

CHAPTER IV
CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Cuban-American children in Miami are exposed to children's plays and puppet theatre via both Anglo and Hispanic television. Traditionalists of live theatre, Cubans are maintaining the live genre for their children in exile. The younger generations are exposed to live theatre and puppet shows in Spanish, either in the category of spectators or, as in the case of Grupo Chicos particularly, as participants.

The basic reasons given for live presentations are generally considered to be those of entertainment and education. The Cuban ideal, however, may be summed up in the motto of Marta Llovio's Grupo Chicos: "Las artes es para la vida como la sal a los alimentos,"¹ a statement by Cuba's national hero Jose Marti, which says that art is for life what salt is for food.

In 1978 Cuban actress Marta Llovio established a theatre workshop for children of Miami. Her Grupo Chicos has been operating since that time as a workshop which trains children in singing and the performance of musical instruments, the dance, and the recital of poetry. As a group the young performers join forces and their combined talents, to present children's plays and musicals, such as La Juventud ("Youth"), Somos Jovenes ("We are Young"), and Corte Suprema de la Juventud ("The Supreme Court of Youth"), and José V. Quiroga's Quando los Niños Governan ("Government by Children"), which have delighted other children and adolescents. Their efforts have been well received by the critics, as well. In 1984, for example, Grupo Chicos won eight awards for the

various categories in the performing arts by ACCA--Asociación de Críticos y Comentaristas de Artes--Miami's Hispanic Association of Art Critics and Column Writers on the Arts.²

After their training at Grupo Chicos adolescent players may be seen performing alongside professionals on the Miami stages. A case in point was Apartamento de Solteras ("Single Girls' Apartment"), a musical comedy by Jaime de Arminan, adapted to a Miami setting by Nena Acevedo and Marta Llovio. Directed by the latter, the comedy was presented at La Comedia in May, 1986. The play featured teenage members of Grupo Chicos playing opposite veteran Cuban comedienne Nena Acevedo, renowned Cuban lead actor-singer Chamaco Garcia, and the newly established Miami actress Margarita Coego, who had her early training with Grupo Chicos.³

According to Josefina Rubio,⁴ children's theatre is also an active part of the activities of Catholic churches in Miami, particularly in the Parish of San Juan Bosco and the Confradia de Nuestra Señora de Caridad. One of the groups which might be incorporated in the genre of religious drama for children is Norberto Plerdomo's Mater Dei. Mater Dei does not perform primarily for children, however, and the performers of the group are, in general, adults.

Under the direction of Danilo Dominguez, Grupo Arcoíris, a group of children performers, has also been presenting plays and shows in Miami, such as Fantasia Musical, at Teatro de Bellas Artes, in December, 1985. The show featured various aspects of the performing arts in a sequence led and linked by a musical score. Fantasia Musical presented Galechka and Alberto, successful young Miami performers, as invited guests. While giving the child an opportunity for training, Arcoíris' aim is basically that of entertaining its audience.⁵

Teatro Guignol, a group which specializes in puppet theatre and is directed by Pepe Carril, not only performs in theatres and on television, but also in parks, clubs, and residences. Carril states that his group's productions aim "at a text which is light but that applies to the interests of a wide age range, so that a message may be carried over."⁶ "But, to entertain is fundamental," says Gilberto Companioni, a member of the group, "for you cannot carry a message if you don't entertain."⁷

Teatro Guignol has been operating on a professional basis in Miami since 1980. Pepe Carril, its director, had much experience in puppet theatre in Cuba, where he performed with the Camejos, a Havana theatrical family devoted to the presentation of puppet shows. Gilberto Companioni joined Pepe Carril after theatrical experience with Centro Dramático Antonín Artaud. The third member of the group, Luís Suárez, joined Teatro Guignol in 1986. In May of that year the group was performing El Cuento de Todos los Cuentos ("The Story of All Stories") at Jose Marti Park, as part of the "First Hispanic Theatre Festival" of Miami. Teatro Guignol operates on a repertory basis, thus several plays are always ready for whatever demand the public makes.⁸

"Puppet shows in English have been an integral part of the Miami-Dade Public Library system for over thirty years," says Ondina Arrondo, director of that Library's Hispanic Branch, "and we have been presenting them in Spanish for fifteen years."⁹ According to Ms. Arrondo the main purpose of the Library's puppet theatre presentations is to make children aware of books, since the plays are adapted from, or based on books available to them. Another aspect of the puppet theatre presentations

pointed out by Ms. Arrondo is that they attract children to the Library and the children, in turn, become familiar with the facilities the Library has to offer.

