

A Century Of Theatre In Cuba An Introduction To Cuban Theatre



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CubaTeatro ... from the Alhambra to the Pocket Theatres

After a steady flowering through the 19th Century, Cuban theatre suffered, during the first decades of the 20th Century, an opposite evolution. To that rich century, during which theatrical activity bloomed amazingly for such a small country, and which was enriched by the work of playwrights like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, José Jacinto Milanés, José María de Heredia and Joaquín Lorenzo Luaces, followed a period of sterility which lasted until the 30's. In those decades, there was only one institution that dominated the Cuban Theatre: The Alhambra Theatre (1900-1935).

Inheriting the "buffo" tradition of the 19th Century, this theatre, at Consulado and Virtudes Streets in Havana, developed a great popular following due to a populist aesthetic, a facile "Cubanism", texts with sexual double meanings and a superficial political satire. Its success, it has to be said, was not due to the librettists - we cannot call them authors- but mainly to the musicians and the actors involved. Around the middle of the 20's, a musical genre became very popular: the Cuban Zarzuela. "Cecilia Valdés", "Amalia Batista", "Rosa La China", "El Cafetal", and "Maria La O" are some of those works, and they are performed in Cuba even now. In opposition to the popular theatre exemplified by the Alhambra, there was the work of José Antonio Ramos (1885-1946), a playwright who created profoundly social plays, in which he touched upon some of the evils that beset the young republic. But Ramos was the exception, an isolated case who failed to establish a true contact with the audience of his period.

A year after the Alhambra roof and part of the orchestra collapsed, Luis A. Baralt founded La Cueva, an experimental theatre company, which took the next step in the development of the Cuban Theatre. It lasted only 8 months, but its example created, after 1938, a series of groups and institutions like Patronato del Teatro, ADAD, Teatro Popular, Las Máscaras, Prometeo, Farseros, and the University Theatre, and thus the modernization of the Cuban Theatre began to take place. The audiences were meager and the government indifferent. There was little support, and besides, the inroads made by radio and television, which offered steady salaries (sometimes quite generous) took its toll when actors, directors and technicians abandoned the stage for more lucrative positions.

At that time, to work in the theatre was an heroic enterprise. And it is because of that heroic artistic devotion that theatre activity grew: never before there had been so many groups, (even though some were short-lived); never before had there been so many premieres and of such quality (even though the schedule consisted of one performance only and the audiences were small).

It is at this time that playwrights started writing with certain constancy and persistence. Some had their plays published in magazines (or by themselves) or received prizes at competitions sponsored by the Ministry of Education or institutions like ADAD, Patronato del Teatro and Prometeo. The lucky ones saw their work staged, even if for

only one night. Nora Badía, Eduardo Manet, Raúl González de Cascorro, René Buch, Ramón Ferreira and Flora Díaz Parrado were some of the new playwrights.

But the most important figures were Virgilio Piñera, Carlos Felipe and Rolando Ferrer (1925-1976). "Electra Garrigó" by Piñera, "El Chino" by Felipe and Ferrer's "Lila, La Mariposa" became examples of what Cuban dramatic literature could be. New directors also appeared: Francisco Morin, Andrés Castro, Adolfo de Luis; some of whose stagings are still well remembered.

In 1954, an unusual fact changed the direction of our theatre. In a small (and improvised) space in Havana, Sartre's "The Respectful Prostitute" was staged, arena style - and amazingly ran for 102 performances. This meant daily performances, which was what was needed to improve the quality, the professionalism and the craftsmanship of theatre artists. That was the beginning of what is known in Cuba as the period of the pocket theatres (Salitas) which lasted from 1954 to 1958, when a great number of small theatres opened in Havana. This activity was so important, that in 1957 the Asociación de Salas Teatrales was founded. At the end of this period, there were in Havana ten small theatres with 1,900 seats and an audience of about 10,000. At first, performances took place daily, except Thursdays. But later, (more rationally), the schedule was fixed from Thursday to Sunday.

The repertory was very eclectic: European avant-garde plays, Spanish melodramas, sentimental comedies and British and Broadway successes. Cuban plays were not as numerous but new playwrights did appear: Fermín Borges, Anton Arrufat and Matías Montes Huidobro, to name a few.

