improvise a "locura" (71), because such variations from the script reveal marriage and family as oppressive social structures.

Improvisation involves risk because it uncovers what the patriarchal script hides. Dafne, repeating her father, says: "la improvisación corre el peligro de la dispersión, decía, . . . [. . .] ¿qué decía? . . . (*Recordando de súbito*) hablaba de los besos y decía que algunos fingimientos nos complacen, nos agradan" (6-7). Thus, improvisation unmaskes the "fingimiento" that casts Papá Morrison as the head of a close-knit, well-adjusted patriarchal family. References to incest, multiple births, and a variety of sexual identity issues imply that the Morrisons embody far from the typical national family romance. Cruz-Malavé has argued that "the specter of homosexuality haunts Puerto Rico's hegemonic discourse of national identity" (141). Following Doris Sommer's theory of foundational fictions, he maintains that Puerto Rico

represents a failed family romance in the sense that it lacks the heterosexual desire to build the nation. In literature, Cruz-Malavé argues, Puerto Rico's "queer" status as a nation-colony plays out as a failed Bildungsroman, because the island never reached "manhood" or independence (142). By these terms, if the family in Sánchez's play is the "gran familia puertorriqueña" with Papá Morrison at its head, then the complicated sexual identities the Morrisons expose in their improvisations on family life foreground problematic issues of collective identity.

Dafne and Mandrake's performances display their exaggerated beauty and sexuality. Dafne's interest in men borders on nymphomania: she has married seven times and now plans to run off with a circus dwarf. Her description of Papá Morrison as "mundanal, liviano, fiestea, mujerea" captures her own personality as well (6), and the recurring emphasis on their sameness is one of the play's more subtle hints at the lack of boundaries implicit in incest.²⁹ Mandrake, Dafne's stunningly handsome brother, is similarly inward looking in his narcissism. In addition, his interest in Dafne may stretch a typical brotherly bond: "Le di un beso en la mejilla a Dafne Morrison cuando salía hacia el bar y la piropé: Ya quisiera la Diana Ross para sus días festivos ser tan linda como tú. (*Carcajea.*) Hay que mostrarle ternura a las hermanas" (46). To top off Mandrake's exaggerated virility, the stage

directions also allude to his possible bisexuality (50).

While Dafne and Mandrake exude passion, Baby and Bianca, in contrast, repress their sexual identities. The empty cage Baby carries for his cat, Gallo Pelón, constitutes one sign of this repression. The stories Baby has constructed around this imaginary friend complements his childlike demeanor, seen as well in his propensity for tantrums. In a sense, Baby is asexual because he has never grown up. His struggle to distinguish himself among his siblings, especially Mandrake, also marks him as a liminal character with no clear identity: “Mi hermanito y yo vestiditos igualitos de marineritos que yo no sabía si yo era yo o si yo era mi hermanito” (23). Bianca’s battle with repressing her urge to smoke serves as a metaphor for her attempt to conceal her lesbianism, but her gender-bending behavior and appearance and her Freudian slips betray her secret. Carlota, the last sibling to perform, is due to give birth to quintuplets at any moment. She embodies an overstated procreative heterosexuality. As John Perivolaris notes, Carlota’s role as a mother figure is yet another hint at the family’s complicated incestuous relationships: “A historical continuity/contiguity is suggested by an incestuous blurring of generations and relationships on the part of Carlota” (355).³⁰

The theatrical context in which the Morrisons perform their

problematic family relations and complex sexual identities underlines the scriptedness of the heterosexual family structure as well as its performativity. Butler defines performativity as the act of repeating the norms that constitute and regulate us as subjects. In regard to gender and sexual identities, she asserts that heterosexual norms are

for the most part compulsory performances, ones which none of us choose, but which each of us is forced to negotiate. I write 'forced to negotiate' because the compulsory character of these norms does not always make them efficacious. Such norms are continually haunted by their own inefficacy: hence, the anxiously repeated effort to install and augment their jurisdiction. ("Critically" 26)

For Butler, there is no originary or essential identity--gender, family, national, or otherwise--that exists outside its performative acts. Rather, the constant need for repeat performances to reaffirm the norms that regulate identity not only reveals its own instability and citationality, but also allows for subversive repetition. That is, subject agency emerges in the possibility of a different kind of repeating that exposes the norms as arbitrary and inefficacious ("Critically" 26). In Quíntuples, Papá Morrison's script on family unity enacts the compulsory performance of the heterosexual national

family. As we have seen, Dafne's Pirandellian request to improvise opens the door for resisting a repeat performance of the patriarchal libretto.

Nevertheless, improvisation does not signify that the siblings are able to invent entirely new roles for themselves, because they can never completely escape performing prescribed family roles and the many other discourses that construct them as subjects.³¹ The improvised monologues do permit the audience to witness, however, the different processes that form identity, and by focusing our attention on the subject-in-process, the play recognizes the plurality, ambiguity, and fluidity of individual or collective identities. Thus Quintuples posits a view of the Puerto Rican national family that highlights its diversity and changeability, which contrasts with the more fixed definitions of national community in plays from the 1950s.

The quintuplet's dissimilar styles of improvisation, self-presentation, and interaction with the audience help construct the identity of each character. Baby and Bianca see themselves as inadequate improvisers, and their awkward gestures and difficult linguistic control communicate this. Baby obsessively asks the audience if it can hear him, and Bianca is painfully aware that she cannot compete with Dafne's theatricality. Carlota resists improvisation by rejecting spontaneity altogether and she scripts and directs the scenario of her quintuplets' birth. Dafne, Mandrake, and Papá Morrison,

in contrast, revel in their outrageous physical appearance, in the facility with which they verbally improvise, and in their ability to manipulate the audience with their gregarious and seductive personalities. Dafne and Papá Morrison make their stage entrance demanding applause, and Mandrake goes as far as to say: “¡El cuento no es el cuento! El cuento es quien lo cuenta” (50). Their delivery of the story may be more compelling than its message, but their personalities cannot dominate entirely because the stories they tell also construct them. That is, they do not invent their identities; rather, they model themselves on film, theater, and music icons. Mandrake’s questions-- “¿Cuál vida me improviso para ustedes? ¿La del quintuple que recita *El duelo de la cañada* o *El brindis del bohemio*?, ¿la del amante emperdenido?, ¿la del jugador emperdernido?” (51)--imply that he can choose whatever identity he would like. These parts, however, are not originals; they are the pre-written roles of a performing quintuplet, or those of a stereotype. Dafne, Papá Morrison, and Mandrake may stray from the patriarchal family script with dramatic flair, but they must struggle for self-definition as much as the rest of the family.

The improvisations further explore identity formation by highlighting how the family members define one another. As the first quintuplet to perform, Dafne previews her sibling’s personalities: “Baby Morrison es

nervioso y Bianca Morrison es hielo y esfinge y Carlota Morrison es una mujer enfermiza. Mandrake el Mago es distinto, todo lo soluciona" (9).

Carlota has a different perspective: she is the only sibling who "está en sus cabales" (61). Bianca positions herself in terms of eccentricity. She sees herself as less eccentric than Dafne, Mandrake, Baby and Papá Morrison, but more so than Carlota (32). Not surprisingly, Baby, the character most vividly defined by the others, is the quintuplet with the weakest personality. Baby becomes baby-like because his siblings make him so by coddling him and telling him he is timid. Baby is trapped (as his cage suggests) in a personality constructed by others: "¡Y Baby Morrison termina por ser tímido aunque Baby Morrison no lo sea! ¡Uno es, también, carajo carajete, lo que los demás quieren!" (26). Consequently, he is forced to express himself through tantrums: "Cuando chillo me impongo" (24), which ironically only add to his immature character. In the final analysis, without the play's master narrative of Papá Morrison's patriarchal script controlling their performances, we witness a much more conflicted and dynamic version of individual, family, and collective identity.

Mirroring the quintuplets' subversion of their father's libretto, Sánchez parodies authority on a metatextual level by examining the paternalism implicit in authorship.³² The prologue by a fictionalized L.R.S. parodies the

hierarchical relationship between playwright, director, actors, and public.

Thus, just as Papá Morrison's script tries to control his family's performances, in the prologue, L.R.S. stipulates how the Quíntuples script is to be performed: "De ninguna manera, bajo ningún pretexto de experimentación, distanciamiento o muestra de originalidad, deberán dichas acotaciones ofrecerse al público" (xiv). L.R.S. states that the long stage directions: "Son, pese a su apariencia, un código de señales para que la atmósfera específica que *el autor* imaginó mientras construía su pieza teatral se realice" (xiv, my emphasis). This insistence on authorial control becomes exaggerated in its repetition and assumes an ironic tone when L.R.S. refers to his own instructions as preachy (xiv). L.R.S. also playfully highlights his power by incorporating the audience in the fiction of the play and then pointing out that it cannot fully participate. He does this by making the descriptive stage directions miniature narratives that form part of the artistic creation that is Quíntuples. Not only does the audience have no access to the humorous descriptions, but Sánchez also flaunts its exclusion when he includes this detail about Bianca: "Sus manos tiemblan aunque el público no lo sabe" (34). This control L.R.S. exercises through his stage directions parodies the paternalism of what Sánchez has called René Marqués's "divinas palabras." Sánchez uses this phrase to describe the effect Marqués's brand of Christian

nationalism had on audiences of the 1950s, and his status as a revered playwright.³³ Sánchez's stage directions also make fun of Marqués's god-like attempt to control the performance text by writing long, detailed stage directions, and his notorious authoritarianism in the staging of his works.³⁴

Sánchez's subtle critique of Marqués's paternalism is emblematic of their contrasting views on the national family romance. In the plays by Marqués examined in chapter 1, nationalism is linked to the characters' yearning for an absent father who signifies an ordered patriarchal world in which race, class, and gender roles are clearly defined. Quíntuples, in contrast, presents a patriarch who cannot control the script of a traditional heterosexual national family. Sánchez, moreover, deconstructs his own paternalist authorial voice when, in the end, the two actors who once appeared to be six "unmask and question the farcical and false nature of both the family and the theatre" (Meléndez 146). The actors assert that the magic of theater is a "mentira" or a fiction, but that it is beautiful and serves to connect "como una maroma entre ustedes, el público y nosotros, los actores" (78). They also state that art is risky. Quíntuples exemplifies this risk because it suggests that like art, all forms of identity are human-made representations that must be constantly (re)performed. The improvisations by the Morrison quintuplets reveal identities to be constructed and changeable rather than

seamless and fixed. In particular, the gender trouble caused by the performance of their conflicted sexual identities destabilizes the binaries that support many constructions of the family and the nation in plays from the 1950s. Through improvisation rather than repetitive performance, the Morrison family elides the patriarchal script of heterosexist nationalism and posits instead, a queer, non-essential family romance at odds with rigid colonialist/nationalist discourses of identity.

The Circus as Translocal Nation

In Quintuples and in Myrna Casas's "El gran circo eukraniano" (1988), the absence of a family home represented on stage underscores the impossibility of uniting a "gran familia puertorriqueña" under one roof.³⁵ In contrast to countless Puerto Rican plays of earlier generations, both plays situate the family on a stage, a public performance space, rather than in a house. By self-consciously using performance as an activity to explore identity, these plays expose the instability of the national family construct as a foundation for collective identity. The works also share the motif of travelling performance troupes and the use of humor and metatheatrical techniques, but Casas's group of six performers lacks the vertiginous circus-like atmosphere of Quintuples. The Gran Circo Eukraniano members

perform monologues and skits about the locales where their circus visits.

Thus, unlike the Morrisons, the goal of this circus is to perform others, not themselves. Their condition as a (reconstituted) family of circus performers does, however, enact Puerto Rico as a translocal nation, and the circus's migratory performances underline the fluidity of identity in general and the translocality of puertorriqueñidad in particular. The play deconstructs the myth of a unified Puerto Rican national family and poses instead an image of a geographically diverse collective identity. Just as in Quíntuples, in which serious questions lurk beneath hilarious performances of conflicted sexual identities, Casas's humorous play addresses the repercussions of Puerto Rico's condition as a fragmented national community.

Recent studies on the Puerto Rican diaspora provide a useful framework for examining "El gran circo Eukraniano." Juan Flores and Alberto Sandoval Sánchez have examined how Puerto Rican writers have, since the 1960s, increasingly imagined a national identity that includes the Puerto Ricans living in the United States.³⁶ I borrow the terms "translocal nation" and "transnation" from Agustín Lao, who theorizes Puerto Rican national identity as "a translocal historical category whose boundaries shift between the archipelago of Puerto Rico and its U.S. diaspora" (171). He argues for a conception of national community that takes into account the

geographic spaces and the different economic, political, and cultural settings that frame puertorriqueñidad. In this vein, Sandoval argues that the literary trope of travel in Puerto Rican literature represents this collective identity “in the context of mobility, crisscrossing, transitivity, dispersion, errantry, discontinuity, and fragmentation” (194). Sandoval traces literary constructions of air migration and asserts that the generation of the 1950s (including René Marqués, Pedro Juan Soto, José Luis González, and others) relied on the myth of the return trip, whereas the generation of the 1960s faced the reality that most emigrants had become settled in the mainland (194). In this generation, authors such as Jaime Carrero began to represent a process of transculturation, the formation of the bicultural subjectivity of the Nuyorican (Sandoval 195). By the 1980s, works such as Luis Rafael Sánchez’s essay “La guagua aérea” and Antonio Martorell’s installation, “House in Mid-air,” based on Sánchez’s notion of an airbus, constitute “a creative manifesto of/for Puerto Rican identity as a migratory process, a transcultural crossroads, a border zone” (Sandoval 201).³⁷ Through the image of the airbus, these artists open a third space, the journey between the island and the mainland, from which to envision Puerto Rican identity. I would argue that Casas depicts and theorizes this in-between space in “El gran circo.” The migratory lifestyle of the circus in Casas’s play, like the images of air

migration, undermines homogenous and fixed definitions of home, family, and nation in favor of fluid and hybrid versions of these institutions.

The first dialogue of “El gran circo” announces the theme of identity by foregrounding the act of naming. Gabriela José, the leader of the circus, welcomes the audience to their show. A young woman in the audience corrects her pronunciation of “Eukraniano” with “Ukraniano.” This begins a discussion about names in which the woman tells Gabriela José that both her original name, Amarylis, and the name she chose for herself, Alina, derive from telenovelas. Alina’s partiality to soap operas and her name switch preview the theme of mobile identities. As for the name of the circus, Gabriela José insists that it begins with EU, and that the circus has nothing to do with the Soviet Union. Both spellings, however, suggest the circus is a metaphor for Puerto Rico’s transnationality because they evoke the tensions between multiple spaces. EUkraniano calls attention to the circus’s relationship to Estados Unidos, or United States, and as Vicky Unruh has observed: “Considering that the play was written prior to the USSR’s demise, the Ukraine allusion suggests geographically-defined national or ethnic identities in tension with the larger national spaces that encompass them” (139).³⁸

Individual and collective identity stories constitute an important

component of “El gran circo.” They form the external play that frames the plays-within-the play, the performances related to the circus show. Each performer--Gabriela José, Sandro, Cósima, Igor, Alejandra, and Nené--has a story about his or her past that explains how each came to join the circus. Gabriela José recounts how she and Sandro left a traditional theater company to form their own group, Cósima says she joined because being a business executive bored her, and Nené tells us that Gabriela José took him in because he was homeless. As we will see, Alejandra’s memory of how she and Igor joined the circus places the group in an unnamed country they all remember fondly for its lovely markets, the hospitality of its people, and its good coffee. In short, each member has a past life abandoned for new roles in the circus: Sandro as a lion-man, Igor as a gorilla, Alejandra and Cósima as trapeze artists and dancers, and Nené as messenger. As circus members, they also form a new family, with Gabriela José and Sandro at its head as substitute parents.

Not only have the characters invented new lives for themselves, their task as circus members also entails performing the identity of the communities they visit. In this regard, they have a unique sort of circus that includes theatrical acts. Upon arrival at each new town, the oídor (formerly Sandro, now Nené) visits offices, clubs, plazas, and restaurants to find out

about local events and to speak with people of all social classes in order to bring back “el más fiel retrato de la vida del pueblo” (4). The performers then imagine the community by dramatizing it on stage. However, when Gabriela José announces that the circus “trae hoy ante ustedes este Kalideoscopio Pueblerino o Prisma Ambarino, de tropical miopía de una IslaMetrópolis o metropolis isla,” Alina, who represents the audience and the community performed, coughs (13). The cough insinuates an uncomfortable reaction to the reference to tropical shortsightedness. That is, the spectators may resist recognizing themselves and the picture of their community represented before them. In this regard, el Gran Circo Eukraniano has much more potential to challenge its audience than a traditional circus spectacle.

The metatheatrical structure of “El gran circo” helps to convey one of its major observations on identity. Performing the communities the circus visits highlights how identities are fashioned, as do the various other kinds of performances that make up the play “El gran circo.” The frame play consists of the business of putting on the show, which includes conversations about the place the characters perform as well as about their personal histories. Within this frame, there is a brief introductory circus parade, several complete skits that seem to be based on the information the actors have acquired about the town, and improvisational monologues in which they

adopt the voices of the locals. Throughout the play, Gabriela José announces at least four times that the show is about to begin, which confuses the multiple theatrical levels and makes it difficult to ascertain when the performances begin or end. The actors further delight in confusing the audience by mixing fiction with reality. For instance, we do not know that Cósima's impersonation of a woman she sat next to on the plane--a Puerto Rican woman flying from the United States to the island--is her "number" in the show until after she finishes. Moreover, Alina believes Cósima has based her monologue on reality until Nené comments that he--not the woman--sat next to Cósima on the plane (9). Gabriela José explains: "Señorita, aquí todo es inventado, invento, invención, imaginación. Esto es un teatro" (9).

Even the outer frame, the moments in between the circus performances, underscores that the actors are *playing* themselves as characters who are actors. Therefore, what appear to be the characters' true life stories cannot be taken at face value. Although Gabriela José and Sandro have left their jobs in a traditional theater to pursue a different kind of performance in the circus, the discourse of bourgeois drama and soap operas contaminates their own life stories. When Gabriela José recalls how she sacrificed her own happiness by allowing her husband to leave with her son to join a more affluent circus, Sandro says "Eso me sueña a novela de televisión o a teatro"

(3).³⁹ Cósima makes a similar comment when Sandro heroically insists that, unlike Gabriela José's son and husband, he would never leave her (3). Furthermore, in another plot twist straight out of a soap, Sandro believes that Gabriela Jose has lost interest in him because she has fallen in love with a younger man, Nené. In the same vein, Igor's story of how he escaped from an impoverished childhood has a pre-written ring to it. We realize Igor has invented this story as a spur of the moment improvisation when Alejandra overhears him and, puzzled, asks what he is doing. Alejandra then tells the public a completely different version that sounds equally apocryphal: Igor is a son who displeased his millionaire father by wanting to be an opera singer rather than a businessman (12).⁴⁰ Just as there are never pure textual beginnings in the sense that we never know when the show is "on," this constant shifting of masks makes it impossible to discern the characters' true identities. Thus Gabriela José's brand of circus, in opposition to traditional illusionistic theater, seems particularly apt for exploring identity as a flexible construct.