Puppet shows are presented in the Hispanic Branch of the Miami-Dade Public Library once a month, and their repertory for 1986 consisted of eight plays. These plays, as a rule, have been translated from the ones existing in the Central Library, and two new plays are presented each year. Besides the monthly scheduled presentations at the Library, the plays are also presented to school groups, by appointment.¹⁰ Occasionally the plays will be performed at schools, but only under exceptional circumstances, such as the schools not being able to provide transportation for the children to the Library. "The norm is for the children to come to the Library,"¹¹ Ms. Arrondo said.

The plays put on by the Library are adapted and performed by the librarians themselves. Ms. Arrondo stated that they are not a professional theatre group and do not compete with existing professional theatre companies. All performances, are, of course, free of charge, since the Library is operated by the County. The average audience participation is about thirty children, although larger numbers are involved when presentations are made for visiting school groups.

Among the plays in the 1986 repertory were La Cucarachita Martina ("Martina, the Little Bug"), by Pura Belpré, adapted from a Puerto Rican folk tale; Episodios de Don Quijote, an adaptation of a series of events taken from the classical Spanish novel by Cervantes; La Caperucita Roja ("Little Red Riding Hood"); El Ratón del Campo y El Ratón de la Ciudad

("The Country Mouse and the City Mouse"), adapted from a Hispanic-American fable; and Los Tres Reyes Magos ("The Three Magi"), loosely based on the Bible story of the three kings.¹²

In the afternoon of January 4, 1986, this researcher attended a performance of Los Tres Reys Magos ("The Three Magi"). Although based on the story of the three kings who brought gifts to the child Jesus, the play does not have a religious guideline. There is no reference to a prophecy or to a guiding star, for example, and one of the gifts brought by a king to the child was a shoe. Ms. Arrondo explained that religious references are absent from performances by the Library since it is a public institution. She also mentioned that the offering of the shoe would be immediately understood by the children as an inference to the Hispanic tradition which is that if a child misbehaves during the year, instead of presents he will find black coal in one of his shoes.

It is Ms. Arrondo's opinion that the puppet theatre productions of the Library have had excellent results. "The children are always eager to return and see another play, and," she concluded, "what is important is that they always take books home to read."¹³

Children's interest in attending theatrical performances will, no doubt, inspire playwrights to continue writing for children. Outstanding among the works created for children by Miami Cubans in exile is The Butterfly Cazador, a bilingual musical comedy by José Corrales and Manuel Pereiras. The authors, who also write for adults--Bulto Postal and Gabriel-- have, in The Butterfly Cazador, a children's play which is "an excellent contribution (to children's theatre) due to the poetry, humor and human values it contains."¹⁴

Continued audience participation has already prompted other groups to dedicate their efforts to the genre. In early 1987, for example, Carousel Productions started a regular weekend presentation of plays for children at the facilities of the New Theatre, in Coral Gables. That theatre has also scheduled a festival of children's plays for the summer of 1987.¹⁵ These activities definitely indicate the concern and interest of Miami Cubans in exile in preserving their theatrical tradition by sharing it with the younger generations.

Barry University Library
Miami, FL 33161

ENDNOTES

1. "Los Chicos Program," Teatro de Bellas Artes, December 15, 1986.
2. Ibid.
3. The play, presented as part of the "First Hispanic Theatre Festival," was seen by the researcher on May 23, 1986. The role of Gumi, played by Nena Acevedo, was alternately performed by Bettina Fibah, during the three-week engagement of La Comedia theatre.
4. Rubio, Josefina. "El Movimiento Teatral-Artístico de Miami," original manuscript, p. 7.
5. Program Notes, December 26, 1986.
6. "Teatro Guignol," el Miami Herald, May 16, 1986, p. 8.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Arrondo, Ondina. Personal Interview, January 4, 1986.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Escarpanter, José A., "Veinticinco años de teatro en el exilio," Latin American Theatre Review, (University of Kansas: Center of Latin American Studies, Spring, 1980), p. 65.
15. "New Theatre Calendar," New Theatre News, Vol. I, No. 2, insert.