CubaTeatro ... A Remarkable Decade

Virgilio Piñera, this century's most important Cuban playwright, described what the Revolution meant to the Cuban Theatre as follows:

"After the small pocket theatres, we were able to perform on big stages; out of productions that lasted only one night, we went to professional stagings that ran for weeks at most theatres; from humble stagings we went to ambitious stagings; authors, that before could not publish their plays, saw the state publishing their work and paying them copyright. Finally, what had never been done before was possible: the playwrights were paid when their plays were produced. Simultaneously, theatre groups were founded (with professional actors), as well as Theatre Brigades, Schools for Arts Instructors and amateur groups."

The gains that Piñera mentions created a playwrighting explosion that characterized the first period of the Revolution. Numbers speak clearly; in the sixties, nearly 400 Cuban plays were premiered. In 1959, 48 Cuban plays had been produced and that total was higher than what had been presented from 1952 to 1958. Stylistically, the plays produced in the first five years could be grouped under two different styles. On one side, realistic

playwrights: Abelardo Estorino ("El Robo del Cochino," "La Casa Vieja"), Manuel Reguera Saumell ("Recuerdos de Tulipa," "Sara en el Traspatio"), José R. Brene ("Santa Camila de la Habana Vieja," "El Gallo de San Isidro"), Héctor Quintero ("Contigo Pan y Cebolla," "El Premio Flaco"). On the other, experimental writers: José Triana ("Medea en el Espejo," "El Parque de la Fraternidad"), Antón Arrufat ("El Vivo al Pollo," "La Zona Cero"), and Nicolás Dorr ("Las Pericas," "El Palacio de los Cartones").

Also new plays by Virgilio Piñera and Carlos Felipe, were presented. Piñera wrote "El Flaco y el Gordo", "El Filántropo" and "Aire Frio", perhaps one of the greatest achievements in the Cuban Theatre of this century. Felipe premiered "Requiem para Yarini", in which he retells the story of a famous Havana pimp. All these plays were concerned with exposing past evils and demanding retribution from the immediate past. Nevertheless the Revolution didn't appear on the stage.

This avoidance, which also appeared in fiction and films of the period was the result, according to Spanish writer, José Manuel Caballero Bonald, of "the peremptory need to come to grips with a world that has been abolished, accusing it morally from the point of view of a new society beginning to be formed".

From 1965 to 1970, new types of expression appeared and the stage reflected the artistic and ideological struggles that were taking place in the country. Experimental theatre gained ground and, with differing success, the artists tried to adapt fashionable techniques of the period to the Cuban reality: theatre of the absurd, theatre of cruelty, ritual and ludistic stagings, happenings, non-verbal plays, improvisations, etc. That is, all the things that at that time were being tried all over Latin America.

Some stagings could be mentioned: "Collage USA" and "Los Juegos Santos" by José Santos Marrero; "Imágenes de Macondo" and "Juego para Actores" by Guido González del Valle; "En la parada llueve" by David Camps; "La vuelta a la manzana" by René Ariza; "Otra vez Jehová con el cuento de Sodoma", "Vade Retro" and "La toma de la Habana por los ingleses" by José Milián. In some instances, what was achieved was an imitation of Western and American models. But not always. Some of those texts have been recovered and have proved their value. On the other hand, Cubans cannot sustain the opinion that those shows "robbed Cuban theatre of ideology", as some said. The ideological polemics that some of those plays caused cannot be forgotten.

Milián and Camps were critical of aspects of Cuban history but this did not please the culture commissars. Besides, it was a process that never reached fruition, since it was brutally aborted. (It would be adventurous and even unjust to reach a final conclusion). It must also be taken into account, how isolated was the theatre movement of that decade.

There were very few Cuban companies that went abroad, and as few foreign companies visited Cuba. Most of the time, Cuban theatre people based their work on books, or on whatever material they could get their hands on. Three plays from those years merit a special mention: "La noche de los asesinos", by José Triana, staged in more than thirty countries and Piñera's, "Dos viejos pánicos", a play that had to wait twenty-two years to

be seen in Cuba. The third play, Eugenio Hernández Espinosa's "María Antonia", delved into the African roots of our "mestizo" nationality.