Casas also posits the circus as a performance mode that suits Puerto Rico's specific cultural situation. Circuses evoke family, as they are usually composed at least partially of blood relations, and as we have repeatedly seen in Puerto Rican drama, family embodies the nation. This circus family,

however, marks a change from the typical family model from the 1950s, because it is not based on kinship and is led by a woman instead of a paternal figure. In addition, circus families are frequently a peculiar sort of family--literally--in the sense that acts consisting of biological oddities such as unusually strong men, bearded ladies, and humans with animal traits traditionally make up part of the circus attraction. In the same way, Puerto Rico's anomalous condition as the Western Hemisphere's oldest colony constitutes a political oddity. Moreover, the title of the circus--the Gran Circo Eukraniano--implies that this strange situation is of North American making. The island's unusual relationship with its northern neighbor has created geographically diverse communities that form Puerto Rico: the island inhabitants, the diasporic Puerto Rican population in the United States, and Puerto Ricans who migrate back and forth between these spaces. As Unruh observes, the circular movement of a circus parallels that of this third group of Puerto Rico's migrating people (138). Lao writes that migration "configures a framework of Puerto Ricanness where the same actors often adopt similar roles in various places, writing different scripts in each scenario" (179). The travels of the Gran Circo Eukraniano, and their particular kinds of performances embody this model of identity formation.

As a liminal character, Alina emphasizes the presence of different

communities of Puerto Ricans by shifting between the audience and the stage. The circus and its performers implicitly portray a migratory Puerto Rico. On the one hand, as a reconstituted family made up of the families divided by migration, the troupe calls to mind the Puerto Ricans who have formed a community on the United States mainland. On the other hand, their travels also evoke the groups who are settled permanently neither on the island nor in the United States. The scene on the airplane in which Cósima humorously impersonates a grandmother returning to the island for a visit refers more explicitly to the Puerto Rican diasporic experience. The grandmother's surprise at Cósima's reasons for traveling to Puerto Rico explains why she and so many other Puerto Ricans have left the island: "¿Y, a qué tú vas a Puerto Rico? ¿A trabajar? Ay, Virgen, yo no sé nadie que vaya a Puerto Rico a trabajar. ¿Es la primera vez? No me digas. Pues es bien bonito" (7).

We learn about the island itself through Nené's reports and the skits created from this information. His description of the island resembles Puerto Rico of the 1980s: "Un país muy complicado. Crímenes, droga, la política los tiene enloquecidos. . ." (10). Other problems Nené details include dependency on welfare, homelessness, and deficient public transportation. The circus number "Auto de la Providencia, Sacramental metropolitano entre

Carolina y Cangrejos” parodies the overabundance of cars on the island.

In the skit, three separate couples in their cars race home late in the evening in order to beat the rain and to avoid being robbed at stoplights (24-32).⁴¹

Their conversations satirize a variety of issues: materialism, class, relationships and communication between men and women, and dependency on popular culture. In a more serious skit, Alejandra and Nené tell the story of how a working class mother lost her son in a shooting that was probably drug related (15-16, 20-22). These performances portray the San Juan metropolitan area, which according to Nené, has become like its own country apart from the rest of the island (10). This rural/urban split presents yet more evidence of the diversity of the Puerto Rican experience.

Alina belongs to the metropolitan area imagined on stage, but she too expresses interest in joining the circus. The circus members underscore that she is not a part of their world by allowing her on stage and then teasingly revealing that she does not understand the multiple theatrical levels at play. Confused, Alina states: “Pero al principio me aceptaron. Digo, al principio no, pero después. . .” (33). To join the circus means Alina would leave one Puerto Rican community, the island, for another, a life of migration. The sense of nostalgia and loss exhibited by the circus family might explain why they hesitate to let Alina join them. Throughout the play, the performers

insist that they have never been on this island before, yet the place produces nostalgia. Gabriela José, Alejandra, and Cósima reminisce about a rainy town near the sea where they met, and where generous people offered them food and wonderful coffee. Just then, Nené enters with some coffee and explains: “Lo traje una muchacha en un thermo. Dijo que era para los artistas pero. . . ¡Qué curioso! Ahora que lo pienso, dijo que su tía lo había hecho porque a la señora Alejandra le gustaba el café. ¿Cómo sabe esa señora que a ti te gusta tanto el café?” (20). In other words, the circus performers have returned to a Puerto Rico so transformed by modernization and urbanization that they do not recognize it.

This visit dispels the myth of the eternal return to a rural and utopic place of origin that, as we have seen, Sandoval traces in his study of literary representations of migration. The circus demonstrates what Sandoval views as the false promise of the round-trip ticket (192). The circus performers can never take a return trip to the Puerto Rico they left behind because that place no longer exists, and at the same time, they can never really go back because they, too, have become something else. Still, Alina is unaware of the cultural amnesia a migratory lifestyle has produced for the circus members, and is puzzled by their reluctance to let her participate in what she believes to be an exotic job: “Me parece fascinante lo que hacen. Viajar, conocer gente de

distintos países" (34). The circus member's visit to this place they feel a connection with, but do not recognize, produces a sense of sadness and loss beneath the traditional surface gaiety of a circus. Gabriela José misses her son, Sandro worries that he might lose her affection, and Alejandra wishes she could have a baby. Alejandra even wonders out loud why they pursue this line of work. Gabriela José's answer is less than reassuring: "No hacemos otra cosa" (17). Nevertheless, the group's constant performance of identity stories--fictional or not--indicates a preoccupation with origins and a desire for a more rooted life. Wishing for a house and a family, Alejandra says: "No, esto no es normal. Andareguear por el mundo pretendiendo ser otra y otros" (17). Gabriela José issues a more direct warning and tells Alina: "Señorita, esto se hace con sangre. Con sangre" (36).

"El gran circo Eukraniano" serves as a cautionary tale about migratory identity. On the one hand, the circus performances show how multiple roles can be imagined and performed, reminding us that discourse constructs subjectivity and that there are no original identities formed outside of ideology. Alina's desire to leave one community for another also supports this flexible vision of inventing new roles for oneself. Likewise, the image of the travelling circus members who have pieced together a new kind of family captures the reality of Puerto Rico as a translocal nation formed of culturally

and geographically diverse groups. On the other hand, the circus also shows some of the consequences of such an existence. Ironically, by collecting stories and performing them so people can maintain a sense of community, the members of the Gran Circo Eukraniano perform a service of which they themselves are in dire need. Their memory loss and sense of existential dislocation suggest that they need to recognize themselves in one of the communities they perform. The play implies further that if Puerto Rico's fragmented national community of mainland, island (rural and urban), and migratory Puerto Ricans learn to recognize one another, and to cultivate their commonalities as well as accept their differences, Puerto Rican identity will be strengthened. As Lao has argued, recognizing the diverse locales of the Puerto Rican nation could be one way to deconstruct the nationalist and colonialist polarities of identity politics (177).

Conclusion

In Linda Sara (1994), a film written and directed by Jacobo Morales, four siblings in a financially troubled aristocratic family must find a way to pay for their father's funeral and hold on to the family home for Sara, their elderly widowed mother. Much like in Hotel Melancolía, family history fills their colonial home, and when it dawns on one brother that the house is

virtually an “almacen de antigüedades,” the siblings decide to auction off its contents to save the family from ruin. This is a difficult choice to make, and some of the siblings struggle with the humiliation of selling their family’s heritage. At the auction, a stranger appears and offers to buy all of the contents provided the family agrees to leave them in the house. Ironically, this man was rejected long ago as a suitor for Sara because he was poor, and she dutifully married another man from her own class. A black and white film-within-the-film narrates Alejandro and Sara’s doomed love story, providing a glimpse of Puerto Rico’s agricultural past. The auction brings the lovers together again, and the last shot of the movie shows them riding off in a carriage as the film turns from color to black and white. Sara looks back at the camera and waves with a wink.

This final image raises several questions. Is Sara waving good-bye to the contemporary world and riding off to a past epoch? Why does she wink? I would argue that the gesture signifies her awareness of the impossibility of returning to a world that no longer exists. Even if it did, she may not wish to return to this world, for even the film’s brief depiction of this paternalist rural utopia reveals that it was stifling for women and offered limited opportunities to the working class and to people of mixed racial heritage. As in many plays from the 1950s, the film-within-the film presents a hierarchal

national family ruled by European landowners.⁴² Sara's wink constitutes a self-conscious gesture that invites us not to take an overly facile happy ending at face value. Like Rodríguez Juliá's album of family photographs, Linda Sara visually pays homage to Puerto Rican history at the same time that words and actions deconstruct this idealized past.

Linda Sara captures the paradoxical longing for the past that colors many Puerto Rican artistic works from the mid-1980s to the 1990s. Social and economic problems and deep political divisions have led many writers to reminiscence about what seemed to be a more stable era. Nevertheless, as in Linda Sara, this nostalgia emerges with a wink. While rapid cultural transformation brought about by industrialization has produced a sense of loss, these writers look to the past with a humorous and critical perspective. In the theater, the family serves to reevaluate the colonialist and nationalist paradigm that historically has framed the discussion of Puerto Rican self-definition. Hotel Melancolía by Antonio García del Toro and Callando amores by Roberto Ramos-Perea are nostalgic in their desire to preserve tradition and cultural identity. In these plays, the image of the family is similar to the families dramatized in plays from the 1950s, but they employ intertexts to show how old identity stories can and should be rewritten in order to find new ways to imagine a Puerto Rican national family in a

postmodern world of globalization. In Luis Rafael Sánchez's Quintuples and Myrna Casas's "El gran circo eukraniano," migratory families perform the mobility of Puerto Rico's national community. By positing the translocality and the "queerness" of puertorriqueñidad, they offer ways to conceive of identity beyond the discourses of colonialism and nationalism. Although all four plays regard paternalist constructions of the family and the nation with suspicion, they do reveal nostalgia for the sense of community and stability of the past implicit in earlier portrayals of the national family. In the context of postmodernity, however, it is understood that there are no originary good old days to which to return nor any totalizing definitions of Puerto Rico's past, present, or future collective experience. Thus, the families represented on stage in the 1980s and 1990s guide audiences to imagine various communities that form the constantly changing composition of puertorriqueñidad. Likewise, in the following chapter, we will see how the Cuban revolution underscores the mutable nature of identity in its quest to shape a new socialist family and nation. Revolutionary cultural politics, however, make it difficult for Cuban playwrights to stage diverse views of the national family.

Notes

¹ Since 1956, the independentista vote has followed statehood as the third most popular status option. Factors involved in its loss of popularity include internal splits in the pro-independence parties over whether to adopt a socialist orientation, the economic unviability of independence, and what Ramón Grosfoguel calls “the historical divorce between nationalist discourses and the Puerto Rican people” (70).

² Independentistas Carlos Soto Arriví and Arnaldo Darío Rosado went to Cerro Maravilla allegedly to sabotage the communication system there. The fact that they were shot by police after they had surrendered became clear only when a 1983 investigation disclosed that the police had committed perjury during the initial investigation.

³ Morales Carrión’s comment on Puerto Ricans united in mourning at Muñoz Marín’s funeral highlights the event as the performance of the national family: “There was great sadness in Puerto Rico as an estimated million people passed by Muñoz’s bier or lined streets and roads to see the slow funeral procession [. . .] After this collective catharsis [. . .] the people went back to their passionate, bitter, political bickering” (315). I would add that the Caso Maravilla briefly joined the national family in outrage as well.

⁴ Silén’s Hacia una visión positiva del puertorriqueño (1970) and Ángel

G. Quintero Rivera's Lucha obrera en Puerto Rico (1971) manifest this new historical focus.

⁵ Important works by these authors include: Narciso descubre su trasero (1975) by Zenón Cruz, González's El país de cuatro pisos (1980), and La Carreta Made a U-Turn (1979) by Tato Laviera. Another significant work representative of the new approaches to literature and culture in the 1970s was Insularismo e ideología burguesa (Nueva lectura de A. S. Pedreira) (1979) by Juan Flores.

⁶ Their best-known works of this period are Ferré's Papeles de Pandora (1976) and Ramos Otero's Concierto de metal para un recuerdo y otras orgías de soledad (1971).

⁷ "Teatro de la fricción" is also a more inclusive label. Perales includes the theater of playwrights from earlier generations who continue to work in the 1960s and 1970s (Marqués, Arriví), playwrights such as Luis Rafael Sánchez and Myrna Casas who fit somewhere between the former generations and the NDP writers, and all the different variations of NDP playwrights. Similar to Ramos-Perea, Josefina Rivera Álvarez employs a generational model to study the new playwrights. These approaches tend to homogenize a theater that, according to Perales: "está regido por la fragmentación, por la atomización de sus creadores y sus manifestaciones, y

lo que es peor, por los conflictos internos” (75).

⁸ Artists involved in this cycle include Lydia Milagros González, Jaime Carrero, Padro Santaliz, Walter Rodríguez, and Rosa Luisa Márquez.

⁹ Bonnie Hildebrand Reynolds, however, reminds us that Puerto Rico has a history of playwrights whose works are committed to the social reality of the island, and that many have been innovators in the theater (145).

¹⁰ Playwrights from this cycle such as Zora Moreno, Ramón Conde, and Pedro Santaliz stood out for their roots in the popular theater, whereas new dramatists like Ramos-Perea, Teresa Marichal, and Víctor Abniel Morales emerged from the university theater scene.

¹¹ In 1985, Ramos-Perea founded the theater magazine Intermedio de Puerto Rico (1985), and in 1988, he inaugurated the Archivo Nacional de Teatro Puertorriqueño. His collection of essays Perspectiva de la nueva dramaturgia puertorriqueña (Ensayos sobre el nuevo teatro nacional (1989) also chronicles the NDP movement.

¹² Puerto Rico’s latest generation of playwrights works with CELCIT (Centro Latinoamericano de Creación e Investigación Teatral) and participates in Talleres de Formación Dramatúrgica at the Ateneo.

¹³ These phrases parodically recycle titles and phrases from an era characterized by cultural nationalism. The phrase “un tun tún de grasa y

fritanguería" refers to the book of poems Tuntún de paso y grifería (1937) by the Puerto Rican poet Luis Palés Matos (1898-59). "Por mi grasa hablará mi espíritu" refers to motto "Por mi raza hablará mi espíritu" popularized by Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos (1882-59).

¹⁴ Perhaps the greatest difference lies in the fact that the typical playwright from the NDP movement: "alegaba tener respuestas a los problemas sociales y políticos de la Isla" (Meléndez 161). By contrast, Priscilla Meléndez argues, "El teatro de los 80 sigue siendo capaz de reconocer la monumentabilidad de dichos problemas, pero ya no alegaba tener y ofrecer respuestas para la solución de éstos" (161). She draws this conclusion from a telephone conversation with theatre practitioner Rosa Luisa Márquez.

¹⁵ García del Toro wrote at least seven other plays during the 1980s. Many of his works have been published, which makes the lack of critical attention they have received puzzling. An observation by Perales on the literary character of his works may explain why his plays have not stimulated much dramatic criticism (281). Hotel Melancolía, however, was staged in 1989 at the Centro de Bellas Artes.

¹⁶ Although the piano itself implies that the Landrón y Rojas family is from the upper class, interestingly, no one identifies a kind of music that best

represents puertorriqueñidad. In contrast, in Los soles truncos, Marqués uses music by European composers in several important scenes. In addition, character references to composers and dances suggest that the Burkharts prefer classical music.

¹⁷ García del Toro's indeterminate use of history resembles the postmodern characteristics of what Hutcheon has called historiographic metafiction. Works such as these, Hutcheon states, "enact the problematic nature of the relation of writing history to narrativization and thus, to fictionalization, thereby raising the same questions about the cognitive status of historical knowledge" (93).

¹⁸ If the detective has actually committed the murder, then this is an obvious criticism of police corruption as well; given the events of the "Caso Maravilla" just a few years prior to the play, this is not surprising.

¹⁹ Since 1976, he has written more than forty plays, many of which have been published and staged. In 1992 Ramos-Perea won the prestigious Tirso de Molina prize for Miénteme más, a play based on how scientists from the United States used Puerto Rican women in their experiments on the birth control pill in the 1950s. Other well-known plays based on Puerto Rican events include Revolución en el Infierno (1982), Módulo 104 (1983), and Cueva de ladrones (1984). Callando amores premiered at the Centro de Bellas

Artes in March of 1995. A version for television was filmed in 1996.

²⁰ Luis never appears on stage because he is in the United States making the land deal. His voice is only heard indirectly through the responses of Victoria and Gina speaking to him by telephone. His wife Gina is a more important character, but this study focuses on Mario and Victoria as the main proponents of the family conflict. A longer study might usefully examine Victoria and Gina's roles from a feminist perspective.

²¹ This ending means that either that the documents regarding the environmental impact of the sale of the land were never made public, or possibly that they were but did not create enough of a scandal for the mother to renounce her plans.

²² Linda Hutcheon writes: "it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us" ("The politics" 2).

²³ For more on Gelpí's examination of paternalism in Puerto Rican literature, see chapter 1.

²⁴ Undoubtedly, Sánchez's enduring influence has been aided by his

enormous success as a short story writer, essayist, and author of the important post-Boom novel, La Guaracha del Macho Camacho (1976).

²⁵ See, for example, the book-length studies on Sánchez by Efraín Barradas, Alvin Joaquín Figueroa, and Eliseo Zayas de Colón.

²⁶ The collection was edited by Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger. See the introduction and essays by Marjorie Garber, R. Radhakrishnan, and Rhonda Cobham.

²⁷ For a study on the metatheatrical levels and multiplicity of discourses at play in Quíntuples, see studies by Hortensia R. Morell, and Johanna Emmanuelli Huertas.

²⁸ His paternalism is further exaggerated by the absence of the children's mother. As sole parent, it is almost as if Papá Morrison gave birth to the quintuplets. Baby says: "Mamá no existió. . . quiero decir. . . Mamá murió dándonos vida" (23-24).

²⁹ For more on incest, see Meléndez's article on farce and incest in Quíntuples.

³⁰ As evidence for an incestuous relationship between Carlota and Papá Morrison, Perivolaris points out that Carlota treats her husband as if he were a child and Papá Morrison as if he were her husband. I would add that Carlota's braids also connect her to her father. In his monologue, Papá

Morrison relates the adventure of using his lover's braids to climb up to her window. The erotic penetration of the house and the fact that his lover is a mulata who lives on the Calle de Cristo suggest that the whole episode parodies the repressed sexuality of the spinsters in René Marqués's Los soles truncos.

³¹ It is important to note that these acts are obligatory: "Gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted: it is not a radical fabrication of the gendered self" ("Critically" 22).

³² The multiplicity of intertexts also underscores the play's theme of challenging authoritative texts. Sánchez mixes references to classical literature with Corín Tellado and comic book characters to collapse the boundaries between high culture and popular culture, as well as to show Puerto Rico's dependency on foreign texts in defining its own cultural voice. Furthermore, the narrative quality of the monologues blurs the generic line between drama and narrative. In this sense, Sánchez challenges the authority of traditional generic distinctions. The fictionalized author identified in the prologue as L.R.S. further hybridizes Quíntuples by referring to it as an amalgam of popular theater styles: "un vodevil, un sainete de enredos. Es

también, la parodia de una comedia de suspenso. Y, finalmente, una aventura de la imaginación, una obra dentro de otra obra, [. . .]” (xv).