CHAPTER V
PROMETEO/THE PROMETHEAN PLAYERS

In 1987 Prometeo completes fifteen years of activities as a community theatre, under the wing of Miami-Dade Community College's bilingual theatre program. Directed by Teresa María Rojas, a graduate of the University of Havana's School of Dramatic Arts, "Prometeo exposes the student to the full range of theatre production: acting, dancing, fencing, drama, singing, voice and diction, as well as history of the theatre, make-up, lighting, costuming and scenography,"¹ and "plays an important part in preserving hispanic culture and the Spanish language."²

The name Prometeo was chosen for the group since that was the name of the Havana theatre where Teresa María Rojas began her career, under the direction of Francisco Morín who is presently in New York. Teresa María Rojas, who went on to become a very successful actress on the Havana stage and Cuban television, made some incursions in the theatre and television, of the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, before settling in Miami. She remembers the early years of Prometeo in Miami as difficult times, due to the problem of identity the exiles felt with regard to a new language, culture, and environment. Today, however, she is dealing with a group of young people who are fully integrated into the new culture--"the children of the original exiles."³

Prometeo offers the community an opportunity to view a wide variety of plays in both Spanish and English. These plays range from classical Spanish productions, such as Lope de Vega's La Dama Boba ("The Foolish

Lady"), and Calderón de la Barca's La Vida es Sueño ("Life is a Dream"), to works by Jean Paul Sartre, Eugene Ionesco, August Strindberg, Noel Coward, Fernando Arrabal, and Virgilio Piñera.

Another aspect of Prometeo is its more experimental original work, such as Teresa María Rojas' Guaracha-Rock, a musical combining aspects of Cuban and American lifestyles and musical traditions, and Jesus. El Hijo del Hombre ("Christ, the Son of Man"), by Jalil Gibran, with original music by the students. The latter won for Prometeo ACCA's award for the best play in 1985.⁴

Teresa María Rojas has also been guest director at Florida International University's production of Suandende, a theatrical adaptation of a novel by "Cuba's most outstanding living woman novelist,"⁵ Lydia Cabrera, who presently resides in Miami. Cuban writers in exile have also been selected for presentation by Prometeo. Among these are Orlando Gonzáles Esteva--El Viaje ("The Trip"), and La Abuela ("The Grandmother")--and Reinaldo Arenas, whose Persecución ("Persecution"), had its world premiere at Prometeo in October, 1985.

Born in 1943, Reinaldo Arenas "is a talented writer who has published two remarkable novels, Celestino antes del alba (1967) and El mundo alucinante (1969)."⁶ The latter has been translated into English as Hallucinations, and was published by Penguin Books in 1972. Other novels published by Arenas in later years are "El Palacio de las Blanquísimas Mofetas (1975), Termina el Desfile (1981), El Central (1981), and Otra Vez el Mar (1982)."⁷ Persecución ("Persecution"), the play premiered by Prometeo in 1985 and directed by student Nilo Cruz is, in its entirety, a set of five acts which, according to the author's instructions in his introductory remarks, may be presented individually

or as a complete work.⁸ The fundamental themes pervading all five acts are repression and persecution. Arenas started writing the play in Havana, in 1973, and completed the work in 1985, in New York.⁹

That the novelist would eventually delve into the field of playwriting may be foreseen in Raymond D. Souza's analysis of the writer's narrative devices in his early novels which, as Souza states, "are theatrical in technique and effect."¹⁰ Characteristics in the novel Celestino Antes del Alba, for example, which are also present in the play Persecución, are a feeling of unfulfillment which dominates the characters, and frustration: "We no longer have a sea. We no longer have a sea. This island no longer has a sea."¹¹

Repression and persecution are felt throughout the play as the characters perform bound to ropes. These are tied to their waists or necks, and the characters are portrayed almost as unreal beings, like manipulated dummies or puppets. In contrast, a chorus, a technique of the Greek theatre, is used by the author to provide the information of what is real or imminent.

Other realistic elements used by Arenas are the showing of slides and filmstrips projected on a screen, upstage. These sometimes are documentary films which show the masses in public demonstrations, the display of strength by the army on parade, or Fidel Castro inflamed in eloquent speeches.

In a note after the end of the play, the author states that life imitates art, therefore, any person who feels he identifies himself with any of the characters in the play should contact the author to state his claim.¹² Ironically, however, Arenas actually uses quotes in the play

from speeches by Ernesto Guevarra and Fidel Castro. These quotes are used in speeches delivered by a character named Reprimero, and are properly identified, for the reader, in footnotes.¹³

In his novels, Arenas often indulges in linguistic play.¹⁴ In Persecución Arenas employs the same technique, sometimes by using a series of words with the same ending, such as "fatalismo, pesimismo, diversionismo, asimismo,"¹⁵ or by having different characters say, or repeat, words that have the same ending, as a rhymed dialogue:

REPRIMERO...la serenidad, la igualdad y la equidad, la legalidad...

SOLDADO-HOMBRE - Imparcialidad.

REPRIMERO -.La imparcialidad!

SOLDADO MUJER - Verdad.

REPRIMERO -.La Verdad!

SOLDADO-HOMBRE - Normalidad.

REPRIMERO -.La normalidad!

SOLDADO-MUJER - Autoridad.