CubaTeatro ... Five Years that Lasted Ten Years

At the end of the sixties, ideology was a battle front. Some works were deemed, according to UNEAC (Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba), "too alienated for the aims of our revolution". At that time, the US had increased its hostility against Cuba and the whole country was on the grip of what was called the "Revolutionary Offensive". Everything was ready for a crisis that was to explode not too long after.

In 1968, during the UNEAC's literary competition, in whose jury sat some foreign intellectuals, awards were given in drama and poetry to two entries that according to the UNEAC's directors "offered conflictive points in a political context that was not taken into account when the winners were selected. The winning dramatic entry ("Los siete contra Tebas" by Anton Arrufat) and the book of poetry ("Fuera del juego" by Heberto Padilla) were allowed to be published, but with an addendum in which UNEAC made it clear that it did not agree with the decision of the jury. The censors' powerful imagination saw points of contact between the plot of Arrufat's play and the US propaganda of the time. Thus "Los siete contra Tebas" became an accursed play and has never been seen in Cuba or re-published.

Soon, Stalinistic obscurantism, cultural xenophobia and repression were let loose on the island. In April 1971 the first National Congress of Education and Culture took place; all discussions were directed by Fidel Castro himself. His closing speech was an irate attack on Latin American and European intellectuals, who had sent him a famous letter of protest over the Padilla case. But the resolutions approved by the Congress were implemented forewith, and this action had a nefarious effect on Cuban culture. The resolutions dealt methodically and in detail with matters like the family; the function of teachers and their duties; youth and fashion; religion; the media; art and literature; and sexual education. On this last item, insistence was made about the antisocial character of homosexuality, and approval was granted to remove "homosexuals from positions of direct relationship with our youth, in matters artistic and cultural". The Congress adopted a final declaration decrying "the rotten and decadent societies of Western Europe and the United States", while backing "legitimate and combative cultural expressions from Latin America, Asia and Africa."

Thus, all excesses were legalized and granted carte blanche. This period is known as the Grey Five Years, but its mediocrity seeped through the whole decade of the 70's. Putting the Congress resolution in action, many artists and intellectuals lost their jobs and were given others where their "evil" influences couldn't afflict the young. Many actors, directors, designers and playwrights were the victims of this "cleaning campaign". As if under a Nazi regime, scenery and costume warehouses were destroyed and a list was made of forbidden plays and authors. Some groups were disbanded (Ocuje and La

Rueda) and simultaneously (in 1973) three new groups were created: Latin American Popular Theatre, Cuban Theatre and Bertolt Brecht Political Theatre. This last named was the signpost of the new theatrical policy, and it illustrated eloquently what those dark years of mediocrity and opportunism had brought forth.

The audiences deserted the theatre. The repertory consisted of co-productions with the USSR, Bulgaria and East Germany; one with Hungary was begun but was forbidden before the premiere. Some Cuban plays were mounted by authors like Gerardo Fernández, Reinaldo Hernández Savio, and Raúl Macías. Paco Alfonso's "Cañaveral" was exhumed. This play, written in the 50's, was the closest that Cuban drama had ever been to Socialist Realism. Very few of the plays written in those years can be taken into account today. In his closing speech, President Castro triumphantly said that the fruits of the Congress, ("the best, the highest") would be seen in 15, 20, 24, or 30 years from then. He was mistaken: in theatre, as in other artistic expressions, it was not necessary to wait that long.

CubaTeatro ... The New Theatre. A Necessary Injection

Even though it all started at the end of 1968, the 70's was to become, as a whole, the most significant decade and exerted a ripe influence in theatrical crafts - not only in the 70's but also in the first half of the 80's. It became known as Teatro Nuevo, a name imposed on it by some cultural bureaucrats.

It began in November 1968 when twelve professional theatre artists left Havana to start a new experimental group called Grupo de Teatro Escambray. They were part of a group that during the National Seminary on Theatre of 1967 were not satisfied with the routine that Cuban theatre had fallen into. They considered the usual repertory as something that "only rarely dealt with the essentials of the country's transformation". With more unanswered questions than certitudes, they began working at Escambray, a mountainous region in the center of the Island. They established contact with the unknown audiences that they were now dealing with. Living communally, little by little, they learned more about the area and its inhabitants, and this led to an artistic method based on their research.