³³ Sánchez’s thoughts on Marqués are cited in Arcadio Díaz Quiñones’s book, El almuerzo en la hierba (Lloréns Torres, Palés Matos, René Marqués) (155).

³⁴ Nelson Rivera recounts Antonio Martorrel’s experience of designing the set for Marqués’s Mariana o el alba: “Marqués refused to compromise on anything in his script, which had to be staged exactly as he had written it. He also attended each and every rehearsal to make sure things were done his way. His scripts were full of detailed stage directions for every single aspect of a performance” (Rivera 64).

³⁵ “El gran circo eukraniano” was first performed in 1988. This production, along with a mix of new and classic Puerto Rican plays by Jaime Carrero, Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, Roberto Ramos-Perea, and Francisco Arriví, toured eight different towns on the island as a part of La Productora Nacional de Teatro. The play has been published as The Great Uskranian Circus in an anthology of Latin American women dramatists in translation edited by Teresa Cajiao Salas and Margarita Vargas. All citations are from a manuscript of the Spanish version.

³⁶ See, for example, Juan Flores’s collection of essays, Divided Borders:

Essays on Puerto Rican Identity (1993).

³⁷ The most recent images of the airbus, according to Sandoval, register the crisis of AIDs. The plane has become a floating cemetery for those who return to the homeland to die (201).

³⁸ For a comprehensive study on how Casas's theater posits Puerto Rican identity as uncertain and moveable through the innovative use of space, see Unruh's article.

³⁹ We discover a different version of this story at the end of the play when Gabriela believes she may have met her son. This recognition (or misrecognition) scene is a poignant reminder of the losses the circus members have suffered by choosing this lifestyle.

⁴⁰ These are just two of the many moments during which one wonders whether any of what the characters say about their pasts is true. In one instance, Cósima has to be prompted because she seems to forget her own story (19).

⁴¹ Casas plays with theater tradition here by using automobiles for the scene of a modern-day Auto Sacramental.

⁴² The movie has many links with René Marqués's Los soles truncos. In particular, the family's financial situation, the failed romance, and visual images of windows in the style of soles truncos evoke the classic play.

Chapter 4:

A New Family for a New Cuba: Representing the Revolutionary Family

The friction between parents and children and the stifling atmosphere of the family home in Cuban plays from mid-century depict a crumbling Cuban Republic. In these works, the children's attempt to differentiate themselves from their parents manifests cubanía, the conscious will to be Cuban. The young generation's rebellion against parental authority implies their desire for a revolution in which Cuba would attain genuine national sovereignty and rebuild the national family. The 1959 revolution led by Fidel Castro did indeed set the Cuban family and nation on a new course. If in pre-revolutionary plays generational conflict highlights Cuban identity as an unfinished process, then the revolution's quest to build a socialist society and the ideal citizen--the "new man"--further exemplifies the dynamism of the Cuban character. In revolutionary society, to be Cuban is to show conciencia, the socialist values of dedication, selflessness, cooperation, and loyalty. Mass organizations, schools, the media, and the workplace shape this new Cuban identity and redirect loyalties from the family, the Catholic Church, Afro-Cuban religions, and other components of traditional Cuban culture, to the nation--now synonymous with the communist state.

In an effort to change people's consciousness and create a socialist culture, Castro's government has also invested in cultural projects. The theater, for example, has served for many years as a public arena for discussing the problems encountered in constructing a new nation. As a part of this building process, it has been crucial for the revolution to imbue the family, the basic cell of society, with socialist values. This chapter explores how the family play in post-1959 Cuba first assumes the didactic goal of staging the changing role of the family in revolutionary society. The family also operates as a barometer of the revolution's performance, serving as a space from which playwrights examine critically the status of their nation. La emboscada (1980), by Roberto Orihuela, and Ni un sí ni un no (1980) by Abelardo Estorino dramatize the formation of the new Cuban family in the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. These plays show how the state's socialist ideology aspires to change traditional notions of what constitutes the family, to clarify the role of the family in the revolution, and to regulate relationships within the family. The recent collapse of the Soviet bloc (1989-91), however, has forced the state to focus on economic survival and on refashioning a political ideology that distances itself from Marxist-Leninist socialism. Thus plays from this period, such as Manteca (1993) by Alberto Pedro Torriente and Vereda tropical (1994) by Joaquín Miguel Cuartas Rodríguez, portray the

family in a much more precarious state than in the earlier works. These works reveal the toll the revolution has taken on the family unit and a turn towards familial self-sufficiency. If the state is no longer in the paternalist position of being able to provide for “la gran familia cubana” then it must allow individual families more autonomy.¹ At the same time, the cultural climate has permitted dramatists to reveal bolder critical views of the revolution.

The relative use of realism in family plays by Orihuela, Estorino, Pedro, and Cuartas provides diverse ways of communicating with the spectator/reader. Although the regime has never enacted a formal policy stipulating a revolutionary aesthetic such as social realism, most plays from the late 1960s through the late 1980s use realism to represent current Cuban themes from the perspective of legitimizing the revolution. In recent years, though, some playwrights have employed the more experimental techniques rejected in the late sixties to criticize the government subtly and evade censorship. Conversely, plays that depict Cuba’s contemporary problems too directly may meet with more official resistance. In the use of realism, then, we can see how Cuban playwrights negotiate with shifting contextual factors, including what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “field of cultural production,” in order to send their messages, whether supportive or critical of the

revolution.² New configurations of theatrical space also convey historical changes. In contrast to the oppressive space of the family home in pre-revolutionary dramas, the illusionistic structure of the middle-class house no longer dominates the stage in the plays examined in this chapter. Other domains such as day care centers, schools, and party youth organizations compete for the socialization of the young, making the family home less central in revolutionary Cuba. The desire to build a different sort of house or national family and the problem of housing shortages contribute to the new connotations of Cuban family space as well.

New Society, New Man

When Fidel Castro and the 26 of July revolutionary movement triumphantly reached Havana on January 1, 1959, they moved swiftly to effect radical political and economic changes. Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith cite four changes in place within a year of the revolution: nationalization of the economy, an egalitarian socioeconomic policy, links with the Soviet bloc, and an authoritarian government (263). By 1961, Castro had strained relations with the United States and many middle- and upper-class Cubans by signing a Agrarian Reform act that expropriated farmlands over 1,000 acres and prohibited foreign ownership of land, by nationalizing

all United States business and commercial property, and by signing a trade agreement in which the Soviets would supply the island with crude oil and other products for Cuban sugar.³ In this same year, the United States broke diplomatic relations with the island, and Cuban troops defeated the invasion of anti-Castro exiles--supported and trained by the United States--at Playa Girón. With the revolution, Cuba had finally achieved the national sovereignty and self-determination so fundamental to its concept of national identity.

At first, the Castro government did not approach building socialism in Cuba dogmatically. For example, rather than following the precept that cultural change must follow the construction of a solid economic foundation, the revolutionary leaders sought to forge a communist conciencia simultaneously with the material base of their society. As Louis Pérez writes, they “argued that communism required the creation of a new consciousness as a function of economic development. The development of the hombre nuevo and the attainment of economic growth were proclaimed to be one and the same process” (340). It was Ernesto “Che” Guevara, a central figure in the revolutionary vanguard, who introduced the concept of the “new man.”⁴ Guevara’s term is used to refer to both men and women, but I will use “new Cuban” to avoid sexist connotations and because some of the plays analyzed

in this chapter emphasize how the formation of a new national identity involves both new men and women. This notion of a new Cuban citizen played an important role in the ideology that fueled the early years of the revolution.

The theory of the new Cuban emerges from several speeches and essays by Guevara. For example, in "The Duty of a Revolutionary Doctor" (1960), he calls specifically for medical professionals to join the revolutionary movement and generally for Cubans to examine their lives "with critical zeal in order to reach the conclusion that almost everything that we thought and felt before the Revolution should be filed and a new type of human being should be created" (258). In a 1965 essay, Guevara alludes to how the new Cuban must be constructed: "it is necessary to develop a consciousness in which values acquire new categories. Society as a whole must become a gigantic school" ("Man" 159). The state will educate the new men and women, but Cubans must also commit to a process of self-education to rid themselves of defects of the past. As this chapter argues, the theater constitutes one of the ideological state apparatuses that shapes this revolutionary conciencia by focusing on the family.⁵ According to Guervara, young people are a particularly important educational target because, free of the prejudices and errors of the past, they constitute "malleable clay" from

which to form the new citizen ("Man" 166). The new Cuban, affirms Guevara, will reject the past by redefining concepts such as individualism to reflect revolutionary values (260). Thus collective advancement rather than personal gain will motivate the new citizen, providing him or her with "great inner wealth and many more responsibilities" ("Man" 167). In short, Guevara and other revolutionary leaders envisioned a new socialist ethic that would transform Cuban society by liberating the island of capitalist cultural ills such as materialism, selfishness, elitism, corruption, sexism, and racism. This ideological idealism motivated the revolutionary movement's initial goals of dismantling the capitalist system and introducing socialist values and institutions.

The failure to meet the all-important goal of a 10-million-ton sugar harvest in 1970, however, forced the revolution to take a more pragmatic turn. In this decade, Cuba solidified its relationship with the Soviet Union by adopting a similar political and economic system, by signing trade and aid agreements with the superpower, and by sending troops to Africa to support Marxist internationalism. At the same time, to correct the over-centralization that had developed during the crucial first years of the revolution, the regime emphasized popular participation in decision-making and made reforms to give mass organizations more power. These changes institutionalized the

revolution and culminated in the 1976 constitution. The 1974 national meeting of the Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC) and the subsequent involvement of this organization in drafting the Cuban Family Code serves as an example of how the government encouraged mass participation in resolving problems that had evolved in the transition from a bourgeois Republic to a socialist state.

Women's integration into the revolution began in the early sixties with their participation in literacy campaigns, counterrevolutionary militias, and Comités de la Defensa de la Revolución (CDR). The economic mobilization of the late 1960s involved women in the national economy on a massive level for the first time. As many studies have shown, rapidly changing gender roles strained the traditional Cuban family to the breaking point. Alfred Padula and Lois Smith point out how the revolution put pressure on women who were "now called upon to excel at work, to volunteer, to study, to participate in sports and politics, and to raise families—to be super women" (79).⁶ Conjugal tensions mounted as many men resisted adapting their role in the family to help with housework and childrearing. The increased participation of the state in the socialization and education of children through day care, boarding schools, government-sponsored recreational activities also altered family relations by weakening the formerly powerful roles of the patriarch

and matriarch. Parents were expected, in turn, to become further involved in the revolution by studying at night school or working in distant provinces and foreign countries. Some husbands and wives simply grew apart as they acquired (or failed to acquire) a revolutionary conciencia. These strains on the traditional Cuban family have contributed to a soaring number of divorces.⁷ The number of Cuban films that address the problems that have emerged with the changing role of women in the family and in Cuban society--Lucía (1969), De cierta manera (1974), Retrato de Teresa (1979), and Hasta cierto punto (1984)--attest to the centrality of these issues in forging a new revolutionary culture.

In 1974, the Cuban government began a nationwide discussion of women's rights and the relationships between husband and wife and parents and children. Millions of Cubans debated a draft of the new Cuban Family Code at meetings of the FMC, and the Confederación de Trabajadores Cubanos (CTC), at block meetings, and on the streets. The code, adopted on February 14, 1975, implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of creating a new Cuban family and attempts to resolve some of the tensions stemming from the interplay between the development of a socialist economic system and "the Cuban socialist vision of an 'open family' (ideological superstructure), which is expected to be politically mobilized, highly participatory, and fully

integrated into the revolutionary process” (Azicri 189). In contrast to some Marxist views of the family, by labeling the family “the elementary cell of society,” the code recognizes its beneficial role in the socialization of new generations (217).⁸ Similarly, the code implies that, realistically, the state cannot fully socialize the household through laundries, cafeterias, and day care. Therefore, it must regulate family relations so that the domestic sphere reflects socialist principles.

The Family Code, according to Max Azicri, brings pre-revolution law “to a level of legal, ideological, economic, and social egalitarianism as never seen before in Cuban history and jurisprudence” (189).⁹ Article twenty-six of the code illustrates well the revolutionary vision of the family and the relationship between the sexes:

Both partners must care for the family they have created and each must cooperate with each other in the education, upbringing, and guidance of the children according to the principles of socialist morality. They must participate, to the extent of their capacity or possibilities, in the running of the home, and cooperate so that it will develop in the best possible way. (222)

Furthermore, the code stipulates that both partners must share housework

and childcare even when one of them stays at home and the other provides the family's financial support. Cuban couples must agree to the above article, as well as several others, as a part of their marriage contract. Although the revolution has never been able to eradicate pre-revolutionary models of the family, the code has undoubtedly made a great impact on Cuban society. In film and in the theater, for example, the code has become a frequent theme. Cinematic and theatrical representations of Cuban families, however, suggest that the process of creating a Cuban family that embodies the conciencia of the new Cuban is slow, because social attitudes towards gender roles and the family are resistant to change. Therefore, through the institution of the family, the plays in this chapter frequently depict the conflict of coexisting pre-revolutionary and new socialist values.

Similarly, the Cuban government overestimated the degree of revolutionary zeal that the "malleable" young generation formed under socialism would display. In 1980, over 10,000 Cubans stormed the Peruvian embassy in hopes of receiving political asylum, forcing Castro to allow a mass departure of refugees from the port of Mariel. Of the 125,000 Cubans who left, forty-one percent were under the age of twenty-seven, which placed the success of political socialization of young people in doubt (Fernández 198). The mass departure also contradicts official representations of a united

socialist national family. Skidmore and Smith note that the visit of 100,000 exiled Cubans in 1979 might have contributed to the exodus because it made the island population more aware of its limited access to consumer goods (274). To alleviate the people's impatience for a higher standard of living, and in an effort to enhance economic performance, the government responded by permitting some market-type activities. By 1986, however, Castro ended the experiment with market mechanisms because it sparked inequalities and corruption. Abolishing the markets formed part of a government campaign to rectify negative trends such as bureaucratic inefficiency, profiteering, and lackluster political participation. The rectification campaign also attempted to re-ignite revolutionary fervor by calling for ideological purification and the return of moral incentives and volunteerism. Even though the regime showed some flexibility and tolerance for contending perspectives, it is doubtful that invoking Guevarian ideals had much resonance with young people.

To complicate matters, the ideological collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and the subsequent breakup of the Soviet Union placed Cuba in a politically and economically unstable position. Cuba entered what Castro has called the "Special Period in Times of Peace" in which the rapidly deteriorating economy has forced Cubans to endure strict austerity

measures.¹⁰ The state can no longer provide some basic necessities and social services, and it has become harder to justify deprivations in the name of socialist principles. For political survival, yet still within the parameters of an authoritarian regime, Castro has eliminated some of the constitution's totalitarian features.¹¹ As the father figure of the paternalist state, Castro must entrust his children, "la gran familia cubana," with more autonomy. Consequently, the family, as Padula and Smith explain, "is again emerging as the preeminent social institution in Cuba. Family networks will grow in importance as food and other resources become scarce. They are already serving as the fulcrum of nascent resistance to the Castro regime" ("Sex and Revolution" 167). What kind of Cuban national family will emerge from the crisis of the Special Period remains to be seen, but the post-revolutionary generation's critical view of the regime suggests major changes on the horizon.

Revolutionary Cultural Politics

In the quest to change people's consciousness and create a new Cuban national family, the revolution made considerable efforts to develop a socialist culture. Its first task was to eradicate illiteracy, as this would not only create an audience for the new Cuban culture, but would also benefit the

entire revolutionary process. In 1961, society literally became the giant classroom Guevara had envisioned, for an estimated 270,000 volunteers divided in different programs worked in all areas of the country to raise Cuba's adult literacy to ninety-six percent (Pérez 358-59).¹² To facilitate the work of the intellectual vanguard, within the first three years of the revolution, important cultural institutions such as the Instituto del Cine (ICAIC), Casa de las Américas, la Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC), and a national school of fine arts, the Cubanacán, were established. At the same time, the state has sought to democratize culture by making it accessible to all. For many years, Government-funded, neighborhood Casas de Cultura have offered free cultural activities such as classes in photography, art, and dance, and have sponsored art exhibits and theatrical and musical performances. Mass organizations such as unions have also encouraged adult participation in amateur theater and music and dance groups.¹³

The revolution sparked an artistic boom in the 1960s, but as the infrastructure of cultural institutions developed, so did a cultural policy that made it difficult for artists to address critically the changing nature of the nation and the family. In a 1961 speech to intellectuals, Castro stated that culture should be the patrimony of the people, and he called on the

intelligentsia to support the revolution. His famous statement, “Dentro de la Revolución, todo. Fuera de la Revolución, nada” addressed the problem of artistic freedom (18). A shift in cultural policy took place between the early 1960s and the 1970s, and by 1968 the line between what was “within” the revolution and “against” the revolution had become rigid. Officials cracked down on writers such as Antón Arrufat and Heberto Padilla for the “counterrevolutionary” nature of their work, and some went so far as to advocate socialist realism as the appropriate revolutionary aesthetic.¹⁴ At the 1971 First National Congress on Education, Castro lashed out against “pseudo-leftist” intellectuals and homosexuals, and statements from the 1975 First Congress of the Communist Party reinforced a hard line on the political purpose of culture. Revolutionary cultural policy has been volatile, and has changed in accordance to how editorial committees define “against” the revolution. Moreover, the degree of confidence of the revolutionary regime itself determines what is considered counterrevolutionary. The ambiguity of what constitutes an appropriately revolutionary stance is the policy’s greatest strength because it forces artists to censor themselves.

Gerardo Mosquera affirms that, at the end of the 1970s, a new generation of artists formed in the post-revolutionary period broke with the dogmatism of the cultural politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s (60).

Furthermore, the relationship between artists and intellectuals and the bureaucrats of cultural institutions has become less tense in the 1980s and 1990s. The 1988 UNEAC congress proposed cutting bureaucratization in the artistic sphere, creating more dialogue between the official cultural apparatus and Cuban writers, and distancing the UNEAC from the communist party (Johnson 157). The congress reflected a political climate more open to pluralist visions of the revolution. Arturo Arango maintains that Cuba's release from its ideological bond with the Soviet Union has further contributed to a new sense of freedom (125). Cuba's profound domestic crisis--the "Special Period"--to some extent has forced government officials to be more lenient with critical interpretations of Cuban society because of the gap between the media's "official" representation of the situation and reality.

Rather than producing art oriented towards forming the new Cuban's revolutionary conciencia, in the 1980s and 1990s artistic works are more apt to examine the imperfections of the new national family formed by the revolution. Less focused on direct communication and functionality, writers are freer to experiment with language and form, and to write on topics not explicitly revolutionary. Conversely, they have been able to address formerly taboo topics more directly, such as homosexuality in Senel Paz's story "El lobo, el bosque y el hombre nuevo" (1991), which was the basis for the

screenplay of the successful film Fresa y chocolate (1994). Writers who grew up in the 1970s and 1980s and had experienced the disjunction between official history and their daily life experiences were uninspired by the values embodied by the Guevarian hombre nuevo, “a profoundly humanistic ideal which subsequently exposed them to empty slogans and schemas, clichés devoid of any real meaning [. . .]” (Mateo Palmer 161-62). Many of these artists display a postmodern mistrust of the mythical hombre nuevo and the master narrative of scientific communism, an obligatory subject in school they have renamed “Ciencia ficción” (Mosquera 61).¹⁵ While young artists may feel frustrated with the regime and the failings of socialism, they do show a commitment to their nation and a special interest in Cuban culture and history. Moreover, their postmodernism is unique to their national experience, because many of their works still communicate faith in history and the utopia of social justice (Mateo Palmer 166).