REPRIMERO -.La autoridad!

SOLDADO-HOMBRE - Ambigüedad.

REPRIMERO -.La ambigüedad!

SOLDADO-MUJER - Antitotalitariedad.

REPRIMERO -.La an-ti-to-ti-ta-to-li-to...¹⁶

At this point the character Reprimero states that the word is too long, and "that's enough."¹⁷ From word play we have a humorous situation. The humor in the play is enhanced by the creation of nonsensical words, which might also be the author's way of portraying the nonsense of flowery demagogic speech. In these instances he invents words such as "oterpartaturpedertercump," "jumptirombsz," and

"katatimtimpompa." Humor is also present at the secretary's mechanical reading of charges against the accused. Absurd and conflicting charges and situations are presented. Again the author may wish to portray the absurdity and cruelty of repression and persecution of citizens in a police state.

On May 23 and 24, 1986, Prometeo presented an English version of Spanish playwright Alejandro Casona's Suicide Prohibited in Springtime,¹⁸ a play of the theatre of the absurd. The play was featured as Prometeo's entry in the First Hispanic Theatre Festival of Miami. As in the case of Arenas' Persecución, Suicide Prohibited in Springtime was also directed by student Nilo Cruz. This researcher attended the final dress rehearsal of the play and remembers the last words of Teresa María Rojas to the actors and technicians, before curtain time: "Do it as you will do tomorrow, when I won't be here to see you!"

Despite her activities as a teacher and director Teresa María Rojas has not relinquished her acting career. Teresa María Rojas was, herself, performing at Teatro Miami, opposite Marta Velasco, in Mexican playwright Emilio Carballido's Mimi and Fifi in the Orinoco, every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, during the months of May and June, thus also participating, as an actress, in the program of the First Hispanic Theatre Festival. She has continuously acted on the Miami stages, having also taken part in Chuck Norris' film Invasion: USA, and in episodes of the television serial Miami Vice. In August, 1986, under the direction of Cuban guest director Gonzalo Rodriguez, Teresa María Rojas interpreted the role of Mother Superior in Prometeo's Spanish language production of John Pielmiere's Agnes of God ("Cordero de Diós").¹⁹

Enrollment at Prometeo is limited to students who are interested in theatre as a profession, and they often have the opportunity of working with professionals as invited artists. In Agnes of God, for example, besides the guest director, Gonzalo Rodríguez, the play featured "three great Cuban actresses, Alina Interián, Marilyn Romero, and Teresa María Rojas."²⁰

During its existence Prometeo has "trained many actors, actresses and directors who have earned outstanding recognition in the performing arts."²¹ Teresa María Rojas says a characteristic of Prometeo is to provide serious theatre to the community and to turn out professionals of the stature of Marilyn Romero, who is now involved in movies and television acting and Manuel Urriarte, who recently toured the Americas and Europe with the "Frankie Kein Show." Others mentioned by Rojas are Tony Wagner, outstanding Miami director, Xavier Coronel, well known for his theatre and television performances, and Máximo Ernesto Sánchez, actor-director who has been featured in several movies and on television serials. Máximo Ernesto Sánchez today is president of Acting Together, Inc., and director of Teatro Avante, a theatre Teresa María Rojas has also collaborated with as a founding member and member of the Board of Directors.²²

The basic philosophy behind Prometeo is "that a sensitive and well-oriented theatre company can greatly influence a community's ideas, and contributes in large measure to its cultural richness."²³

ENDNOTES

1. "Prometeo," a leaflet published by Miami-Dade Community College, Mitchell Wolfson New World Center Campus, Miami, Florida, p. 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Rojas, Teresa María, Personal Interview, January 4, 1986.
4. Arte y Cultura, Mini-Revista, Organo Oficial de la ACCA, Miami, March-April, 1985, p. 8.
5. Rojas, Teresa María, op. cit.
6. Souza, Raymond D., Major Cuban Novelists, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1976), p. 27.
7. Unveiling, New York, January-March, 1985, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 3.
8. Arenas, Reinaldo, Persecución, Author's transcript, p. 3.
9. Ibid., Author's Note, p. 81.
10. Souza, Raymond D., op. cit., p. 27.
11. Arenas, Reinaldo, op. cit., pp. 36-37.
12. Ibid., p. 80.
13. Ibid., pp. 64-65.
14. Menton, Seymour, Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), p. 100.
15. Arenas, Reinaldo, op. cit., p. 47.
16. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
17. Ibid., p. 45.
18. The program does not credit a translator.
19. No credit for translator available.
20. Saavedra, Maria Elena, "Interpretará Teresa María Rojas a la Madre Superiora en Cordero de Dios," Diario las Américas, August 15, 1986, p. 5-B.
21. "Prometeo," op. cit., p. 2.