After two years, they had gathered enough material and Alibio Paz, a member of the group, decided to write a play. That's how "La Vitrina" (1971) was created - one of the shows that defined the collective nature of the New Theatre and the appearance of one of the most interesting playwrights of the 70's. "La Vitrina" also identified some of the styles that Teatro Escambray was to use in following productions. Thus, they dealt exclusively with contemporary themes; used debate as part of the dramatic structure; refused to find solutions to the problems put on stage; and re-elaborated and revived the countryside traditions and cultural attitudes.

Other plays followed: "El Rentista" and "El Paraíso Recobrado", by Paz; "Las Provisiones" by Sergio González; "Ramona" and "La Emboscada" by Roberto Orihuela; and "El Juicio" by Gilda Hernández, the most experimental of all since it required the audience to play an active part in the play. Some original founders left, new actors came in. Herminia Sánchez and Manolo Terraza, went back to Havana and founded Teatro de Participación Popular. Their idea was to incorporate Escambray's methods and to use non-professional actors (in one instance, the cast was formed by dock-workers). An actress, Flora Lauten went to La Yaya, a recently inaugurated community, and with some of her neighbors created a theatrical collective that produced several shows.

After 10 years of open repertory, Conjunto Dramático de Oriente felt dissatisfactions similar to those that had created Escambray. They tried to find answers, so they mounted: "Los Cuenteros"; "Amerindias" and "El Macho y el Guanajo". These investigations and searches led those artists to "relaciones", an old and forgotten popular manifestation that mixed music, carnival, theatre and dance. Their first work in this renewed style was "El 23 se rompe el corajo" (1973), and after that, "De cómo Santiago Apóstol puso los pies en la tierra" (1974), a brilliant spectacle that had the fascination of a Carnival parade. This group, called later Cabildo Teatral de Santiago, premiered other plays ("Juan Jaragán y los Diablos", "Cefi y la Muerte", "Sobre Romeo y Julieta", "La Paciencia del espejo") that were not so good. One had to wait until 1990, when "Baroko" brought back the level of previous achievements. A schismatic section of the Santiago group created "La Teatrova" in 1974, whose aim was to find "spoken-sung words that would satisfy the actor's needs, but differently than in the lyric theatre". Plays like "Pabobo", "La Sierra Chiquita" and "Los Zapaticos de Rosa", proved that a new style, imbued by poetry, sensitivity and simple theatricality, had finally arrived.

All these different experiences had common objectives: the finding of original roads for our theatre, the willingness to participate actively in the social process, the search for a new type of audience, the dealing with new themes and the use of new expressive resources and new types of communication.

After a 1977 meeting, organized by the Theatre and Dance Directory (a sector of the newly created Ministry of Culture) some functionaries proclaimed the existence of a so called Teatro Nuevo (New Theatre). A decision was taken to protect it and enlarge it, so three new groups were founded: Cubana de Acero, dedicated to plays about the working class; Teatro Juvenil Pinos Nuevos, that would deal with the problems of young people; and Colectivo Teatral Granma, whose repertory was to reflect the historical and cultural traditions of the Bayamo region. It's easy to understand why officials granted such enthusiastic backing to the Teatro Nuevo: it was tempting to be able to show (at last) plays which expressed the revolutionary spirit, freed from what Ernesto Guevara called the "original sin". That explains the unmeasured support. But because of this support, divisions within the theatre movement were created, since existing sectors of the theatre were ignored in favor of this new privileged class.

Not taking into consideration the paternalism and overvaluation given to Teatro Nuevo, one must agree that the new groups gave the Cuban theatre a much needed boost and its beneficial results influenced the metier of the whole theatre. In the first place, it gave priority to social problems; and in its search for a different repertory, the playwrights were to gain. There were new texts presented by different groups, and indirectly, they inspired other theatres to produce new texts. (That was the case of Estorino's "Ni un sí ni un no"). Also, these plays brought to the stage a new type of characters: working people, students, farmers, people involved in a society in the midst of change. Besides, they stimulated the critical spirit that can be seen in the Cuban plays written in the 80's and 90's.