Theater in Revolutionary Cuba

An explosion of creativity and experimentation characterizes the first decade of theater in revolutionary Cuba. State sponsorship finally offered playwrights and theater groups the support to produce a national theater movement. In these early years, the Cuban stage saw productions of classic

and avant-garde plays by international dramatists, as well as works by a new promotion of Cuban authors.¹⁶ By 1967, however, the climate of ideological orthodoxy had permeated the theater, and plays that did not represent a recognizable social reality came under suspicion as decadent, elitist, and potentially counterrevolutionary.¹⁷ That year, at the Primer Seminario Nacional de Teatro, theater practitioners meditated on the role of their art form in a budding socialist society. Rine Leal writes:

acogieron el principio de que el arte [. . .] esté al alcance del pueblo, pero no a través de lo populachero o el paternalismo. El nacimiento de un teatro popular (realmente del pueblo) se ligó al surgimiento de públicos masivos, y muy especialmente a la formación integral del hombre nuevo. (152)

In this spirit, Sergio Corrieri initiated the Cuban Teatro Nuevo movement by founding Grupo Teatro Escambray in 1968. This movement offered artists a forum for exploring, from a pro-revolutionary stance, the changing identity of the Cuban national family.

Like the New Theater movement in Puerto Rico of the 1960s and 1970s, and in other Latin American countries, the new Cuban groups abandoned the proscenium stage in search of new spaces and audiences for their collectively created pieces. Specifically, the label “Teatro Nuevo” in Cuba applies to a

popular, anti-bourgeois theater that emerged from an interactive relationship between the theater groups and their public. Corrieri's group worked in a province in the remote Escambray mountains, as did Flora Lauten's Teatro La Yaya. Other groups worked in Santiago de Cuba (Teatrova and Cabildo Teatral de Santiago) or in working class neighborhoods in Havana (Teatro de Participación Popular). Each group was unique, but they shared such characteristics as "la creación de una nueva dramaturgia basada en la investigación, el tratamiento inusitado del espacio escénico y la participación por medio del debate, la música o los elementos callejeros [. . .]" (Leal 171).¹⁸ Teatro Nuevo plays dealt with immediate issues relevant to the island's socialist transformation: land reform, the struggle against counterrevolutionaries, the changing role of women, and the clash between new and old morals and behaviors. By using a particular area as a base, the groups oftentimes had prolonged relationships with their public and became invested in resolving the problems they represented in their plays. This linked their interest in improving their art with the development of a strong revolutionary conciencia. Likewise, by involving peasants, workers, and students as actors, the plays not only engaged the audience in a critical reflection on the difficulties of constructing a new society, but also allowed those affected the most by the changes literally to become "actors" in the revolutionary process of creating a

new Cuban citizen, family, and nation.

The Teatro Nuevo movement participated effectively in officially sanctioned cultural production because the artists evidently understood what Bourdieu calls “a space of possibles,” that is, “all that one must have in the back of one’s mind in order to be in the game” (176). To be in the game during the 1970s, the theater produced accessible art for the masses from a socialist perspective. The purpose of the Teatro Nuevo movement was to gain a larger public, as Leal puts it, to turn Cuba into an “inmensa plaza teatral” (151). The revolution would receive ideological validation through theatrical performances assuming that the public grasped the play’s message. Such a grasp, as Bourdieu argues, depends on the divergence between the level of emission (the complexity of the code required to access the work) and the level of reception (the degree to which the public masters the code required for understanding the work) (224-25). By writing plays with clear conflicts and using uncomplicated forms and colloquial language, Cuban playwrights from the late 1960s to the 1980s kept the level of reception high and the level of emission low. In Bourdiean terms, the plays produced cultural capital (forms of cultural knowledge, in this case, socialist competency) because the audiences had to be trained to decipher them. In this regard, the works served as a form of consciousness-raising as they

instructed the spectator on how to become a good member of the new family of socialism.

Teatro Nuevo represents the most innovative Cuban theater in the ideologically charged climate of the 1970s, for few memorable works were produced outside of the movement.¹⁹ In 1981, the graduation of the first class from the Instituto Superior de Arte (ISA) marked the beginning of a new theater generation. The student's creative reinterpretations of Cuban classics contrasted with the overuse of realism, popular language, schematic formulas, and didactic messages that had invaded the island's stages. Institutional reorganizations further contributed to a livelier theater movement. In 1989, the theater wing of the Consejo Nacional de Artes Escénicas (CNAE) initiated a system that funds, for a limited duration, projects proposed by artists who wish to work together on developing a creative vision. By freeing artists from being permanent members of a group, the CNAE shifts "the emphasis from building theatrical institutions to making available the resources for creating theatre" (Martin 54).²⁰ The autonomy from cultural state apparatuses and the flexibility of working in different collectives has fostered creativity and has produced more diverse theatrical representations of the new Cuban family and nation.

Rather than focusing on immediate social conflicts, in the 1980s, plays

have included complex character sketches, individual conflicts, and the study of connections between Cuba's past and present.²¹ In addition, new theater collectives such as Flora Lauten's Teatro Buendía and Víctor Varela's Teatro del Obstáculo

began a theatrical renovation which transformed theatre into a public forum for an audience that felt 'marginalized': young people. These young people, having lived through the achievements of the revolution, demanded a form of expression that was different from those characteristic of the 'official voice of the revolution.' (Manzor-Coats and Martiatu Terry 39)

The unresolved conflicts, ambiguity, and violence in recent performances by such groups effectively dare to suggest that socialism does not exempt the new Cuban from alienation and frustration (Correa 77). In the 1990s, playwrights have continued to renovate theatrical form and content through a postmodern poetics of fragmentation with respect to history, myth, language, and dramatic structure. Rosa Ileana Boudet also notes a synthesis of diverse theater traditions, as well as the use of metaphor and parody ("New Playwrights" 32). These new approaches attest to the shift in the field of cultural production. On the one hand, audiences are better educated and can decipher more complex codes, and on the other, the space of possibles

has wider parameters, which allows the artists more liberty to express their ideas in singular ways. The survival of Cuban theater in spite of the difficult conditions for performances in the Special Period,—the lack of materials, electrical blackouts and the problem of transportation—testifies to its strength and commitment to staging the problems of national and cultural identity. Today the interaction between performance and revolution is as complex as it ever has been.

For the past four decades, government officials have used education, the arts, and new revolutionary laws to shape attitudes and behaviors in accordance with socialist principles. The family structure, resistant to change, has been a crucial target in this project of forming a new Cuban citizen and nation. In an effort to abolish bourgeois family values, the state drafted the 1975 Family Code to guide the construction of the new socialist family. During this decade, the euphoric idealism and experimentation of the 1960s gave way to pragmatism and orthodoxy. Decentralization in the 1980s and the current socio-economic crisis that has followed the loss of Soviet support, however, have altered the revolution's stance towards the family. The island's precarious economic situation has forced the state to step back and allow individual families to find creative ways to survive the severe shortages. Moreover, the failure of socialism in Eastern Europe and the

Soviet Union has compelled Cuban leaders to reevaluate the ideological basis of the revolution, allowing for a somewhat more flexible vision of the family and the nation.

On numerous levels, theatrical performance in revolutionary Cuba chronicles these different phases in the construction of a new society and a new national identity. The representation of the new Cuban family participates in a national discussion on how “la gran familia cubana” or nation has changed. As we will see, in order to instruct proper revolutionary behavior and perhaps diffuse further conflicts, earlier plays are didactic and perform conflicts with which audiences can identify. The family torn apart by conflicting values in Roberto Orihuela’s La emboscada (1980), for example, implies the need for a new socialist family. Corrieri signals a different type of revolutionary theater in which playwrights shift their focus from those having difficulty integrating into the revolution to “los problemas que tenían aquellos que estaban haciendo la Revolución” (Luzuriaga 52). Ni un sí ni un no (1980) by Abelardo Estorino exemplifies this approach. It addresses one of the challenges faced in forming a new society, the changing gender roles and their effects on the family. The fragile state of the family in plays such as Manteca (1993) by Alberto Pedro Torriente and Vereda tropical (1994) by Joaquín Cuartas Rodríguez, in contrast, raises questions about the revolution

itself, that is, its shortcomings in creating a new Cuba. These playwrights embody a critical stance “within” the revolution; that is, a more nuanced position no longer immediately labeled as counterrevolutionary. In all four plays, the playwrights’ approach to the theme of family and portrayal of the space it inhabits provide important clues about Cuban cultural politics and the revolution’s distinct stages in shaping the new national family.

Ties that Bind: Family Loyalties in Revolutionary Cuba

Teatro Escambray first performed Roberto Orihuela’s play La emboscada in 1978.²² The play shared the 1979 UNEAC prize for drama and has received several notable stagings including a 1981 free version by Flora Lauten’s students at the Instituto Superior del Arte (ISA). Although La emboscada marks the close of the Teatro Nuevo era (1968-78), it pays homage to an important issue from an earlier historical moment during which the revolution and the Teatro Nuevo movement intersected. Corrieri and his group went to the Escambray Mountains in search of a new audience to involve in the revolutionary process. The region had proved to be a difficult area to integrate into the revolution and was the seat of organized counterrevolutionary activity from 1960-65. La emboscada, which takes place in this context, enacts the inevitable clash between two brothers, one a

member of the revolutionary army (Lorenzo), and the other, a counterrevolutionary (Jacinto). On the surface, the conflict and dramatic structure appear simple, and the didactic message of the play is unmistakable: family loyalties should take second place to one's commitment to the revolution. Orihuela's play, however, goes beyond sketching a Manichean fraternal conflict to explore carefully a convulsive, transformational moment for the family in revolutionary Cuba.

The works of Orihuela and Teatro Escambray dramatists reached a wide audience during the most repressive period for the arts since the revolution.²³ Corrieri states that if theater is to fulfill what he considers its double function, to entertain and provoke critical reflection, "tiene que haber una comunicación colectiva" (56). The revolution demanded a popular theater that communicated its ideology to the masses. Successful playwrights (i.e. those who did not encounter trouble staging their work in the politicized climate of the 1970s) understood this code and expressed it in such a way that a broad public was able to read it. For some critics, the accessibility (simple form) and instructive content make the artistic value of these plays limited. A Brechtian approach to realism, however, makes some works more transcendent than others. These plays achieve collective communication without sacrificing innovative techniques.

In his essay "The Popular and the Realistic," Brecht defines popular as "the people that is making history and altering the world and itself"

(108).²⁴ For Brecht, the popular and the realistic go hand in hand:

It is in the interest of the people, the broad working masses, that literature should give them truthful representations of life; and truthful representations of life are in fact only of use to the broad working masses, the people; so that they have to be suggestive and intelligible to them, i.e. popular. (107)

Brecht's realism does not ascribe to the conventions of a particular model of realism, such as the detailed representations of reality in nineteenth-century novels. For him, realism entails laying bare the mechanisms of society that oppress the masses and "writing from the standpoint of the class which has the broadest solutions for the most pressing problems afflicting human society" (109). Brecht argues that realistic/popular representations of society can and should be achieved by diverse approaches because reality constantly changes, thus "to represent it the means of representation must alter too" (110). In revolutionary Cuba, the theater movement has suffered because some believed that avant-garde works necessarily alienate popular audiences. Brecht, in contrast, suggests that as long as the work is realist, that is, truthful, its form can be as inventive as the playwright would like and the people will

understand it. Although revolutionary playwrights have produced few experimental pieces, by seeking out popular audiences and making them the subject, as well as sometimes the performers of plays, the Teatro Nuevo movement has added a new dimension to Cuban theater. In the spirit of Brecht, these plays have both dramatized the changing reality of revolutionary Cuba and have contributed to forming the new society under construction. The most memorable works have been those like Orihuela's La emboscada, which poses a nuanced revolutionary conflict in a thought-provoking manner.

The development of the dramatic action in La emboscada suits the dynamism of the epoch it depicts. The brief episodic scenes have the cinematic quality of capturing simultaneous events in different locations. They break the classic unities of time and place and propel the action forward quickly just as the revolution set in motion rapid changes in society. In the play, a rural family feels the effects of these changes as their family falls apart. Lorenzo, a miliciano, discovers that his brother Jacinto has rebelled against the government, and Zoila (their mother) makes him promise that he will not act against his brother. This places Lorenzo in a difficult position when the Capitán asks him to lead a mission against his brother's band of rebels. Although Lorenzo is the ideal person to lead the attack, as he is the most

familiar with the terrain, he refuses because of his pledge to his mother.

His friend Camilo offers to lead the operation in his place. In the meantime, one of Jacinto's principal collaborators, Pancho (his cousin), has ceased his subversive activities and has denounced Jacinto to the authorities. The play reaches its climax when Jacinto and his bandidos murder Pancho and his wife Prima. Family loyalties break down further when Lorenzo discovers that the rebels also have killed Camilo. These events catapult Lorenzo into action. He reveals a new level of commitment to the revolutionary family by avenging Camilo's death and leading the ambush in which Jacinto is killed: "¡El que quiera vengar a un hermano, que me siga!" (97).

Orihuela complicates the dramatic structure by placing virtually identical scenes at the beginning and end of the play. In scenes 1 and 30, a divided stage shows the rebels marching in circles on one side, and milicianos planning an ambush on the other. Scenes 2 and 31 and 3 and 32, which lead to the confrontation between the two groups, are almost exactly alike. In the first version, however, the audience does not know that the rebel leader, El Muerto, is Jacinto's alias, and it does not know that the body Lorenzo finds after the attack is his brother. Throughout the play, there are clues that lead the audience to realize that it has witnessed the play's end in the opening scenes. By framing the play's conventional rising-falling action with these

scenes, Orihuela hands the audience an active interpretive role. Knowing the outcome allows the spectator to consider analytically the steps that led to it, and invites it to speculate on possible different courses of action. Consequently, viewers may examine critically how they participate in the revolutionary changes going on around them.

Orihuela creates the spaces in which the play's action takes place by rearranging basic objects and pieces of furniture that one would find in a rural home or military camp. Lighting changes and flexible props such as stools, a table, and a bunk bed designate shifts between scenes in the homes of Zoila and Pancho, military camps, and bandido hideouts. The absence of an on-stage house fits the play's theme of forming a new Cuban family. This period of change suggests homelessness, for the bourgeois family has been torn apart by the revolution and must rebuild in the context of a socialist society. La emboscada implies that various levels of family need to become more interconnected as the revolution develops. In the play, two families are related by blood: the immediate family of Zoila and her children, and their extended family that includes Pancho and Prima and other relatives. Strong community ties also form a kind of extended family. In this relatively remote area, family and community allegiances have hampered implementing revolutionary values and policies. Lorenzo's place in the army, however, has

exposed him to new kind of family bound by socialist ideology. Pancho, Prima, Camilo, and even Jacinto ultimately die because Lorenzo's loyalties are caught between a family of blood relations and a family of revolutionary compañeros. In Lorenzo's predicament, the play suggests the need to redirect one's allegiance from the individual family to the larger family of the socialist nation.

How Zoila, Lorenzo, and Jacinto view the family highlights their position with respect to the revolution. Zoila serves as an audience for Lorenzo and Jacinto's opposing stances on the revolutionary government. She rejects both positions because they pit family members against each other: "usted tendrá sus ideas y el tendrá las suyas, pero antes que todo, ustedes son hermanos. La familia está ante to las cosas, ante to los gobiernos, sean buenos o malos. ¡La familia es sagrada!" (20). Nevertheless, the play shows that the family is subject to change, that it is not "sacred" or impervious to the historical process. As a widow with seven children and a sick father to care for, Zoila wants whatever is best for her family: "Lo que tiene que pasar es que ustedes se acuerden que los dos son hermanos y que debían jalar pal mismo lao, pal lao que beneficie a la familia" (28-29). In a country mobilized for mass transformations, Zoila's pro-family stance represents a bourgeois mentality. From a Marxist perspective, trying to

obtain what is good for the family encourages its members to think in individual terms. In doing so, it weakens the bond between the individual and the collectivity and becomes an obstacle in the process of constructing the socialist nation. Thus, Zoila's supposed "neutrality" is almost as detrimental to the revolution as an outright counterrevolutionary standpoint. Through Zoila, La emboscada encourages its audience not to remain passive spectators to the revolution.

The characterization of the brothers makes it clear which position the play would have its audience emulate. The audience learns that both Lorenzo and Jacinto were involved in the movement to topple the Batista dictatorship, but Jacinto distanced himself from the revolution when its Marxist orientation became clear. Personal gain motivated Jacinto's participation in the revolution; therefore he is unsatisfied with his rewards: "Fuimos nosotros los que tumbamos a Batista, los que nos jodimos. Pues bien, es a nosotros a los que nos toca la mayor parte de las cosas que se repartan. Pero no, ¿qué hicieron? Los cachitos de tierra pa' los guajiros y lo otro pa'l estado" (50). The revolution has not fulfilled his modest materialist dreams of owning enough land to pay others to work on it, as well as possessing some oxen, a truck, and a house. Instead of climbing the socio-economic ladder as he had hoped, Jacinto finds himself in the middle of a

revolution that seeks to destroy class distinctions. Jacinto, like many other campesinos, lacks revolutionary conciencia, and his exclamation, “¡El comunismo es del carajo! ¡To es pal gobierno: las tierras, las casas, los hijos, las mujeres, to se lo cogen!” (52) echoes the ideological confusion rampant in the Escambray zone in the early 1960s. In spite of its hyperbolic tone, Jacinto’s statement contains some truth because the revolutionary government does socialize the private sphere of the casa, altering gender roles and the relationship between parents and children. For Jacinto and Zoila, then, communism does threaten the family as a self-sufficient bourgeois construct.

Lorenzo, in contrast, sees the ideological change as beneficial for his family and others. He has learned to read thanks to the revolution, and he shows a growing revolutionary conciencia. In his opinion, “La revolución nos dio la tierra y no a nosotros solos, sino a to’l mundo; a to’l que la trabajaba. La revolución se hizo pa’ que los muertos de hambre como nosotros vivieran como personas, no pa’ que to’l estuvo alzo se hiciera rico” (28). Moreover, Lorenzo points out that Jacinto’s dream of paying others to work on his land would perpetuate the same oppressive economic system against which they both rebelled. Unlike Zoila and Jacinto, who focus on their own family’s well-being, Lorenzo repeats, “Hay que pensar también en

la otra gente" (29). Lorenzo's collectivistic thinking manifests the social consciousness of a developing hombre nuevo.