22. Rojas, Teresa María, op. cit.
23. "Prometeo," op. cit., p. 2.

22. Rojas, Teresa María, op. cit.
23. "Prometeo," op. cit., p. 2.

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CHAPTER VI
TEATRO AVANTE

Teatro Avante is a non-profit organization which has been operating as a corporation in Miami, since May, 1979. Its first production was Electra Garrigó, by Virgilio Piñera, "one of the best contemporary Cuban playwrights."¹ The play was performed at Teatro America, (now Teatro de Bellas Artes), in 1978.

By 1981 Teatro Avante, in a cooperative effort, was able to open its own 150-seat playhouse, at Flager Street and 46th Avenue. In less than three years Teatro Avante showed "an impressive record of 18 productions and 396 playing dates."² More than 28,000 theatre-goers attended these productions and Teatro Avante, named after the word "forward" in old Spanish, "soon became one of the leaders in Spanish speaking theatres in South Florida."³ Many of the plays presented were Spanish versions of plays by American and English writers, such as A Streetcar Named Desire, by Tennessee Williams, Chapter Two, by Neil Simon, Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf, by Edward Albee, Finca, an adaptation of George Orwell's Animal Farm, William Gibson's The Miracle Worker, and The Crucible, by Arthur Miller.

Teatro Avante has also presented classical Spanish dramas, such as Tirso de Molina's Don Gil de las Calzas Verdes, and an adaptation of Federico Garcia Lorca's The House of Bernarda Alba. In August, 1983, Teatro Avante, "known for its innovated efforts to motivate local talent and attract a younger audience,"⁴ expanded its presentations to include experimental one-act plays by new or internationally known playwrights, on Thursday nights.

Up until that time the sole Cuban playwright presented by Teatro Avante had been Virgilio Piñera. His Electra Garrigó, which was the first production of the company, and Aire Frío, presented in 1981 had, until 1983, been the only works by a Cuban playwright in Teatro Avante's repertory. With the Thursday night experimental presentations, Guillermo Cabrera Infante's Tres Monólogos, an adaptation of a novel originally titled Tres Tristes Tigres ("Three Trapped Tigers") came to light, as well as Miami's Cristina Sánchez' adaptation of Loree Yerby's Save Me a Space at Forest Lawn, titled A la Caballero.

Virgilio Piñera was again selected for the Thursday night performances. This time the play was El Flaco y el Gordo, which premiered in Havana in September, 1959, when Castro was already in power. At that time the play received "negative reviews from the communist sector of critics."⁵

Virgilio Piñera is credited with introducing the theatre of the absurd in Cuba in 1942, with his play Electra Garrigó.⁶ He is "among the first writers of the world to cultivate the literature of the absurd."⁸ In El Flaco y el Gordo ("The Thin Man and the Fat One"), Piñera's pessimism seems "directly linked to a revolutionary process: The Thin Man eats the Fat One, thus becoming fat himself. Then, another Thin Man appears, who, possibly, will also eat him up."⁹ Revolution is seen then as a repetitive cycle, "with a fatalist trend which obviously offers no solution."¹⁰ The negative aspect of the work therefore, "could not be seen with sympathy by the official critics"¹¹ of Castro's revolutionary Cuba.

By 1965 Virgilio Piñera, whose works continued in the absurdist trend of Electra Garrigó and El Flaco y el Gordo, had been imprisoned, in spite of the fact that in his works "local references are deemphasized in keeping with both the existentialist and the absurdist universal view of mankind."¹² Aire Frío, however, presented by "Teatro Avante" in 1981, is a chronicle of a poor Cuban family in the period prior to Castro, and the family's dream of climbing the social ladder to a middle class station. Aire Frío is not a play of the theatre of the absurd, but a realist play. "If I were to choose the most meaningful realist work of the Cuban theatre, I would not hesitate to choose Virgilio Piñera's Aire Frío."¹³ Montes Huidobro explains:

"Aire Frío es una de esas obras que cuando se leen producen una absoluta sensación de que uno está allí, metido entre los personajes. Sin trucos escénicos, mediante una fidelidad absoluta con respecto al lenguaje y las situaciones, uno siente que esos personajes resultan tan familiares como nuestro diario vivir."¹⁴

("Aire Frío ("Cold Air") is one of those works which, when read, produce an absolute feeling that one is there, mingling with its characters. With no scenic trickery, with absolute fidelity in regard to language usage and situations, one feels that those characters are as familiar as those one meets in everyday life.")