CubaTeatro ... Plurality During the 90's

There had never been an official rectification about the excesses and mistakes that took place after 1977. But despite that, a less dogmatic period opened up. The Thesis about Artistic and Literary Culture, approved during the First Congress of the Communist Party (1975), used more moderate language than the incendiary resolutions of the sadly famous Congress on Education and Culture. Cuban theatre began a slow process of recuperation. Gradually, and sometimes not at the needed speed, most of the discharged artists could again practice their profession. Unfortunately, this sense of justice came too late for some writers. Some had died (Piñera) or gone into exile (Triana, Ariza). With these reappearances and absences, the Cuban Theatre began to look differently in the complex panorama of the last two decades of this century.

In the 80's different tendencies co-existed, based on material gains from the 70's. But paradoxically, the artistic results did not satisfy what was to be expected after so many revolutionary years. Nevertheless a new conscience and auto-criticism was created and against state control, repetitiousness and routine, some effort was made to come out of the previous "impasse". A new generation of actors and playwrights, of critics and investigators, formed by the Instituto Superior de Arte (who found their voices in "Tablas" Magazine and "La Maza" bulletin) contributed to this new attitude. In the 80's Cuban writers predominated. And the plays, under the influence of Teatro Nuevo, used the reality of the country, recreating it, but without complaisance and with a strong critical sense.

This had both positive and negative gains. It brought new plots and characters and promoted debates over polemic situations like the social disorientation of Cuban youth, the survival of marginal ethics, the difficulty which women found when they wanted to join the work force, the obstacles that delayed the appearance of a new morality. Thus Cuban theatre could extend its activities, from domestic and family sites to labor centers and schools. By 1984, a banalization of themes and critical approaches could be noticed. Flat naturalism, schematic formulae and "popular" language were preferred over more modern and complex forms. The search for audience appreciation was a double edged

sword, since it mistook what is "populist" for what is "popular", and bad taste, vulgarity and triviality were the rule.

There was a reaction. Some plays started to investigate the past and create a more poetic approach to reality. Also deeper philosophical density was brought into play and more flexible dramatic structures were sought. Examples include "Morir del Cuento", and "La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de José Jacinto Milanés" by Estorino, two of the most important texts in contemporary Cuban theatre. Influenced by the last named play, Abilio Estevez wrote "La verdadera culpa de Juan Clemente Zenea", and after this, Gerardo Fullea León added "Plácido"; Tomás González, "Delirios y visiones de José Jacinto Milanés" and Carlos Celdrán, "Catálogo de Señales". They all dealt with Cuban literary history, and they allowed the playwrights to reflect on the relationship between the artist and his society, and the conflict between what is existential and what is historical.

One of the clues to a more open attitude at the beginning of the 80's was the recovery of several "condemned" plays that had not been staged before. So "Juana de Bekiel, más conocida por su nombre de religiosa de Madre Juana de los Angeles", by Milián and "La dolorosa historia..." by Estorino were performed. (But "Los siete contra Tebas" by Arrufat was not given the green light. It still has not been produced in Cuba). Of particular importance has been the rescue of Tomás González and Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, two writers whose appearance in the 60's was brilliant and who suffered a cruel setback in the 70's. In 1985, González premiered "Los Juegos de la Trastienda", using Grotowski's techniques developed by Los Doce in Cuba, a group to which he belonged. Hernández Espinosa finally saw staged some of the work he had kept to himself for thirteen years: "Odeni, el cazador", "Oba y Shango" and "Mi socio Manolo" (but "Calixta Comité" remains forbidden to the present day).

It also must be pointed out how the sense of the individual is rescued in plays like "Accidente" by Roberto Orihuela, "Calle Cuba 80 bajo la lluvia" by Rafael González, "Aguiles y la tortuga" by Reinaldo Montero and "Tren hacia la dicha" by Amado del Pino, a very important fact in a society where all experiences have obligatorily to be approved by the official gaze and the masses. The monologue was revitalized in 1988 when the first festival of monologues took place. There have been ten more festivals, the last one in March 1999.