Exposing the process of forming a new Cuban--with all its uncertainties and errors--moves La emboscada beyond an overly schematic conflict between the brothers, or on a more general level, between old and new Cuba. Whereas Jacinto and Zoila are representative of plays that portray characters having difficulty integrating into the revolution, Lorenzo exemplifies works that investigate the conflicts that arise for those involved in building a new nation. The references in La emboscada to the errors of the Instituto de Reforma Agraria (INRA) in implementing agrarian reform show, as Guevara admits, that "Socialism is young and makes mistakes" ("Socialism and Man" 165). Similarly, Lorenzo, when pressed by Jacinto to define communism, admits that he does not entirely understand the ideology of the revolution: "¡Yo qué coño sé! ¡A mí las cosas de la política no me entran en la cabeza! Pero tengo los ojos bien abiertos y miro" (52). Like the revolution, Lorenzo learns as he gains experience. Jacinto's rebellion and Lorenzo's subsequent pledge to Zoila place him in a situation in which he must define what he understands as revolutionary behavior. Lorenzo concludes that he cannot help with the operation against his brother:

Mire, capitán, yo quisiera ayudar, pero si yo engañara a la vieja,

si yo ahora les ayudo a ustedes, ¿con qué cara iba a mirar después a mi madre? Yo creo que pa' ser revolucionario lo primero es respetarse uno mismo, si yo ahora les ayudara estaría incumpliendo algo que prometí por la memoria de mi padre, dejaría de tenerme respeto, dejaría de ser revolucionario.

(75)

Orihuela sets up a moral dilemma because self-respect undoubtedly constitutes an admirable revolutionary quality. On the other hand, Lorenzo's loyalty to his family shames him in front of his compañeros. Lorenzo's problem raises several unanswered questions: if Lorenzo had not made the pledge to his mother, would he have fought his brother? What would Lorenzo have done if the Capitán had *ordered* him to lead the attack against Jacinto? Should Lorenzo have been less loyal to his own family for the benefit of the common good?

The play answers this final question by showing how kin relationships fall apart and by offering an alternative family. In the beginning, Jacinto relies on knowing that, although Lorenzo is in the army, "él no se va a virar contra mí, es mi hermano" (27). Jacinto, however, does not expect himself to respect the same rules and turns against his blood relations. When Jacinto finds out that his cousin Pancho has accepted money from the INRA, he tells

him that he has orders to burn the homes of any campesino who accepts help from the government. He warns: “No cojas mucho a cuenta de la familia, Pancho, que se me puede olvidar que somos parientes” (72). Jacinto does disregard their kinship, and after he kills Pancho, Prima cries: “¡Tú lo mataste, ya tú no eres familia. . . !” (90). At the same time that these traditional family relationships based on blood ties break down, a new revolutionary family is being born. Various scenes highlight the camaraderie of Lorenzo’s military compañeros, and as the Capitán explains to Lorenzo, “Aquí todos somos hermanos. En ocasiones más hermanos que los que llevan nuestra propia sangre” (36). Lorenzo understands this only after Jacinto betrays their family and Camilo is killed by the bandidos. Consequently, when Zoila seeks his support, rather than comforting her over the impending ambush he will lead against his brother, Lorenzo shows her Camilo’s body and says: “Llore, vieja, llore por Camilo; ese es el hijo suyo que merece esas lágrimas” (97). In the final line of the play, Lorenzo identifies another dead body: “Sí, era mi hermano” (101). Significantly, Lorenzo uses the past tense to refer to Jacinto, not because he is dead, but because he no longer considers him a brother.

La emboscada reflects a Brechtian approach to realism in its realistic, that is, truthful, construction of the character Lorenzo. Rather than the

embodiment of a rigid ideological position, he is a character who makes errors and learns. Orihuela's model of the hombre nuevo is flawed and unfinished, which enriches the basic conflict between the brothers, and presents a far more challenging dramatic conflict for the audience to interpret. Typical of the theater of the period, however, the play's revolutionary message is clear. It asks its implicit audience to abandon bourgeois individualism in favor of the Guevarian ideal of collectivism. This entails a socialist redefinition of the family, in which the individual household is socialized to benefit the collectivity, the larger family of the revolution.

Performances of La emboscada by different theater groups in the late 1970s and early 1980s mark the close of the Teatro Nuevo movement and the emergence of a new generation of artists interested in taking Cuban drama in new directions. Although I have argued that the form and content in La emboscada is far from simplistic, its didactic lesson is clear. Raquel Carrió affirms that the 1981 interpretation of the play by the ISA's graduating class offered "un nuevo camino, una experiencia que lograba sintetizar, con un nuevo lenguaje, las búsquedas más fértiles de la escena nacional durante dos décadas de teatro revolucionario" (2). The new version used richer images and less revolutionary discourse to communicate with an increasingly complex and demanding audience (Carrió 3-4). In the late 1960s, the Teatro

Nuevo groups found the uninitiated audience they had been looking for, and by the end of the 1970s this audience reached a level of sophistication ready for new representations of Cuban reality. This shift coincided with the end of the orthodoxy of the “Quinquenio gris” and an opening in cultural policy. In Bourdiean terms, the ISA’s production was able to raise the level of emission, first, because the Teatro Nuevo movement had helped elevate the level of reception, and second, because the space of possibles had been altered. La emboscada captures the rupture of the individual bourgeois family institution and the birth of a larger national family bound by socialism rather than blood. At the same time, the play’s flexibility, seen in its contrasting performances, presages fresh approaches to representing this new family and society under construction.

Gender Relations in the New Family

From the chaotic early years of the revolution portrayed in La emboscada, the scene of Abelardo Estorino’s Ni un sí ni un no (1980) shifts to the institutionalization of the new socialist system in the 1970s. While Orihuela’s play signals the dawning of a new Cuban family, Estorino’s piece addresses the challenges encountered in instilling egalitarian, socialist values in this family. Like the ISA’s groundbreaking production of La emboscada,

Ni un sí ni un no, staged by Cuba's most prestigious theater collective, Teatro Estudio, and directed by Estorino, experiments with realist forms.²⁵ This break with realism, along with the play's urban setting in Havana, mark a departure for Estorino, but in the themes of marriage, machismo, and family, Ni un sí ni un no is well within the playwright's typical dramatic universe. The play traces the evolving relationship of a young couple, Él and Ella, in the 1970s. His father and her mother, as well as two "others" who play alternate romantic partners for Él and Ella, round out the cast and provide more perspectives on the issue of sexual equality.

In Ni un sí ni un no, Estorino's examination of the impact of changing gender roles on the family in revolutionary Cuba posits a dialectic notion of cubanía. By employing metatheatrical and Brechtian techniques, Estorino questions Cuban values and traditions associated with family relations assumed to be immutable and given, suggesting that the only essential quality of cubanía is its constant transformation.²⁶ Ni un sí ni un no enacts the spirit of Cuba's 1975 Family Code, the preamble of which states that discriminatory bourgeois norms "must be replaced by others fully in keeping with the principles of equality and the realities of our socialist society, which is *constantly dynamically advancing*" (217, my emphasis). To stage this changeable reality, the theater must reject superficial, realist representations

inclined towards resolution and finality. As Estorino states, “La obra trata la transformación, el movimiento anímico, vivo, dinámico de esos personajes y la estructura de la obra va transformándose de la misma forma. Están imbricados el contenido y la forma que no puede ser de otra manera” (qtd. in Martínez Tabares 29).

The first scene of Ni un sí ni un no establishes the play’s central problem by linking the themes of transformation and gender. As Él sorts rice for dinner, he recites passages from Engel’s Anti-Dürhing (1878), a materialist interpretation of Hegelian dialectics. Él reads: “. . .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. . .” (290). This dialectical vision of the world leads him to ponder how his relationship with his wife has changed. Él illustrates his reading by throwing grains of rice on the floor, assigning them a gender, and proclaiming: “Este macho crecerá, éste no se transformará, machos desperdiciados, lanzados al piso de una cocina en el Vedado donde no tendrán oportunidad de cumplir el proceso dialéctico de la naturaleza” (290). While Él’s musings are lighthearted, it becomes apparent when his wife comes home that their relationship is strained precisely because his attitude towards gender roles has not evolved enough to meet her expectations of a

new Cuban husband. In contrast, he believes she has changed overmuch.

The two-act play, therefore, begins near the end of their story, for they are no longer the same people they married eight years ago, and divorce seems imminent. The rest of the play backtracks and shows the evolution of their relationship. We witness their wedding, their early years of marriage, how they grow apart and meet new love interests, their separation, and finally, what appears to be a reconciliation.²⁷ Metatheatrical scenes, in which the actors step out of character to discuss the play or to experiment with different modes of representation, break up the linearity of the story.

In line with the thematic focus on the new family, Estorino abandons the well-made family drama to experiment with new ways to represent the story of *Él and Ella*. In this regard, Estorino implicitly questions the efficacy of realism in portraying a world in transition and challenges the Cuban theater movement to resist superficial costumbrista representations of Cuban society. He strays from the typical orderly unfolding of the plot with flashbacks, improvisation, and characters who wander in and out of scenes, or step out of their roles to discuss the structure and the action of the play. The stage directions indicate that scene and costume changes, as well as the shift between character and actor, should be made visible. The house, a standard fixture in realist theater and a traditional site for representing the

family, also highlights the play's artifice. On the one hand, the kitchen is so authentic that it includes food, utensils, and running water; on the other hand, the walls move when the actors bump into them, and smashing plates lose their dramatic effect because they are made of cardboard. Estorino plays with realist conventions, dismantling them to underscore that what the audience views on stage is a constructed and changeable world rather than a seamless representation of a fixed reality. This has the Brechtian effect of distancing the spectator emotionally from the play and encouraging him/her to consider analytically the attitudes and events represented on stage.

Various uses of metatheater serve to expose gender stereotypes and encourage the audience to examine male-female relationships. *Él* and *Ella*'s decision to pull down the walls of their flimsy house signifies a rejection of the vestiges of the family formed with pre-revolutionary values. If *Él* and *Ella*'s marriage was built on a shaky foundation, then they must tear it down and build a new revolutionary family. Tearing down the set also parallels laying bare realist conventions as the following dialogue indicates:

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)

The play mixes different levels of fiction and reality to highlight the connections between life and art, suggesting that the roles we play in life may be as constructed as those in the theater and that art expresses many truths about life. Self-conscious performances in the style of old movies and comedias costumbristas parody superficial and stereotypical representations of cubanía. El Otro suggests that they do “una escena cubana de verdad” (317), and the actors improvise two scenes that highlight machista behavior, one that exaggerates the sexual banter and linguistic characteristics of Afro-Cuban types, and another in which a jealous husband chides his wife for leaving the house. In the context of the play’s goal of altering sexist attitudes, these scenes should strike the audience as outmoded representations of Cuban culture. A more overtly didactic use of metatheater is seen when the actors step out of their roles to comment on the characters. The actors who play Él and Ella, for example, note how much their characters have changed:

ÉL. ¿Pero te fijaste bien cómo son?

ELLA. *Eran* más jóvenes.

ÉL. Me refiero a las actitudes. No se parecen en nada a los de la cocina. (301)

Similarly, when the characters stop to redirect the action of the play, they

underscore, as Él puts it, that “Ningún libreto es definitivo” (381). Just as the actors stray from the script, the play suggests that spectators reject prescribed sex roles and create new ones suitable for Cuba’s revolutionary context.

Él and Ella’s relationship embodies the changing libreto of Cuban identity. The characters are representative of a generation that has had to negotiate between the traditional values of their parents and the new force of the revolution. In forming a new society, the revolution has entered the private family space to inculcate socialist values. This is most visible in a recording of the Family Code, which plays over the pantomime wedding of Él and Ella. A scene from early in their marriage, however, hardly shows a revolutionary couple. Ella, pregnant, fetches water and turns the television on and off for her pajama-clad husband (320-21). Ella depends on her mother for decision-making, and when Él receives orders to leave for a military mobilization, she insists on going to stay with her mother to avoid being home alone, explaining, “Que las mujeres somos muy miedosas” (326). Her husband’s absence forces Ella to become more independent, and instead of staying at her mother’s house to avoid being alone at night, she volunteers to participate in a special night course in pediatrics.

The relationship between Él and Ella is never the same after he returns

from military service. Él seems pleased with Ella's new endeavors, and he surprises her as well by having learned to do his own laundry. They appear to be a maturing new Cuban couple until Él exposes a double standard when Ella announces that she must leave for class: "Me parece bien que quieras superarte. [. . .] Pero debes atender a tu marido. ¿Está claro? Por lo tanto, hoy no vas a clases, porque yo acabo de llegar de una movilización y he estado fuera cuarenta y cinco días. Y tu deber es atenderme" (332). She tells him that he should be a true revolutionary and accept her commitment, but he replies: "¿Revolucionario de qué, chica? Esto es un asunto de marido y mujer. ¿Qué tiene que ver la Revolución en la cama?" (332). Throughout the play, Él and Ella's work and study responsibilities reveal that the revolution really does enter the bedroom because they have less free time to spend with each other. The integration of women in the revolutionary process has altered traditional characteristics of family roles and relations, because as a student, a worker, and a wife, Ella cannot attend to her husband and the home as a traditional Cuban wife would. They have come to share household tasks, and Él prides himself on being a "marido evolucionado" (291). His reference to the Family Code, however, has an empty ring to it: "Yo soy un humilde esposo que acata el Código de Familia porque ha entendido la igualdad de derechos y deberes de ambos cónyuges" (294). Él has not

evolved as quickly as Ella has, and her achievements outside of the home create tension within it.

Not only do Él and Ella feel the effects of the revolution on their married life, they also must contend with the influence of their parents, who embody pre-revolutionary culturally defined male and female roles. The play's title--Ni un sí ni un no--refers to traditional authoritarian families, in which the wife obeyed the husband without question. El Padre says that with Candita, his wife, "no tuvimos ni un sí ni un no. Yo decía, y ella decía: así es" (306). El Padre upholds a sexual/spiritual dichotomy by praising her subservience and lack of sexual instincts: "No era una mujer, era una santa" (297). In contrast, El Padre is a stereotypical machista dominated by his sexual drive. He advises his son to proposition women but not to marry those he successfully seduces: "lo que se prueba no se compra" (313). When La Madre finds out that Ella is pregnant, however, she acts swiftly to save her daughter's reputation by pushing her to marry and to lie about the due date: "Y cuando nazca, ¡sietemesino! Y si hay que ponerlo en la incubadora, lo ponemos, aunque pese doce libras" (309). Rather than break a cycle of marriages built on material values and lies instead of love and respect, the mother draws on her protective instincts and sets up her daughter's marriage to be just as unhappy as her own has been. La Madre's unquestioning

perpetuation of cultural attitudes, such as the social stigma of an unwed mother, is consistent with El Padre's philosophy of parenting: "Yo eduqué a mis hijos como me educaron mis padres y mi hijo educará a los suyos como lo eduqué a él. Y así seguirá la historia" (356).²⁸

Él and Ella prove, nevertheless, that the story does not continue as such, because the revolution has modified the cultural codes passed through generations. Ella says her mother educated her one way but that she turned out another because "a mí no me educó sólo ella, sino también el trabajo, la escuela, el cine, los libros, las concentraciones y la milicia" (356). Similarly, El Padre watches in disbelief as Él ignores his advice and takes responsibility for the pregnancy, marries Ella, and above all, washes his own socks. At times, how Él and Ella handle their relationship baffles their parents, which suggests that the couple learned revolutionary values mostly outside of the home. Ni un sí ni un no explores the problematic process of adapting a newly acquired revolutionary conciencia to family relationships. As Ella explains to El Padre: "Esta es otra época, con otras leyes y con otros conceptos morales, igual que hay otras modas y otra música. Y el que no lo vea así está momificado" (356).

Ultimately, El Padre and La Madre do learn from the younger generation, and they adjust to the new ethics of revolutionary Cuba. Although La Madre initially appears to be a typical bourgeois mother, the

play shows her willingly participating in the revolution, and she approves of the advances in women's rights. By the play's end, she has learned not to meddle in her daughter's affairs, and she stops deferring her own happiness and fulfillment by remarrying. Her class-consciousness has changed as well, because her new husband is a mason, whereas earlier she encouraged her daughter not to marry a working-class man. On the surface, El Padre never stops resisting the revolution, which in his opinion, robbed him of his business and is destroying his son's macho sensibilities. In a vulnerable moment, however, El Padre reveals that he has cancer and tells truth: "Siempre anduve con una careta" (379). He did come to appreciate the benefits of the revolution, but to save pride, he did not publicly acknowledge his change of perspective: "Yo cambiaba y me daba cuenta, pero seguía viviendo y repitiendo las mismas palabras. Me daba pena que me vieran cambiar, me parecía una debilidad, y los hombres deben ser firmes, dicen" (379). Now, El Padre admits to his son that he approves of Ella and that he is pleased with the opportunities in education, work, and travel that the revolution has provided his son.

In the play's final scene, Él and Ella also unmask themselves by removing the carnival costumes they were wearing when they first met and recognizing the people they have become rather than the couple they once

were. They had found the costumes while dividing up their things in preparation for their divorce. Nevertheless, they do not become another statistic in the skyrocketing divorce rate of the 1970s, for, as Salvador Arias writes, “aquí el conflicto sirve dialécticamente a la superación de la situación” (21). After pursuing others--el Otro and la Otra--whose personalities and values are ironically similar to the younger versions of Él and Ella, the couple reunites with a deeper understanding of the transformational nature of relationships. Thus, Estorino ends his piece optimistically, suggesting to audience members that the dialectical resolution of the conflicts in their own home can lead to revolutionary conciencia as opposed to divorce and family instability. The recognition scene and subsequent happy end has the flavor of a Golden Age comedia, which Estorino accentuates by summing up the moral of the play in verse. Él suggests storing the costumes, but Ella says not to bother because they will constantly play new roles in life. Él asks: “¿Es que no tendremos nunca algo inmutable y eterno?” and Ella replies: “¡Claro que sí! / El deseo de cambiar, / Cuando una historia termina / Otra está por empezar” (394). As if to prove this point, Estorino avoids the closed dramatic structure of realism by ending the play with a new beginning, as Él and Ella reunite as a stronger couple and El Otro and La Otra prepare to perform the same scene that opened the play.

In 1958, Estorino's play, El robo del cochino, prophesied that the rupture of the bourgeois family caused by the revolution would bring more egalitarian relationships between men and women. In his 1980 piece, Ni un sí ni un no, the generational rift depicted in the earlier work has healed somewhat, for the play represents the process of both parents and children adapting to new gender roles in a socialist family/nation. Furthermore, the incorporation of metatheatrical techniques challenges the notion of timeless national characteristics that include the values of the pre-revolutionary Cuban family. Ni un sí ni un no poses a dialectic view of Cuban identity, implying that the great web of relationships that constitutes the Cuban national family will continue to evolve in consonance with changing social and economic realities. In form and in content, Estorino's play strives to represent cubanía as a process.