Cabrera Infante's novel Tres Tristes Tigres, which Teatro Avante presented in an adaptation entitled Tres Monólogos ("Three Monologues"), in 1983, presents the universe "as a huge comedy rather than an enigma, a gigantic folly perpetrated by some unknown being."¹⁵

Cabrera Infante was born in Oriente, Cuba, in 1928, and began his literary career in the 1950's. He was appointed to several positions in the editorial field during Castro's regime, and in 1961 he began serving as Cultural Attaché at the Embassy of Cuba in Belgium. In 1965, however, Cabrera Infante resigned from that position and has, since then, remained in Europe, "one of the many people who have chosen to leave Cuba during

the last decade."¹⁶

When Tres Tristes Tigres appeared in 1967, Cabrera Infante "was a relative newcomer to the international literary scene."¹⁷ Although the work is not a political one it takes place in Havana in the summer of 1958, a few months before Castro's revolutionary government came into power. It depicts "an era that is coming to an end and the feeling of disintegration that characterizes an apocalyptic period."¹⁸

Word play is a constant technique in Cabrera Infante's work, and his use of language, sometimes using a mixture of languages, accentuates his creativity. This is especially true "when he exposes foibles of our customs and beliefs or ridicules our idols."¹⁹ In his Nueva Novela Hispanoamericana y Tres Tristes Tigres Sanchez-Boudy dedicates a 24-page chapter²⁰ to list words used or created by Cabrera Infante in Tres Tristes Tigres and to explain their meaning for a full comprehension of the text. The word "Matrimonio" (matrimony), for example, becomes "martirmonio" (martyrmony). Even the names of important figures are not spared his word play, thus Scott Fitzgerald, for example, becomes Scotch Fizzgerald, and Somerset Maugham, Somersault Mom.

The characters in Tres Tristes Tigres search for order and permanence in a world which is constantly changing. The characters, however, are both comical and tragic, and although the work "captures the essence of an impending tragedy we approach it laughingly."²¹

In December, 1983, Teatro Avante was forced to close its playhouse "due to high-rising production costs and an incredible 25 percent rent increase."²² The company has continued its activities, however, using the facilities of Koubek Memorial Center, Centro Cultural SIBI, and Teatro de Bellas Artes.

Another innovative position taken by Teatro Avante as of April, 1984, has been its yearly presentation of a Festival of Ethnic Theatre, which has included such plays as Soul Gone Home, by Langston Hughes, Waiting for to Go, by Daniel Metzger, and The Past is the Past, by Richard Wesley. Several of the plays produced by Teatro Avante for the Festival of Ethnic Theatre have been performed in the English language.

During the months of May-June, 1986, Teatro Avante presented Alguna Cosita que Alívie el Sufrir, by René R. Alomá. Originally written in English with the title of A Little Something to Ease the Pain, the play was first produced in 1980 at St. Lawrence Centre, the largest English language theatre in Toronto, Canada. The Spanish version produced by Teatro Avante was translated by Alberto Sarraín.²³

René R. Alomá, who was born in Cuba in 1947, left that country for Canada at the age of 15. His career as a playwright began in 1975 as a Playwright-in-Residence at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre, where his first produced play was Once a Family. Other works by Aloma are Le Cycliste, (written in French), A Friend is a Friend, Fit for a King, The Magic Box (children musicals), Mountain Road, and Token Booth (one-act plays). Three of his plays are set in Cuba: A Flight of Angels and A Little Something to Ease the Pain (written in English), and his last play, Secretos de Amor, written in Spanish, shortly before the author's untimely death, in 1986, at the age of 39. A Little Something to Ease the Pain had won for René R. Alomá two playwriting prizes--First Prize in Smile Company's Playwriting Competition, and the New Playwright's Award at Southampton College, in 1979.

Directed by Mário Ernesto Sánchez, who also played the role of Nelson Tatin Rabel, the play takes place at a church sacristy, and at the Rabels' residence, in Santiago de Cuba. Carlos Pay Rabel, played by Xavier Coronel, is a Cuban exile in Canada, who returns to visit his relatives in the city of Santiago.