In 1992, a group of young graduates from Instituto Superior de Arte, under the direction of Flora Lauten, presented a very original staging of "La emboscada" to which followed "Electra Garrigó" and "Lila, la mariposa". Six years later, Victor Varela, a graduate from Instituto Superior de Arte, created outside of traditional venues, "La Cuarta pared", an experimental piece with only gestures and guttural sounds. It was presented first at a minuscule apartment and later at the Teatro Nacional. It was the most important theatre event of the year. Something similar happened in 1999 with a trilogy formed by "The Glass Menagerie", "Tea and Sympathy" and "A Streetcar named Desire" which introduced Carlos Díaz, a new talented, transgressive director. It was under these circumstances

that the work of a new generation began, a generation that would dominate Cuban Theatre in the 90's.

Their styles consciously avoided what their teachers had taught them. It was a healthy response to the agony of a dying theatre, that had been under the sway of political efficacy, static ideological schemes and a realism (whether socialist or bourgeois) which had become a wrongly conceived naturalism. All this new creativity was a result of the changes brought about by the Ministry of Culture organizing the theatrical life of the country.

1989 saw the end of the rigid organization of theaters with resident companies (a type of structure which became an obstacle for creativity) and a new type of projects was advanced based on the flexibility by which artists could join forces to create an artistic project. Young people then joined established theatres, and in a few years they gave excellent proof of their talent.

Is this development an inevitable and systematic patricide that art must do to achieve renewal and development? In some measure, yes. But there is also a will to establish a bridge to the experimental attitude of the late 60's, more as a continuity than as a nostalgic look at the past.

Then, the revalorization of rituals and the experiences advanced by Los Doce took place; Artaud and Grotowsky came back; minimalism was used; as also dance-theatre and the anthropological theatre of Eugenio Barba: the same influential figures that had been considered decadent and harmful by cultural commissars some years before. Those bureaucrats had wanted only orthodox realism.

The evolution that has taken place in the last ten years of this century includes young directors like Carlos Díaz, Julio César Ramírez, Carlos Celdrán, Víctor Varela, Nelda Castillo, Rubén Darío Salazar, Raúl Martín, Mario Morales, Joel Sáez y José Oriol, who have joined active veteran directors like Vicente Revuelta, Berta Martínez, Flora Lauten, René Fernández and Roberto Blanco. The same has happened among authors. Established masters like Estorino ("Parece blanca", "Vagos rumores"), Hernández Espinosa ("Alto riesgo", "Oshún y las cotorras") and Milián ("Si vas a comer, espera por Virgilio") are very active. Virgilio Piñera has been rediscovered by the young and they have mounted several of his works ("El No", "La niñita querida") and revived others ("La Boda", "El Flaco y el Gordo"). Among the new authors there are: Abilio Estévez, Alberto Pedro Torriente, Joel Cano, Ricardo Muñoz, Reinaldo Montero, Raúl Alfonso.

In a period of electrical blackouts and lack of materials due to the "special period" Cuba is going through, the Cuban Theatre, in the words of critic Vivian Martínez Tabares, "maintains a flame that moves all the time in the area of ideas; since there is little space in newspapers, the theatre offers a terrain wherein ethic discussion is possible and which artistically creates a process, through language and expressions, that maintains alive the ideological debate that is taking place inside today's Cuban Society".

CubaTeatro ... Cuban Theatre Also Exists in Exile

Like other artistic manifestations during the forty years of the revolutionary regime, a current of theatrical activity has taken place in the rank of the Cuban exile. It is something hardly known, especially inside Cuba where a politic of erasures, exclusions and silence is carried out by institutions and publishers. Two of the greatest playwrights, Eduardo Manet and José Triana left Cuba to live in Paris, where they continued to write. Manet's "Les Nonnes" ("The Nuns/Las monjas"), written in Spanish but premiered in French, has been translated into over 30 languages and has been produced throughout Europe, North America and Latin America, while Triana's "Worlds Apart" premiered in Stratford-upon-Avon. Any approach to the "exile theatre" in the United States must begin by knowing that it is a phenomenon inserted into the complex panorama of what is known in the U.S. as Hispanic minorities. So we must consider its existence inside the alien culture of the U.S., supported only marginally, with a paternalistic attitude. For those minorities, a series of rules and directions seem to have been established that focus on "ethnic" themes determined by the prototypes and clichés held by the Anglo-Saxon majority. In this milieu, Cuban artists have had to work, under a disadvantage "vis-a-vis" the ones who work inside Cuba, who are enjoying the protection of the State. They have had simply to survive.