Endangered Species: Socialism and the New Family

In Cuban plays from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s by Rolando Ferrer, Virgilio Piñera, Abelardo Estorino, and José Triana, children rebel against their parents in an effort to redefine the family and the nation. La emboscada and Ni un sí ni un no center on this young generation in the 1960s and 1970s and their quest to build a revolutionary society. As young people

gain revolutionary conciencia, they confront the problems that emerge in forming a new Cuba and negotiate with the resistant values of an older, pre-revolutionary generation. Plays of the 1990s, by contrast, invert this generational conflict. In Vereda tropical (1994) by Joaquín Miguel Cuartas Rodríguez, women nearly in their sixties play steadfast revolutionaries, and the characters who doubt the revolution are their children and grandchildren. The play treats the aging of the revolution in the context of Cuba's Special Period, or Post-Soviet crisis. Given the resurgence of experimental theater in the late 1980s and 1990s, the realist detail of Cuartas's piece "le da cierto aire de teatro de una época anterior" (Monleón 112). Ironically, after years of a cultural policy that favored staging tangible social realities over artistic experimentation, the play's frank portrayal of the difficulties the new Cuban family has faced following the breakup of the Soviet Union may have resulted in censorship. In 1994, Vereda tropical shared with La noche by fellow Cuban Abilio Estévez the prestigious Tirso de Molina prize for Hispanic theater. Nevertheless, Vereda tropical has been neither published nor produced in Cuba, and its title has scarcely been mentioned in Cuban theater publications. It is possible that the play remains unstaged because Cuartas does not work in a subsidized theater collective or because the play is simply too difficult to produce in Cuba's current economic conditions, but its

unpopularity might very well relate to the play's portrait of the socialist family in decline.²⁹ Vereda tropical suggests that not only has the revolution failed to erase traces of the pre-revolutionary family, but that the new family, built over the foundation of the older model, is on shaky ground as well.

The central character in Vereda tropical is fifty-eight year old Buenavista Rufino Ruiz (Burrurú). She lives in a solar in Havana with her mother, Engracia (eighty), and her daughter, Caridad (thirty-eight), and her granddaughter, Purita (twenty). Each time the city suffers a blackout, their elderly neighbor Romualdito sings the song "Vereda tropical" to fight the sensation that he is alone in the world, as he puts it: "El último ser de una especie que se extingue" (47-48). With the Special Period as its backdrop, Vereda tropical reveals socialism and the new Cuban family to be endangered species. Faced with losing her family, Burrurú must reconcile her revolutionary idealism with the ideological and economic crises in Cuba. Each act proves to be a downward spiral for Burrurú: she breaks her leg in a blackout at the end of the first act, and in the second, her home catches fire (Romualdito is killed), and Gladis La Jabá, her mortal enemy from Miami, returns home. In the third act, Burrurú is disappointed by love and discovers that her commitment to the revolution has alienated her from her family. The play ends with Burrurú alone in the dark singing "Vereda tropical," aware

that she will indeed become extinct if she does not adapt to the changing face of Cuban reality.

Through the daily life of the characters, the play offers a glimpse of the economic realities of an island that has suffered a trade embargo for over thirty years and has recently lost its main subsidizer and trading partner. Bururú's crumbling home visually evokes the deterioration of the socialist family and nation in Cuba. Realistically constructed onstage, the living space that Bururú shares with her three family members constitutes a sign of national economic hardship. Their home is so cramped that there is not enough space for a rocking chair to rock, the kitchen is outfitted poorly, and they have no bathroom of their own. Due to the island's lack of construction materials and replacement parts, it is unlikely that the characters will be able to move or improve their quarters. If Romualdito dies, they could expand into his space but, typical of the play's dark humor, Caridad laments: "*(Suspiro.)* Pero el viejo tiene buena salud, aunque de la cabeza está un poco mal, ya sabes" (16). Energy shortages have caused everyday tasks to become complicated. For example, oil lamps clutter the house because of long, scheduled blackouts, and Engracia, speaking to Caridad, describes crossing the city as an arduous odyssey: "al regreso no había guagua y cuando se apareció una la empujadera fue grande, ni porque es vieja la respetan. No, y

se rompió a las cuatro paradas. Mi nieta, he tenido que caminar 20 cuadras" (30). Other indications of Cuba's dire situation mentioned by the characters include medical and food shortages. The Cuban pesos the women earn are virtually worthless, and Caridad understands that to survive, they need to find a creative way to earn dollars. While the younger generation scrambles to gain capital in a changing socialist system, Bururú stands by the old system and stoically suffers the brunt of the economic crisis.

In spite of all the evident hardships, Bururú is unfailingly supportive of the revolution. As a woman of African heritage and a single mother, Bururú represents those who have benefited the most from the revolution's advances in eliminating sexual and racial discrimination and its achievements in socializing medical care, day care, and education. Her faith in the socialist system, therefore, is well founded, and with Bururú, Cuartas creates a memorable character that embodies the new Cuban. Indeed, she differs notably from the dependent and self-abnegating, middle-class Cuban mother we have seen in pre-revolutionary plays by Ferrer, Estorino, and Piñera. Before the revolution, Bururú was a maid; now she is a community leader who has held a position in the Ministerio de Cultura for twenty-five years.

Bururú has been an exemplary revolutionary. On the wall facing the public, a gigantic picture of Che Guevara surrounded by medals and

diplomas dominates the family's cramped home. Antolín, her gentleman caller, is duly impressed: "*(Suspirando.)* Usted tiene toda su vida colgada de la pared, Bururú" (45). On the wall, one can read the history of the revolution in Bururú's life, from her participation in the underground movement against Batista, to her efforts in the 10-million-ton harvest in 1970, her work in Africa, and her devotion to the neighborhood Comité de la Defensa de la Revolución (CDR). The number of diplomas recognizing her blood donations indicates that she has literally sacrificed her life for the revolution, even, as Antolín points out, in the current period of poor alimentation. Bururú's wall, a living example of Guevara's doctrine of volunteerism and moral incentives, contrasts with the material impoverishment of the home. The revolution is the focus of meaning and commitment in Bururú's life, and, given how her quality of life has improved from the creation of a more egalitarian society, it is easy to understand her revolutionary zeal. But for Caridad and Purita, born after the revolution, it is more difficult to justify problems such as material shortages and the lack of personal freedom.

Marching down the street dressed in their miliciano uniforms, Bururú and her sixty-year-old friend Adarcisa present a striking image of the aging revolution. Unlike the works we have seen thus far, here characters between the ages of fifty-eight and eighty dominate the action of the play. The

builders of the revolution have aged, and the younger generation brings with it a new attitude toward the revolutionary society. Elderly widows populate the shooting range, honing their skills should they need to defend their nation, while Caridad and Purita socialize with friends. The older generation gladly does its patriotic duty and participates in Preparación Combativa sessions, but instructor does not bother to appear. Adarcisa complains about his flimsy excuse and the general lack of desire to serve the revolution: “¡Gripe, gripe! ¿Te has fijado cómo últimamente todo el mundo se enferma o busca alguna excusa para no cumplir?” (21). Worse than indifference is the lack of respect young people show toward symbols of national pride. On their way home, Adarcisa and Bururú encounter the decapitated bust of José de la Luz y Caballero in the dilapidated park they had built during voluntary work.³⁰ Disheartened by the vandalism and the economic crisis, Adarcisa wonders if, “después de tantos años de lucha todo se está haciendo sal y agua” (21). After all, it looks as if the nation is selling out to capitalism: “Ya tú ves todas las empresas y corporaciones que se han inventado, ¡y como llaman a los capitalistas a invertir! Chica, ni las putas que existieron en el barrio de San Isidro llamaban tanto a los machos” (21).³¹ They rally their spirits by remembering the good old days and cheerfully shouting out the names of North American companies nationalized by the Cubans.

Later, they erect a new bust, showing the perseverance ingrained in their generation.

To younger Cubans, Bururú and Adarcisa's enthusiasm for the revolution seems anachronistic. Bururú's family brings a generation gap into relief when Bururú returns from Preparación Combativa to find Caridad in bed with Pititi, the son of Gladis la Jabá. Their families had been friends until Gladis la Jabá betrayed the revolution fourteen years ago by leaving Cuba on the Mariel boatlift. Unlike her mother, Caridad holds no grudge against the family, and she tells Bururú that the neighborhood will welcome Gladis la Jabá back because of the dollars she will bring. When Bururú retorts, "No va a ser. La gente no se arrastra por un dólar, la gente tiene dignidad," her daughter laughs (30). Caridad knows that in Cuba's current circumstances dignity is not most people's main concern and tells her mother that, "el que no se dedica a algún negocio o a algún trapicheo no vive hoy en Cuba, chica" (50). Nevertheless, any business involved with United States dollars is immoral from Bururú's perspective, and she waits for official channels to improve her situation. She expects that any day she will receive a new apartment in return for her many years of service to the revolution. Caridad complains that her mother, "Siempre ha sido como una línea recta. Pero el mundo es redondo, coño; el mundo es redondo. No cuadrado" (39). Their

contrasting world views reach a climax when Bururú discovers that Caridad has received gifts of shoes and clothing from Gladis la Jabá, and Caridad tells her that she plans to marry Pititi and move with Purita to an apartment his mother has bought for them.

Bururú has never confronted Caridad and Purita's progressive distancing from the family, because over the years she has perfected the art of daydreaming as a means of avoiding unpleasant realities. The set includes a space to the side of the apartment marked with a sign stating: "El Lugar donde se sueña" (12). In this magical space, Bururú lies on a pink hammock between two phosphorescent palm trees and watches her dreams play out. One of her long-term fantasies involves her relationship with Caridad's father. When she conjures him up, he appears as a handsome white chauffeur, and they dance. She has created a whole mythology about their relationship and his heroic death fighting against Batista, in order to deny that Caridad was the product of a brief affair. This subconscious desire for a traditional family headed by a (white) male offers a vision of the family more in line with bourgeois ideals than the revolutionary family represented in the play. Thus, the fantasy suggests that the revolution cannot erase traditional models of the pre-revolutionary family and that Cuba's new family and nation has more links with the past than some revolutionaries would like to

admit. In another dream, Bururú's wish for Purita to become a doctor mixes with her anxiety about the Special Period and Gladis la Jabá's visit. In this fantasy, Purita announces that she has won the Nobel Prize for discovering the vaccine for AIDS and that she plans to give all the rights to her discovery to the revolutionary government. Bururú exclaims: "Purita, mi nieta, salvaste a Cuba. Mija, salimos del periodo especial gracias a ti. Ya no necesitaremos los dólares de la gusanera. Ya no van a dejar venir a Cuba a Gladis la Jabá. (*Purita se retira. Bururú queda sola en la hamaca, meciéndose con alegría.*)" (35).³² Bururú resolves another problem in a humorous fantasy in which Caridad rejects Pititi in favor of an exemplary revolutionary worker. She tells Bururú:

CARIDAD. Mamá, nunca más va a tener que ver a Pititi en cuero en tu cama. Te lo prometo.

BURURÚ. Gracias, mija, un hombre en cuero no es nada edificante.

CARIDAD. (*Amorosa.*) Mamá, haré lo que tú digas. (53-54)

In reality, Caridad does not obey her mother, and Purita has doubts about a medical career. Bururú's conflicted fantasies help her ignore the fact that her household embodies neither the ideal pre-revolutionary family nor the exemplary new family.

As Bururú's misfortunes add up, it becomes harder for her to evade reality and she begins to recognize how she has alienated her family. She breaks her leg, her house is damaged in a fire, Gladis la Jabá comes home in a blaze of material glory, and she discovers that Antolín is interested in Adarcisa, not in her.³³ Perhaps worst of all, the union awards her yet another medal and treats her to a dinner for six instead of a much-anticipated new apartment. The realization that her family is slipping away, however, truly jolts Bururú from her dream world. When Caridad announces that she and Purita are moving out, Purita delivers Bururú another shock by telling her that she has decided to leave medical school to work at a hotel. Bururú cannot believe that Purita does not want to become part of a tradition that has been a source of pride for the revolution: "Vas a ser Premio Nobel. Además, además, tenemos uno de los por cientos de mortalidad infantil más bajos del mundo. Tenemos los médicos de la familia. Tenemos más maestros por habitante que cualquier país del mundo. (*Desesperada.*) Tenemos. . ." (130). Bururú's desperate list of all of the revolution's accomplishments, however, means little to young people who cannot afford to buy shoes. In Cuba's skewed economy, Purita points out that she can earn more from tips in a hotel than as a doctor: "Una profesional suelta el piojo y lo que gana no le alcanza ni para un ajustador. La empleada de un hotel come bien y con las

propinas se viste mejor que la profesional" (130). The character Purita is representative of what Enrique Baloyra calls an "internal brain drain" in which overqualified professionals and technicians seek jobs in the dollarized sector of the economy (36). For Purita's generation, the satisfaction from having gained revolutionary conciencia does not match the desire for a higher standard of living. In general, according to this play's perspective, the state's ideological orientation has not been as effective shaping the behavior of young people as it was with Bururú's generation. Consequently, the image of the family in recent plays such as Vereda tropical contradicts any official rhetoric of a united socialist family and nation.

In the meantime, Engracia has considered moving to a retirement home where she can live in greater comfort. She tells Bururú that the home is like a five star hotel: "No te falta el buen desayuno, ni la merienda, hay televisor en colores, excursiones, y te dije, hasta un grupo de teatro, un médico que viene a verte" (68). It is heartbreaking for Bururú to accept that she cannot take care of her mother adequately. The realization that her family is leaving leads Bururú to renounce her illusions. She physically destroys her dream space and announces that "En este país ya no hay sueños" (132). Engracia asks, "Y ¿quién te dijo a ti, hija, que un país vive de sueños? Vive de realidades, y las realidades siempre son duras" (132).

Bururú understands the difficult reality of everyday survival in Cuba, but what she must confront is the rigidity of her worldview and the changing nature of Cuban socialism. Ultimately, her hard work and devotion to the revolution have given her dignity, and she takes comfort in this as she looks at her wall of personal history that marks her participation in building a new Cuba. To avoid extinction, however, she and the revolutionary government must find new ways to hold the national family together.

The pressures of the Special Period strain Bururú's family, but Engracia stands by her daughter and together they will weather the economic crisis. In the end, old-fashioned mother's advice guides Bururú rather than revolutionary principles. This empowerment of the private sphere, a return to a source of knowledge long considered detrimental to the official indoctrination of revolutionary conciencia, suggests that the older models of the family that have persisted in Cuba may contain values useful to the new family. It also constitutes a sign of the times, for the loss of Cuba's main ideological referent along with the economic emergency have forced the socialist state to step back and allow alternative ways for Cubans to resolve problems. The revolution's anti-religious stance, for example, has eased because the state knows that the island needs the support of other institutions in this time of crisis. Engracia assures Bururú that God will reward her

goodness. This confuses Bururú, who points out that for thirty-five years the revolution has said that God does not exist. Engracia replies: “(*Sonriendo con gran sabiduría.*) Eso también está cambiando, Bururú. También está cambiando. Mi madre, que en paz descanse, siempre decía aquello de que todo lo que pasa conviene” (133). Again, motherly advice evokes generational continuity and suggests that revolution must draw upon traditional Cuban resources, rather than rely on a foreign power, to resolve the national crisis of the Special Period.

Crisis management and experimentation have characterized the operational mode of the Cuban regime and helped ensure its longevity. To preserve her family, Bururú must adapt to the changing times. The new family will survive, but as Estorino argues in Ni un sí ni un no, it will constantly take on new forms; likewise, Vereda tropical suggests that in the changing Cuban family, different models of family coexist. Engracia tells Bururú, “A veces en las familias tienen que pasar cosas así. Las familias son como los países, que de vez en cuando necesitan un sacudión” (134). In the shake up of the family dramatized in this play, we have seen utopian dreams dashed, a socialist aperture towards capitalism, and young people motivated by consumerism rather than revolutionary ideas. The presence of multiple generations in Bururú’s family reveals the persistence of some values and

traditions from an epoch that the revolution had purportedly eradicated.

The unstaged status of the work suggests that, similar to Triana's experience with La noche de los asesinos (1965), perhaps Cuban officials found that Vereda tropical did not maintain a sharp enough contrast between past and present national families.

Of Lard and Family: Surviving the Special Period

Alberto Pedro Torriente's Manteca (1993) is a darkly humorous play that, in the tradition of Piñera and Triana, combines realism with elements of theater of the absurd and Artaudian cruelty to form a distinctly Cuban representation of the family. Like Vereda tropical, Manteca treats a new family's endurance of the Special Period, but the play's synthesis of styles and inclusion of a variety of discourses make its presentation of this crisis much more ambiguous than the costumbrista realism of the other work. As in Cuartas's piece, Manteca challenges the revolution's perennially optimistic rhetoric by showing some of the negative effects of the current socioeconomic crisis on the Cuban family; consequently, the play was initially censored. The theater collective Teatro Mío eventually played Manteca over fifty times to audiences that reportedly greeted the play "with passion, heated applause, and raucous laughter" (Martínez Tabares, "Manteca" 46).³⁴ For Pedro,

sincerity defines the most revolutionary plays, and he affirms that “Si las obras no consiguen generar una fricción con la sociedad en que vivimos, si no se provoca un rozamiento, un conflicto con la época, entonces algo funciona mal en esa escritura” (“Todo esto” 77). Despite the play’s challenging form, or indeed, perhaps because of it, Manteca clearly struck a chord with audiences eager to experience honest portrayals of the difficult circumstances in which they live.

Similar to Vereda tropical, the family theme in Manteca serves to assess the national identity of the island after the demise of Marxist socialism. Because of Cuba’s relationship with the United States during the first half of this century and its ties with the Soviet bloc in the second, Pedro argues that Cuba has not fulfilled the potential of its unique identity: “I think we have not yet become all that we are, with all the dignity that is required” (Martínez Tabares, “Theater” 63). In Manteca, the characters turn to the family, not the state, as a means of surviving Cuba’s economic crisis. This reliance on kinship and appealing to one’s own “metonymically introduces into the discourse, from another angle, the focus on Cubanity (cubanía)” (Muguerca 56-57). That is, according to this play, to orient itself in a world undergoing great ideological shifts and to achieve self-sufficiency, Cuba must look to itself for answers. In this regard, the play’s scrutiny of the Cuban family and

national identity forms part of an artistic trend in the 1990s that counters the precariousness of the present by examining national values and traditions.

The dramatic action of Manteca is uncomplicated. To alleviate the shortage of food, three adult siblings, Pucho, Celestino, and Dulce, have shut themselves in their fifth-story apartment in Havana to raise an illegally purchased pig. It is New Year's Eve, the day they have agreed to slaughter the pig, and they have trouble doing the deed because the animal has become like one of the family. When Celestino does kill the pig, they realize that they must raise another because it has come to represent a utopia that provides them with a sense of purpose. Part of the play's dramatic tension derives from the fact that the action that the siblings have to take does not become clear until well into the play. Their unwillingness to act, a strong odor permeating the apartment, and the presence of a knife create a somewhat menacing tone.

The majority of the one-act play, however, does not treat violence. It consists of the siblings' daily rituals of survival and their conversation, which is often entertaining. Dialogue rather than action dominates the play, and ranges from logical comments about their absurd situation, rationally expressed memories of the past, bizarre proclamations about Cuba, the

world, and themselves, intertextual references, and the rhythmic enumeration of, among other things, English verbs and days of the week. Over their disconnected conversations, the song “Manteca” intermittently blares throughout the play. The abusive music contributes to the anxiety of the cloistered atmosphere of an apartment so cluttered that it looks like a storehouse of junk.³⁵ The trio of siblings, their ritualized daily activities, and the possibility of a bloody sacrifice in Manteca obviously recall the murderous siblings in José Triana’s La noche de los asesinos.³⁶ Here, however, the survival of the “gran familia cubana” depends on the siblings coming together to reconstruct what’s left of their family, whereas in Triana’s play, the children wish to destroy their family unit in hopes that a less oppressive institution might emerge. Nonetheless, like the earlier play, the incarcerating atmosphere of the family apartment in Manteca suggests the repression of personal freedom in revolutionary Cuban society, which highlights the similarities between the pre- and post-revolutionary families.