His visit occurs during the celebrations of "Carnavales," and Carlos Pay Rabel, in the merry mood of the festivities, states to Tatin that it was so good to be back that he felt inclined to remain in Cuba. Tatin is shocked by Carlos Pay's comment, and replies in an explosive series of statements. Tatin had been pretending that all was well with him, but he finally contains himself no longer and admits that if he had a way out of Cuba, he would certainly leave the country. He says that one needs to be blind to live in Cuba, and that the merriment of the moment, the "Carnavales," is just "a little something to ease the pain."²⁴

Alguna Cosita que Alívie el Sufrir by Teatro Avante was superbly produced in every artistic detail--scenery, lighting, music and sound effects--by the experienced producer René Alejandro and technical artistic directors Rolando Moreno, Gonzalo Rodríguez and Raúl Reyes-Roque. The cast included other outstanding talent of the Cuban theatre in exile, such as veteran actress Elódia Rivega, (familiar to Cuban audiences since she was 14 years of age and presently active in the Hispanic radio of Miami), in a memorable portrayal of Doña Cacha, and Maria Malgrat (Dilia), one of the founders of Teatro Las Máscaras, with professional experience on Peruvian stage and television after her exile from Cuba, as well as with the companies of Jorge Montoro, and that of the late and great Cuban comedian Leopoldo Fernández. Also important were the performances of Alina Interián (Ana), one of the founders of

Teatro Avante and renowned for her work both as an actress and producer; Edna Schwab (Clara), and Humberto Ponce de León (Padre Efrain), with considerable experience on Miami stages, including work at the Coconut Grove Playhouse; and Tony C., whose experience on the stage has led him to television and roles in such films as The Mean Season, Amigos, and Flight of the Navigator, besides participation in numerous national television commercials. In her professional debut with the cast was Barbara Rodríguez (Amelia), a newcomer from Prometeo drama classes.

Teatro Avante definitely appears to be loyal to the name it chose for itself, thus notwithstanding adverse financial situations, the company has continued to go "forward," offering the best theatre fare, with the finest artistic care. Alguna Cosita que Alívie el Sufrir was, without any doubt, "a notable production."²⁵ The play was Teatro Avante's entry in the First Hispanic Theatre Festival of Miami.

ENDNOTES

1. RAS Community Theatre, Inc., a/k/a Teatro Avante History, pamphlet, (Miami, 1985) p. 1.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
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CHAPTER VII
THE COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE
AND THE
INTERNATIONAL PLAYWRIGHTS SERIES

The Coconut Grove Playhouse, located in Miami, is a Florida State theatre which went into its thirty-first season in 1987. The Playhouse receives a yearly subsidy of \$300,000 from the State of Florida and, in 1986, the Florida State Legislature voted for an extra one million five-hundred thousand dollar subsidy for the remodeling of the Playhouse and its parking facilities.¹

Producing Artistic Director Arnold Mittelman is responsible for the programming of the Playhouse, which ordinarily presents hit plays by visiting professional companies. In 1986, however, a new facet was added to the Coconut Grove Playhouse's program. Under the supervision of Judy Delgado, the Playhouse started its International Playwrights Series, consisting of Monday evening readings of plays in Spanish, featuring local actors and directors. Commenting on the Series, Judy Delgado stated that it was time for the Playhouse to project an educational aspect to its programming and that the Series was also a way of welcoming the Hispanics and bringing them into the American cultural mainstream.²

Plays for the International Playwrights Series are submitted to the Coconut Grove Playhouse. They are then read and selected for production by a committee. Among the plays selected for the first Series, which ran from January, 1986 to August of the same year, four were by Cuban playwrights in exile. These were: Exilio ("Exile") by Matias Montes Huidobro, Recuerdos de Familia ("Family Remembrances") by Raúl de

Cárdenas, Siempre Tuvimos Miedo ("We Were Always Afraid") by Leopoldo Hernández, and "Sanguivin" en Union City ("Union City Thanksgiving") by Manuel Martín, Jr.

Matias Montes Huidobro, author of Exilio, has written extensively for the theatre and about the theatre. His Persona, Vida y Máscara en el Teatro Cubano, published by Miami's Ediciones Universal in 1973, is a 496 page in-depth study of the Cuban theatre. The work analyzes the Cuban theatre from its historical, social, and psychological perspectives and is a veritable Bible for the student of Cuban drama. Montes Huidobro, who has also published a similar study on the Puerto Rican theatre, titled Persona, Vida y Máscara en el Teatro Puertorriqueño, is considered "one of the most prolific researchers of literature in the Spanish Language."³

Born in Ságua la Gran, Central Cuba, in 1931, Matias Montes Huidobro is a graduate of the School of Education of the University of Havana. He started his career as a secondary school teacher and theatre critic for Havana newspapers and television. In the early years of the Castro regime, Montes Huidobro was appointed professor of Journalism at Havana University. In 1961, however, he left Cuba for the United States and, after a brief period in Miami, he and his wife Yáxa joined the faculty of the Division of Languages and Literature of the University of Hawaii, where Matias Montes Huidobro is associate professor of Spanish literature.⁴

Besides writing for the theatre since 1950, Montes Huidobro has published poetry, numerous short stories in Cuban magazines, and had a collection of short stories, La Anunciación, published in Madrid in 1961. He has also written three novels, one of which, Desterrados del Fuego, was published in Mexico, in 1986.