After forty years, very few artists can live off the theatre; many of them have had to earn their livelihoods at other professions. Within this context, a dramaturgy has appeared with a common element, the will to maintain a Cuban identity inside an alien cultural and linguistic audience. They try to expand the Cuban frontier into places that their exile has forced them to occupy. All this appears even in the work of authors who were formed in exile and who write in English.

In the decade of the 60's there was only an outstanding figure, María Irene Fornés, who in 1963, with her play "Tango Palace", started a brilliant career. Around that time, the first groups to stage Cuban plays were created: Dumé Spanish Theatre, Duo Theatre, Centro Cultural Cubano, Prometeo, INTAR and Repertorio Español. Some years later, in Miami, Teatro Avante was formed (In 1986 Avante started the International Festival of Hispanic Theatre). In the 90's La Ma Teodora was founded. A considerable part of the plays written in exile deal with past memories and material: "Abdala-Martí", by Iván Acosta and Omar Torres; "La Peregrina" by Héctor Santiago, "Un hombre al amanecer" by Raúl de Cárdenas and "A Burning Beach", by Eduardo Machado, (who has written an ambitious cycle of plays under the title "The Floating Island", covering Cuban history from the 20's to the Revolution). Other plays deal with Cuba after 1959, and those are weighted down by resentment and misguided passions.

In greater number and far more interesting, some plays deal with exile itself, and the problems of adaptation and uprooting. One of the first plays that dealt with this theme was "El Super" by Ivan Acosta and this was followed by "Broken Eggs" by Eduardo Machado, "La Familia Pilon" by Miguel González Pando, "Café con leche" by Gloria González, "Exilio" by Montes Huidrobo, "Mamá cumple ochenta años" by Mario Martín,

"Coser y Cantar" by Dolores Prida and "Union City Thanksgiving" by Manuel Martín. The encounter between Cubans who remained in the island and those in exile is the central theme of plays like René R. Alomá's "A little something to ease the pain"; "Nadie se va del todo" by Pedro Monge Rafuls; "La dama de la Habana" by Luis Santeiro and "Swallows" by Manuel Martín.

A bit more "unclassifiable", provocative and iconoclastic are the many plays written by José Corrales and Manuel Pereiras. New York and Miami are the most important centers for Cuban theatrical activities, but each city has its own character. In New York the theatre made by Cubans, tries to consolidate itself into groups and institutions, while in Miami, it depends on commercial interests. (Avante and La Má Teodora, are the exceptions.)

These Miami companies offer frivolous entertainment, between a revue and a comic strip, that include superficial and opportunistic reference to political happenings. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why the theatre in Miami hasn't reached the levels of quality, richness and daring that have been obtained by the New York playwrights.

The 20th Century ends with hopeful signs. INTAR and Repertorio Español are today well established and enjoy a solid reputation in the cultural ambience of the nation. Repertorio Español lately has been involved in a project of collaboration with theatre people inside Cuba. The result is that New York has seen several plays by Estorino (including "Parece Blanca", "Las penas saben nadar", "Vagos rumores" and the world premiere of "El Baile") while Machado's "Broken Eggs" toured to Havana, Matanzas and Santa Clara in Cuba. This is something that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. Thus, that two-headed reality that is at present the Cuban culture, begins to be reunited again, keeping away schematic political dicta with which Art has little patience.

Despite economic problems, La Má Teodora has kept working (its latest premiere has been "Alto Riesgo") and has appeared at international festivals in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Spain. New playwrights have appeared (Nilo Cruz, Rogelio Martínez, Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas); two magazines are published (Ollantay and La Má Teodora) opening a critical and documentary window for the working artist. All of this gives a hopeful and optimistic approach to what might happen in the next millennium.

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