The economic crisis has brought three very dissimilar siblings to live together in the small apartment their parents have left them. Celestino is a macho communist who has married a woman he met while studying engineering in Leningrad. He refers to the breakup of the Soviet Union as the “desastre” and insists that, to him, Russia will always be the Soviet Union

(171). Pucho is a gay, frustrated writer who has lost his position as a university professor for introducing taboo subjects in his classroom. The brother's antithetical personalities makes their relationship tense, and, at one point, Pucho comments, "No es fácil convivir con un hermano como tú" (182). He adds that he is only living with Celestino because he has no other option (182). Dulce is a domestic motherly type who tries to smooth things over between her brothers; her conventional wisdom delivery of offbeat comments about the world is often amusing. Overall, in spite of their differences, the siblings show concern for one another and cooperate to make the best of their situation.

Life in the apartment has a ritualistic, timeless quality. The passage of time acquires meaning only inasmuch as it relates to sustenance. The beginning of a New Year, for example, is meaningful only because it is the day the siblings will slaughter the pig. On a daily basis, the siblings ask each other if it is an odd or an even day because this determines when they leave their home to wait in line for rations: "Hay que estar los días impares, de madrugada, con los recipientes" (175). Thus days of the week matter only in terms of portioning their rice adequately. Dispensing rations becomes a ritual for Dulce, who sorts rice, divides the daily bread into three servings, and passes out glasses of sugar water. Repetitive tasks also occupy Celestino and

Pucho's time: Celestino repairs makeshift objects and Pucho searches for an essential lost page of his novel. Even Celestino's attempts to commit suicide are on their way to becoming a ritual to fill time. He informs Pucho and Dulce that he would like to be run over by a truck, but they point out that he has already tried this twice before, at the same corner, in front of the same truck driven by the same driver (174). The incongruity of the Celestino's suicide attempt and the detached logic with which the siblings treat the pathetic act make it almost seem funny. The play's dark humor recalls Piñera's treatment of the family in Aire frío. Just as Luz Marina understands the absurdity of waiting in her stifling family home for aire frío, or change, as the siblings in Manteca portion, fix, and search, and, most of all, wait for the pig to fatten, they are struck with the absurdity of their situation: "Estamos criando un puerco en los umbrales del año dos mil, a escondidas, en un edificio de apartamentos, desafiando las leyes sanitarias que han hecho posible el florecimiento de las ciudades del planeta, porque necesitamos proteínas, proteínas y manteca" (186).

This family's isolation in their battle for survival, by extension, embodies the situation of the Cuban nation. Pucho's bewildered questions: "¿En qué acabará todo esto? ¿Hasta donde vamos a llegar?" (177) refer to his family's plight as well as to the ideological vacuum and economic crisis Cuba

faces with the loss of Soviet support. As unstable as the revolution's early years were in terms of Cuba's position in the world, especially after Castro declared himself a Marxist, Dulce associates stability with the good old days when the Soviet Union became part of Cuba's extended national family. She remembers fondly Nikita (Khrushchev), and the missiles, the circus, and the canned meat sent to Cuba by the Soviets: "Aquella carne que tenía una vaca pintada en la latica y que la gente decía que era un oso y que aquello era carne de oso, aquella carne que nos salvó, cuando ningún país quería mandarnos nada, aquella carne me caía bien" (173). Although Castro has led a uniquely Cuban revolution, the Soviets provided an anchor that helped Cubans define their place in the world order. The certainty of having Soviets as allies and the North Americans as enemies, even if it meant teetering on the brink of a nuclear war, seemed to Dulce a more stable time: "Cuando la crisis esa de los cohetes, como le llaman, estábamos mejor. Al amanecer podíamos ser barridos de la faz de la tierra, pero estábamos juntos todos aquí. Mamá, papá, nosotros, mis hijos, la familia" (192). Dulce also identifies stability with a different kind of family than the one she is living with now, which suggests that the revolution has altered the family in important ways.

Martínez Tabares states that "Manteca defends the space of the family as the individual's last recourse and refuge from the arduous and relentless

process of transformation opened up by the Revolution” (“Manteca” 45). I would argue, however, that the Special Period marks a *return* to the family as a refuge from state intervention only because the state can no longer support “la gran familia cubana” or the nation. As we have seen in other works, the revolution’s attempt to create a socialist family has greatly affected this institution by modifying relationships between parents and children, and husbands and wives. Through the family, playwrights have explored how the regime has attempted to instill revolutionary values in Cuban society, and to what extent it has been successful. In the case of Manteca, all that is left of the new Cuban family is a fragment: two brothers and a sister. After the initial years of installing a socialist system in Cuba, the revolution looked abroad in the 1970s and became involved in Marxist movements in other countries. Dulce maintains that with the geographical dispersion of the Cuban family, “empezó la locura” (192). In Dulce’s case, service to the revolution has destroyed her marriage and weakened her ties with her sons: “Un hijo en Africa y otro en el Polo Norte. Y no puedo culparlos porque el primero que empezó fue mi marido. Por eso se acabó nuestro matrimonio, porque vivía más tiempo en el lugar donde lo mandaron que en su propia casa y por supuesto allá encontró otra y por allá se quedó” (191-2). Celestino’s marriage has also ended in divorce. He married a woman from

the Soviet Union and brought her to Cuba. Although their children seemed to grow up comfortably Cuban,—they rejected their mother’s borscht in favor of their Cuban grandmother’s black beans--their mother never adapted to her new country, and she left Celestino and took the children back to the Soviet Union. With these divorces, the death of the sibling’s parents, and no mention of other relatives, only a piece of the family remains.

Celestino’s failed marriage evokes the end of Cuba’s Soviet romance and the beginning of a period of great uncertainty for the island. The characters in Manteca are very aware of how the fall of Marxist socialism has ushered in a period of shifting world borders and alliances, as well as renewed national and ethnic movements. Dulce’s chaotic enumeration of these changes matches the disorienting feeling of the epoch:

Y los bosnioherzegovinos bomba viene y bomba va. Y vaya sangre y venga sangre. Y de África ni hablar. Con tanta vaca suelta que hay en la India. Y ahora en Alemania, ni negros, ni turcos. ¿Habrán podido tumbar aquella estatua? Vamos a ver, porque están los vietnamitas, los chinos y los coreanos. (176)

Whatever the future of communism may be, for Celestino, one thing is certain, its collapse in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union signifies more than a simple transition to capitalism: “Mucha gente piensa: ‘Se acabó el

comunismo y para la tienda', lo que no saben es que lo que viene si no es fascismo se parece bastante" (188). Likewise, Pucho's comments reveal his concern about recent waves of racism, xenophobia, and fundamentalism.

Manteca portrays the worldwide tendency to decentralize through a renewed autonomy of the individual Cuban family. After decades of experimenting with the construction of a new society based on collectivist ideals, Dulce concludes that "Al final con lo único que cuentas es con tus padres, tus hijos, tus hermanos, con tu sangre" (189). As the state cannot provide for the nation in this period of scarcity, citizens have turned to their own individual families to find creative ways to survive the economic crisis.³⁷ In light of the food shortages, it is fitting that in Manteca, a pig, which recalls the tradition of a family gathered together for holiday pig roasts, has reunited what remains of the sibling's family. The totemized pig objectifies their kinship and recalls a more primitive existence in which basic survival determined human groupings. The ritualistic quality of the siblings daily tasks and the spilled blood of the pig, which constitutes a visual image of blood ties, adds to the ambience of primal survival. As Dulce affirms, the pig underscores the primacy of the family: "Ese animalito mantuvo unida a la familia y la familia es lo principal" (191). This change in priorities in which loyalty to one's family takes precedence over commitments to the collectivity

implies a more lenient approach to difference and individuality in Cuban society. As Pucho says, “El integracionismo es excluyente” (189). The regime’s project of integrating Cubans in the revolution has required sameness; the new Cuban family has included those who emulate revolutionary qualities, and Pucho’s homosexuality automatically has excluded him from this family.³⁸ This opening towards a more diverse Cuban family, one that includes components new to both traditional and new families, coincides with a re-examination of all things Cuban.

Part of Cuba’s survival depends on its resourcefulness and adaptability. In the post-Soviet period, the revolution has had to de-emphasize the Marxist foundation of the Cuban constitution and tone down the official rhetoric that alienates young people. In addition, the regime has understood the importance of maintaining a strong national identity and a sense of cultural belonging in order for Cubans to draw from their own experiences to find ways to resolve their problems. Rather than looking to the state or to another country, Cubans must now look to the family for answers. In Manteca, the siblings implicitly reflect on national identity when they discuss Cuba’s place in the world. For example, Dulce’s amusing theory of how the world is dominated by those countries that had dinosaurs refers to Cuba’s problematic lack of oil: “Y aquellos que tuvieron dinosaurios siempre

han hecho de los otros lo que les ha dado la gana, como esos siete que siempre se están volviendo a reunir por allá, por Europa” (170). Whereas Dulce defines Cuba by its lack of natural resources, Celestino distinguishes Cuba from other countries affirmatively. For example, while thinking of his wife in Russia, he defends Cuba’s brand of Communism: “Yo soy de aquí. Allá ella con sus mundos y sus problemas. ¡Yo soy de aquí! ¡Comunista de aquí! Sí, comunista. Cada día soy más comunista, más comunista de aquí” (188).

In the play, some of the characteristics that describe this aquí, however, include machismo, racism, and intolerance. Dulce’s humorous remark about Cuban men being incapable of monogamy and Celestino’s obsession with failing to stop his wife from taking the kids—“No tuve cojones, no tuve cojones!” (174)--parody the aggressive virility of Cuban men. Celestino repeats cojones so many times it begins to lose its shocking effect, and Pucho further deflates his exaggerated masculinity by suggesting that all his bravado may be a cover up for repressed homosexuality. The play underscores that the revolution has not welcomed homosexuals in the new Cuban family/society. Pucho has lost his job and has trouble publishing, and Celestino has felt obligated to look out for him because he has known that Pucho could get into trouble with the authorities. Celestino’s refusal to pose

nude for an artist friend of Pucho's makes fun of Cuban male anxiety about homoeroticism. The pose planned by the artist--Celestino, naked, with a crown of laurel on his head and a hammer and sickle in his hand--also embodies the challenge of being an artist in a communist society. Dulce's exaggerated surprise at the fact that the artist is black parodies obvious racial stereotypes: "¡Qué pena, un muchacho y tan fino, a pesar de su color! Si cuando lo vi por primera vez, pensé que era un deportista, un basquetbolista de esos, y en cuanto habló me dio una verg➔enza porque era artista. ¡Un artista a pesar de su tamaño y su color!" (180).³⁹ The play also mentions the Cuban inclination for socializing and celebration and alludes to a jocular but satirical attitude summed up as malicia, which is similar to choteo, the national habit of mocking figures of authority and serious occasions. Manteca parodies some of these supposedly Cuban attitudes and prejudices to encourage Cubans, in this moment of self-examination, to rely on humor, tolerance, and camaraderie to survive this difficult period.

Without Soviet support, Cuba has looked hard at itself to determine the best ways it can secure a stable economy without betraying the principles of the revolution. Manteca represents this recent search for self-sufficiency in its examination of cubanía and portrayal of the desire to define Cuba's place in the world, and in its focus on the renewed responsibilities of the individual

family. The sibling's decision to raise another pig maintains their illusions of utopia and holds the family together. They do, however, brainstorm about other ways to survive. Pucho proposes the capitalist venture of selling the slaughtered pig and, with the profits, making sweets to sell outside of children's hospitals. Dulce is more creative and imagines a fifth-story garden paradise in which they would cultivate their own fruits and vegetables in large pots in their apartment. Martínez Tabares affirms that these other options show "the need in Cuban society for personal initiatives, for individual involvement in the search for paths out of the crisis and solutions that will move the country forward" (45-46). That is, in contrast to the socialist ideal of a collective revolutionary family, the state must entrust unique groupings of individual families such as that of Celestino, Pucho and Dulce's with more liberty to determine their destiny. As the dominance of the state in Cuban society weakens, yet another new Cuban family emerges, one that is more comfortable with heterogeneity and that seeks innovative solutions to difficult national problems. Furthermore, whereas plays from the earlier post-revolutionary period tend to reject any trace of pre-revolutionary values in the formation of a new socialist family, Manteca, like Vereda tropical, suggests that the traditional Cuban family performs an important function in surviving the Special Period. Moreover, Pedro's playful absurdist

techniques signal a new trend in the arts that permits more diverse explorations of the Cuban family and nation.

Conclusion

In the task of building a socialist society and molding a new citizen, the Cuban revolution has paid special attention to redesigning the institution of the family. To create a new Cuban identity that reflects a revolutionary conciencia the regime has sought to instill the family, so fundamental to socializing future generations, with revolutionary values. One method by which the government has attempted to change people's thinking is through the arts. In particular, the public arena of the theater has been an important site for schooling citizens on changing traditional Cuban values of the private sphere of the home. La emboscada (1980), by Roberto Orihuela, treats the 1960s process of transferring one's allegiance from the individual household to the new socialist family, signaling a less central role of the family in the emerging new Cuban society. Abelardo Estorino's Ni un sí ni un no (1980) shows a positive resolution to family tensions stemming from the changing gender roles in the 1970s. In these plays, the flexible use of theatrical space in the construction of the house underscores the focus on forming a new kind of Cuban family. By the early 1990s, however, the house that the revolution

built was under severe strain because the loss of Soviet support ushered in an ideological and economic crisis. The plays from this period are less didactic and more apt to use the space of the family to examine critically the status of the revolution. The new family in works such as Vereda tropical, by Joaquín Cuartas Rodríguez, and Manteca, by Alberto Pedro Torriente, cannot rely on the state to provide the services it has become accustomed to receiving. In these plays, the on-stage house has a broken-down air, and family relations are strained. Nevertheless, Cubans have turned to family networks to find inventive ways to persevere through the economic crisis.

Just as the family must become more self-sufficient, officials have granted more autonomy to the arts because they cannot afford to fund them and because they understand the importance of allowing an outlet for Cubans to express their discontent with the island's present circumstances. Since the revolution, Cuban playwrights have had to negotiate with a space of possibilities that has shifted in accordance with a rather slippery revolutionary cultural policy. Therefore, in portraying Cuban social realities, the diverse approaches of the playwrights examined in this chapter have varied in motivation and in responses from government officials and the public. Each play, however, examines how Cuban identity has changed since the revolution by emphasizing changes in the family. Che Guevara, a central

figure in the project of revolutionizing Cuba, maintained that the construction of socialism and the birth of the new Cuban was an ongoing process: "His [the new man] image is as yet unfinished; in fact, it will never be finished, for the process advances parallel to the development of new economic forms" ("New Man" 160). From La emboscada, which suggests to its audience that the bonds of the socialism are stronger than blood ties, to Manteca, which reaffirms kinship as a mode to strengthen the revolutionary family in a time of great uncertainty, the theater has performed the constantly changing identity of the Cuban family and nation.

Notes

¹ In line with Juan Gelpí's description of the paternalist tendency in Puerto Rican literature to equate the nation with the family, I use the phrase "la gran familia cubana" to refer to the nation. See chapter 1 for more on Gelpí.

² For Bourdieu, a field is a social system (political, economic, educational, cultural, etc.) structured by the relations between the positions agents occupy in the field. He defines the literary field as

an independent social universe with its own laws of functioning, its specific relations of force, its dominants and its dominated, and so forth. Put another way, to speak of 'field' is to recall that literary works are produced in a particular social universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws" (163).

In Cuba's social universe, the fields of literature and culture are inextricably linked with socialist institutions.

³ The United States expressed its displeasure with the revolutionary government by imposing a trade embargo on Cuba that continues to remain in effect today. Disaffected Cubans, in turn, emigrated to the United States. As early as 1962, 195,000 Cubans had left the island (Pérez 335).

⁴ Guevara was a medical doctor from Argentina who joined the revolution in the 1950s. After serving as minister of industry from 1961-65, Che disappeared from Cuba. He resurfaced as a guerrilla leader in Bolivia, where he was killed in 1967.

⁵ Althusser's theory on how the state achieves social control locates both the family and the theater in what he calls an ideological state apparatus. These are institutions (cultural, religious, political, etc.) that control subjects through ideology as opposed to state apparatuses such as the army, the police, prisons that operate through violence (Althusser 145).

⁶ Some statistics from a study on the Cuban family between 1970-87 reveal the inequalities of women's "double shift": men spend thirty-eight minutes per week doing household chores, whereas working women spend four hours and forty-four minutes; not surprisingly working women have two hours and fifty-nine minutes of free time per week whereas men have four hours and fifty-nine minutes (Reca Moreira et al. 132).

⁷ Between 1959 and 1974, the divorce rate rose from 8.5 percent to 30.2 percent (Smith and Padula 84). In the period between 1977 and 1981, the divorce rate continued to grow annually by 9.3 percent ("Cuba" Azicri 58).

⁸ Azicri points out that while Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin addressed the issue of family, there is no centralized Marxist

theory on the sociology of the family (187). Marxist positions vary from proposing that the institution should disappear altogether to theorizing on the development of the socialist family (which presupposes the death of the capitalist family).

⁹ I am focusing on the code's insistence on gender equality in the home. Other noteworthy sections cover divorce, consensual unions, and the rights of children.

¹⁰ Upon the breakup of the Soviet Union, the island lost about six billion dollars in annual subsidies and a very favorable trade policy.

¹¹ For example, the party has allowed religious believers into its organization and the constitutional amendments make it illegal to discriminate because of religious beliefs. The regime has also altered the constitution by dropping Marxism as the official ideology. For more on systemic changes, see "Political Changes and Social Attitudes in Cuba During the Special Period: Implications" by J. Richard Planas.

¹² Cuban literacy rates before the revolution showed great discrepancies between men and women, urban and rural regions, blacks and whites, and upper and lower classes. Pérez writes,

In 1958, almost half of all Cuban children aged six to fourteen years had received no education. Only a quarter of the

population fifteen years or older had ever attended school.

Three-quarters were either illiterate or had failed to complete primary education (358).

¹³ For more on the development of popular culture in Cuba, see Judith Weiss's article, "The Emergence of Popular Culture."

¹⁴ The Padilla affair is well known because it resulted in a letter of protest signed by important European and Latin American intellectuals. Padilla's conflict with officials began when he lost his job after writing an article favoring Guillermo Cabrera Infante's novel Tres tristes tigres (1967) over a revolutionary novel. He won a UNEAC prize in 1968 for Fuera del juego but the work was censored for its critical vision of the revolution. In 1971 he was jailed and released after signing a long statement of self-criticism that he also delivered personally at a UNEAC meeting.

¹⁵ For more on Cuban postmodernism in literature, the plastic arts, and architecture, see the July 1991 issue of Plural on postmodernity and the revolution.

¹⁶ See chapter 2 for more details on the early years of theater in the Cuban revolution.

¹⁷ State-inspired ideological orthodoxy silenced Antón Arrufat, Virgilio Piñera, and José Triana, three of Cuba's best playwrights.

¹⁸ For a book-length study of Cuban New Theater, see Rosa Ileana Boudet's Teatro Nuevo: Una respuesta.

¹⁹ Cuban critics tend to favor the works of the Teatro Nuevo movement over other "teatro de sala" plays of the same period because they believe Teatro Nuevo to be more artistically innovative. The movement, however, has provoked divergent critical responses. Like many Cuban critics, Judith Rudakoff considers Teatro Escambray

a radical departure from the strictly propagandist theatre that was performed in Cuba in the 1960s, which relied on almost exclusively on heavy didacticism. Teatro Escambray shifted the focus in Cuban popular theatre from dialectic and formalized structure to aesthetic concerns and highly theatrical, imagistic performance (81-82).

Other critics, in contrast, including Cubans who oppose the revolution and scholars from institutions outside of Cuba, would argue that the political purpose of Teatro Nuevo prohibits any of the works produced by these groups from possessing artistic value.

²⁰ Terry Palls notes that economics also motivate institutional changes. In the economic crisis of the Special Period, the performing arts must seek financial autonomy. To that end, the CNAE has outlined a marketing plan

for the new theater collectives. This leads Palls to ask whether art at the service of the revolution is nearing an end (128).

²¹ Structurally complex and philosophically dense works like Abelardo Estorino's Morir del cuento (1983) and Abilio Estévez's La verdadera culpa de Juan Clemente Zenea (1986) constitute two such examples.

²² Orihuela (b. 1950) started working with Teatro Escambray as an assistant director and playwright in 1972 and continues working with the group today. At least six of his plays form part of the group's repertory. La emboscada and Ramona are his best-known pieces.

²³ The Teatro Nuevo movement coincided in large part with the period of ideological orthodoxy now referred to as the "Quinquenio gris" (1971-76).

²⁴ This contrasts with the vision of the common people or the "folk" as the embodiment of tradition, characterized by timeless and unchanging beliefs, customs, and habits (Brecht 108).

²⁵ For more on Estorino's use of realism, see Woodyard's article: "Estorino's theatre: Customs and Conscience in Cuba" and chapter 2 of this study. Most critics mention Estorino's 1983 play Morir del cuento as the piece that signals a new, less schematic and more formally daring phase of his work as well as a new period in Cuban drama. I would argue, as does Woodyard, that we should look to his earlier play, Ni un sí ni un no, for signs

of an emerging new aesthetic.

²⁶ I am using cubanía to signify lo cubano or “cubanness.” Chapter 2 discusses this concept in more detail.

²⁷ This lengthy play includes more important life events for Él and Ella than I am able to examine here. One detail relevant to the theme of gender is the tension created by the fact that that Ella has had more education (she is a nurse studying to be a doctor) than her husband (he is an electrician frustrated by being passed up for promotion).

²⁸ The Family Code, in contrast, attempts to redirect inherited attitudes, and in fact, grants full rights and equal status to all children, whether legitimate or not.

²⁹ Cuartas (b. 1938) wrote two very successful theater pieces early in his career. Many groups staged his play Los ángeles no son dogmáticos and in 1965 he received an honorable mention from the Casa de las Américas for Llegó la gloria la gente de los Santos Inocentes. Since 1967, Cuartas has had a productive career writing for the Cuban National Radio.

³⁰ José de la Luz y Caballero was an important Cuban educator in the nineteenth century.

³¹ The regime’s tourism policy is one example of how Cuba is literally prostituting itself. Enrique Baloyra writes: “prostitution, which Cuban

officials had proudly declared extinct thirty years ago, has reappeared as a direct result of the upsurge in tourism and the increasing narrow employment opportunities" (Baloyra 35-36). Prostitution has returned in the form of jinetas, prostitutes who escort foreigners in exchange for dollars or consumer goods.

³² Variations of the word gusano refer to traitors of the revolution. Any Cuban living in exile would be a gusano from Bururú's perspective.

³³ Gladis la Jabá makes quite a return to her neighborhood. She interrupts Bururú's ceremony to erect the new bust of José de la Luz y Caballero with a raucous conga line. Gladis opens her suitcases full of gifts, and signs of North American culture such as rock music, McDonalds, and car ads magically fill the scene. As she leaves the plaza, some of the CDR members join the conga line. Given Bururú's inclination for fantasies, it is unlikely that the rest of the crowd sees the same splashy scene she did.

³⁴ Pedro (b. 1954) may have had better luck with producing his play than Cuartas because of his long involvement in revolutionary theater. After graduating from the Escuela Nacional de Arte, he participated in two groups involved in the Teatro Nuevo movement, Cubana de Acero and Teatro Político Bertolt Brecht. He is now a member of one of Cuba's strongest theater collectives, Teatro Mío, directed by his wife, Miriam Lezcano. He has

written over five plays including two hits from the 1980s, Tema para Verónica and Weekend en Bahía. Pedro has also acted in the theater, and in television and film.

³⁵ In addition to the rusty cans and broken objects mentioned in the stage directions, in the performance Boudet describes, the apartment also contains a dusty bust of Lenin and remnants of sets from productions of Marxist plays (xx). Thus, this production situates the play much more specifically within the post-Soviet context.

³⁶ Pedro states that he was unfamiliar with Triana's play when he wrote Manteca and that "What's going on is a coincidence with Cuban reality, and in that sense Triana has the patent because I would in any case be demonstrating in another way what he has already demonstrated" ("Theater" 67). The fact that Pedro is not familiar with Triana's work is a revealing statement on censorship in revolutionary Cuba.

³⁷ Informal methods of survival, meaning those outside the system, have thrived in Cuba since the late 1980s. Damian Fernández affirms that popular words and phrases such "inventársela, sociolismo, resolver, buscársela, pinche, mayimbe, and socio express the ingenious ways that Cubans find to cope with the situation of shortages and adversity" (72). Sociolismo is a network of socios, or friends who find room for maneuver

within socialist system. This phenomenon will certainly influence the role of the family in contemporary Cuba.

³⁸ The revolution cannot afford to exclude members of the Cuban family. This is evident in the fact that the regime has allowed exiles to visit in order to gain United States dollars.

³⁹ A passage in Pucho's novel also parodies the stereotype of the eroticized black male (176). The oniric scene described by Pucho fits the white phobia of black sexual potency described by Franz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks (157-209).

Conclusion:

The Repeating Family: The Performance of Caribbean Identity

The field of Caribbean studies has shown a recent proliferation of university programs that investigate this world area, of academicians who define themselves as Caribbeanists, and of new conferences, associations, journals, and internet fora devoted to examining the social, political, economic, and cultural processes of this region. Many scholars have focused on the cultural specificity of the Caribbean, hoping to locate and illuminate the elusive qualities of antillanidad, or Caribbeanness. Roberto González Echevarría, among others, has argued that the sugar industry and the resultant development of a slave-based plantation society in the nineteenth century was the central factor that created a regional unity separate from the rest of Latin America (2).¹ Certainly the insular and maritime condition of its geography, the zone's multiplicity of races, cultures, and languages, its proximity to the United States, and the persistence of colonialism are other factors that make the area distinctive. The subject of Hispanic Caribbean writing, however, traditionally has been subsumed under the study of Latin American letters, which has downplayed its regional characteristics and connections with other Antillean literatures.

In today's context of cultural globalization, massive (im)migration, and transnationalism, it has become increasingly important for scholars not only to focus on the Caribbean as a distinct territory that experiences these trends in a unique way, but also to employ the new approaches to investigating collective identity required by this worldwide trend. As a result, in the 1990s, new literary and cultural studies have emerged that address Caribbean literature and culture from comparative, regionalist, and multidisciplinary perspectives. The 1994 publication of A History of Literature in the Caribbean, edited by A. James Arnold, constitutes the first literary history of the Caribbean archipelago and rimlands, and articulates the literary unity of the area without homogenizing important differences in national experience. Likewise, Silvio Torres-Saillant's Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Culture (1997) lays the groundwork for a regional theory of Caribbean literature. Michael Dash, in his Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context (1998), explicitly departs from earlier single author or nation-based studies and conceptualizes the region as a whole.² Because they cross national and linguistic borders in their analysis of Caribbean fiction, a pan-Caribbean stance also informs Simon Gikandi's Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature (1992) and Ileana Rodríguez's House/Garden/Nation: Space, Gender, and Ethnicity in

Postcolonial Latin American Literatures by Women (1994).

Along with the growing transcultural and regionalist explorations of Caribbean literature and identity, scholars in the social sciences and in literature and the arts have increasingly turned to the human activity of performance as the object of their study. At the University of Puerto Rico, for example, the 1997 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Faculty Institute explored performance and text in the Caribbean. In 1999, another event held at the University of Puerto Rico focused on performance, a symposium sponsored by the Rockefeller-funded Caribbean 2000 project entitled "Cultural (con)Fusion?: TransCaribbean Performance and Performers." In spite of these developments, book-length studies on Caribbean literature and culture that focus on theater and performance have yet to appear. Antonio Benítez Rojo's The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective (1996), however, emphasizes the unity of Caribbean culture by highlighting its performative, or "spectacular" character. For Benítez Rojo, there is a certain way of being Caribbean that is performed in texts and cultural practices (19-21). He views the region as a unique and chaotic sociocultural system in which a Caribbean "island" with repetitive patterns and similar dynamics emerges and embodies not one island in particular, but, rather, the cultural paradoxes of the whole

archipelago (3-4).

My study has identified a repeating family in contemporary Cuban and Puerto Rican drama that not only illustrates special characteristics of Caribbeanness, but also allows us to examine the unique role of theater in the interpretation and production of national culture. As with Benítez Rojo's theory of the repeating island, from the repeat performances of the individual family in different nations and historical contexts, we can discern a larger Caribbean family that embodies important characteristics of a regional identity. That is, although the Cuban and Puerto Rican theatrical representations of the family examined in this study are technically and thematically diverse, they resemble each other in important ways that underscore cultural commonalities. In each dramatic work I have analyzed, the family serves to contribute to on-going debates on national self-definition in Cuba and Puerto Rico. In these plays, the varieties of relationships implicit in the family unit--between husbands and wives and parents and children, and among siblings--play out diverse positions on Cuban and Puerto Rican national and cultural identity. Playwrights further problematize these positions on national community by staging families of different races, classes, and compositions. The family's capacity to include multiple subject positions as well as the collaborative nature of performance lend themselves

to probing issues of collective identity. The use of the domestic sphere in representing the nation is particularly effective in raising the audience's consciousness of how certain visions of the nation are promoted or repressed. The connections formed between the national family represented on stage and the audience seated in the national house--the theater--involve groups of citizens in the cultural politics of representation.

This study's contextualized analysis of the phenomenon of the repeating family is useful in developing a regionalist approach to Caribbean literature and culture, and more particularly, in exploring how images of the nation are enacted on stage. The sixteen family plays examined in the preceding chapters highlight the self-reflective and performative character of cubanía and puertorriqueñidad. Imagining the nation in Puerto Rican and Cuban literature has long been a dominant theme, but the repeated appeal to the family in the dramatic tradition of these islands emphasizes how the very scrutiny of national selfhood has come to constitute a Puerto Rican and Cuban cultural idiosyncrasy. That is, the discourse of family, and by extension, of wider communities--national or regional--forms part of the experience of being Caribbean. Furthermore, the distinctive aspects of theater highlight the historicity of culture, and its construction in a certain place and time. In his study on cultural identity in African, African-American, and

Caribbean drama, Tejumola Olaniyan writes, “Identity in the performative conception is a *process* marked by endless negotiations” (31). The framework of theatrical performance underscores the performative qualities of identity, for the set, props, costumes, and roles played by actors all point to how identities are formed in given contexts rather than born pre-constituted and timeless. Thus, while many of the issues examined in family plays remain the same over time, because the performance event can never be repeated exactly the same, performance always highlights “the tension between a given form or context from the past and the inevitable adjustments of an ever changing present [. . .]” (Carlson 195). Further, by focusing on two crucial moments in the production of family plays, this study has shown how concepts of nation and identity shift over time.

In the 1950s, plays by Francisco Arriví, René Marqués, and Myrna Casas manifest a preoccupation with Puerto Rico’s changing national character under the newly adopted political status, the commonwealth. Their family plays enact a historically pivotal moment that signifies displacement for some groups, and for others, the forging of a more inclusive Puerto Rican national family. The many failed love matches in these plays suggest that the island’s nation-building romance never produced a hegemonic vision of the Puerto Rican people. The characters portray dissenting views on what

should constitute puertorriqueñidad, and in some metatheatrical scenes, imagine alternative identities to those available for performance in the world created by the play and in the cultural field of the 1950s. In other words, following Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, only certain constructions of identity play out within the web of interests (social agents and institutions) that constitute the cultural-literary field of a given historical moment. While Puerto Rican drama in the 1950s is primarily realist in its theatrical form, the metatheatrical moments in these plays signal subsequent dramatic methods for exploring national selfhood, prefiguring the theatrical portrayal of the Puerto Rican family in the 1980s and 1990s. In Cuban plays from the 1950s, in contrast, there is more consensus on national identity in the overwhelming dissatisfaction with what Cuba had become since its independence. The family quarrel in this country plays out as a generational conflict in plays by Rolando Ferrer, Virgilio Piñera, José Triana, and Abelardo Estorino. The younger generation portrayed in these works seeks to create an autonomous nation and a more just society, a task their parents' generation had failed to achieve during the Cuban Republic. In these works, the children desire to create a different national experience by forging a new kind of national family.

In both countries, the dramatic action of the plays from the 1950s

unfolds in the quintessential family space—the house—which stands for the space of the nation. In Puerto Rican theater, the physical state of the home and the characters' perceptions of their place within it highlights conflicting interpretations of national community. In Cuba, dismantling the house embodies the act of rebelling against parental authority, and suggests the need to reconstruct the institution of the family as a form of rebuilding the nation itself. The performance of national and cultural identity on stage before the live audience implicit in these works adds a special dimension to the national debate on cultural self-definition. As Martin Esslin argues, the "theater is the place where a nation thinks in public in front of itself" (101). The image of the house, in particular, links family and nation and invites the spectator to ponder issues of membership. That is, in what diverse ways will the audience identify with the vision of the national household dramatized on stage? For the duration of the play's performance, the theatrical space of the family housed on stage merges with the space of the auditorium to form an imagined community that involves the audience in the problems posed by the play.

While Cuban and Puerto Rican theater of the 1950s formed part of the realist tradition of creating on-stage worlds that (re)present dominant ideologies as natural and unchanging, the mutable nature of theatrical

performance itself suggests a plurality of worldviews. Thus Cuban and Puerto Rican works from the 1980s and 1990s, through metatheater and other anti-illusionist techniques, have called into question nationalist discourses by proposing that identities are constructed and therefore subject to change. Consequently, while historical circumstances have made the debate on identity equally urgent in the 1980s and 1990s, playwrights have been more interested in examining the processes that form various national communities than in defining a particular fixed view of the nation. Through the family play, then, we can perceive historical changes in how intellectuals have conceptualized collective identity. By reworking identity stories from the 1950s, Puerto Rican works by Roberto Ramos-Perea and Antonio García del Toro reveal the necessity of paradigms beyond the discourses of colonialism and nationalism from which to investigate nation and identity. In plays by Luis Rafael Sánchez and Myrna Casas, families leave the home and display themselves on actual stages. This performance context presents families as mobile and their members as forever reinventing their roles within them. These plays take into account the many subjectivities that form a community and offer a variety of new perspectives on formerly accepted essentialist constructions of the nation.

In a similar vein, the private space of the family in Cuban plays of the

1980s and 1990s has entered the national stage, because with the revolution, debates about the family have become part of the public domain. In these works, the family has lost its private and individual character, for the revolution has entered the home in order to ideologically orient the bourgeois family towards the larger family of socialism. I have argued that plays from the 1950s through the mid-1960s portray a self-conscious awareness about cubanía as a process. That is, by challenging the lifestyles created by their parents' generation, the children in the plays from this period show their awareness of the alterable condition of Cuban identity. It is no surprise, therefore, that the revolution's endeavors to mold yet another national identity have characterized the plays of the post-1959 period. The deliberate creation of a revolutionary society has emphasized the performative character of cubanía. In the 1980s, plays by Abelardo Estorino and Roberto Orihuela contribute to discussions about a new Cuban family by representing socialist family values and the conflicts that arise between pre-revolutionary traditions and new ones. By the early 1990s, however, plays enact the erosion of the new family under the precarious social and economic conditions in Post-Soviet Cuba and propose that the family in contemporary Cuba is really a palimpsest of new and old models. The plays imply, in fact, that the national family has survived precisely because Cubans have inventively synthesized

old and new traditions.

Examining two important historical moments in the production of family plays in Cuba and Puerto Rico helps us chart how approaches to identity shift over time. In plays from the 1980s and 1990s, the myth of a unified national family has given way to a view that there is no identifiable, single Cuban or Puerto Rican cultural identity. The persistence of the family image, however, indicates a continued desire to imagine a collective identity of shared experiences. Through the connection between family and nation, this study has demonstrated that drama not only articulates identity debates, but also precipitates them. The plays examined here show theater to be a special space, separate from the real world but deeply implicated in it, where the performance of discourses can parallel, invert, expose, and compensate for the constructions of identity that dominate in intellectual debates about national culture.

This study on how Cuban and Puerto Rican family drama performs the nation opens questions that lead to further avenues of investigation. While family has remained a central metaphor for national community, globalization and the networks created by mass communication and transnational capitalism are altering concepts of family and nation. For example, the migratory experience has been a fundamental to the issue of

self-definition for both Puerto Rico and Cuba. Like their island counterparts, the overwhelming theme for Cuban-American and Puerto Rican-American playwrights such as Manuel Martín Jr., Eduardo Gallardo, and Dolores Prida has been the family. How national boundaries must be remapped in order to include these groups in the imagined community and in what ways the image of the family changes as it embodies transnational identities constitute important areas to examine. In addition, as with the Hispanic playwrights, plays by Caribbean Anglophone writers such as Derek Walcott, Errol Hill, and Errol John also work out problems of identity through the theme of family. This coincidence supports my argument that the family represents a particularly rich site for the exploration of identity, and it suggests the potentiality of further developing regional Caribbean studies. This project not only has implications for the theater's role in staging national and regional identities, but also lays the groundwork for a multigeneric study of the family in Caribbean literature. From the nineteenth century to the present, many important poetic and narrative works in the Hispanic Caribbean have centered on the family, and a good number of them reveal a worldview not limited by national boundaries. This study has demonstrated how the family provides a productive space from which to examine national identities and it also suggests the family's potential for

embodying regional and transcultural identities. The analysis of family and identity in other countries of the Caribbean region and in other literary genres, then, may constitute a means of identifying a literary discourse that is a particular expression of a socio-economic, political, and cultural Caribbean condition.

Notes

¹ González Echeverría explores the fundamental role of slavery in the creation of Caribbean culture in his introduction to a special issue of Latin American Literary Review on literature of the Hispanic Caribbean. See also Miguel Barne's essay included in this issue: "The Culture that Sugar Created."

² Dash's book forms part of the series New World Studies published by the University of Virginia Press. As the title suggests, the series focuses on the Americas and publishes interdisciplinary studies that examine different nations and cultures.

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