His first play, Las Cuatro Brujas ("The Four Witches"), was awarded honorable mention in the 1950 national playwriting competition sponsored by Havana's Prometeo Theatre. The following year he was awarded first prize in the same competition, for his play Sobre las mismas Rocas ("On the same Rocks"). Although more than half of his plays have been written after he left Cuba, "Montes Huidobro's theatre reveals the undiminished persistence of the Cuban experience throughout his dramas."⁵

Exilio, the three-act play selected for the International Playwrights Series, centers around the lives of five Cuban exiles during the regime of Batista, who return to Cuba after Castro's victory. While, at first, enthusiastic about the new regime, three of them--Victoria, Román and Rubén--become so disenchanted with it to the point of resuming their exile in New York.

Beba and Miguel Ángel, however, remain in Cuba, totally engrossed in the activities in the revolutionary regime. In the third act, which takes place twenty years later, they are again in New York. Beba is on a mission at the United Nations and Miguel Ángel is guest lecturing at New York universities. Their stay in New York is to be a brief one, but they contact Victoria and Román and arrange for a reunion of the five former friends. Great tension is then brought into the drama:

VICTORIA - This plan of the five of us getting together again is absurd... after twenty years...

ROMÁN - We have nothing to say to each other. At least, I don't. What I had to say was said twenty years ago, when I left Cuba. What can I say now? There's no use beating a dead horse.⁶

After considering turning out the lights and not answering the door, Rubén, the third exile arrives for the reunion. The three ponder over the situation and decide it will be best to have the reunion. Rubén tells Román the meeting will be a perfect chance for Román to complete the third act of La Vida Breve ("The Short Life"), a play he started writing in Cuba, twenty years earlier. During the conversation Román and Victoria notice that Rubén is carrying a gun. Román asks Rubén to give him the gun: "After all, I am the author of the play . . . I am the one who has to decide what the characters are to do."⁷

VICTORIA - Think for a moment. Roman is right. Give Román the gun.
RUBÉN - I can't, Victoria. I am the one who will have to execute them.⁸

Suspense is increased when Román unsuccessfully tries to take the gun away from Rubén. Rubén turns the lights off and when he turns them back on again, no one knows where the gun was placed. Immediately afterwards the bell rings, and Rubén opens the door. He greets Beba and Miguel Ángel with an exaggerated show of affection, embracing them and kissing Beba repeatedly on the cheeks.

At first their conversation is awkward, every one of them feeling the reunion should really not have taken place. It is the type of conversation which usually occurs after long absences, particularly when

the parties involved have taken completely opposite paths. Montes Huidobro's dialogue is excellent, and he livens the situation through the use of humor:

BEBA - After all, we've had a very exhausting week. Besides the work sessions there are the social commitments. You'd better believe it, we also do have social commitments.

VICTORIA - I do believe it. After all you are socialists.⁹

Victoria recalls the house Beba and Miguel Ángel were assigned as a place of residence by the revolutionary regime. It was a mansion which the government confiscated from a wealthy family. As high ranking government officers they are still living in that mansion, which Beba says she misses while on her constant missions abroad:

BEBA - ...There's nothing like being in one's own home.

VICTORIA - But is the house yours?

BEBA - Of course, not. It's the state's. That's just a manner of speaking¹⁰

.....
What about this apartment, is it yours?

VICTORIA - Yes, it's ours. Well, it's really the bank's. "Ours" is a manner of speaking.

Suspense is resumed when Miguel Ángel, while reciting a revolutionary poem, finds the gun Rubén had placed on the typewriter. Miguel Ángel takes the gun, and states that he and Rubén had planned to kill Beba, his wife, that evening. There is a crescendo in tension and suspense. All the bitterness, envy and competition for power that has existed in Beba and Miguel Ángel's lives is poured forth as Miguel Ángel threatens her with the gun and tells her she is no longer needed by the

regime. After a great struggle with Beba, Miguel Ángel hands Rubén the gun. However, he states that perhaps it will be a worse punishment for Beba to have to live with the humiliation of being degraded by the revolutionary government than to be executed that night.

Beba and Miguel Ángel then leave together, as two people whose destinies are forever bound by their own petty self-interests and the constant fear of knowing each is an informer on the other: Two victims of immorality and oppression.

Montes Huidobro's El Tiro por la culata ("Backfire"), written during the early stages of the revolution, deals with the exploitation of the people and the corruption of large land owners. In the play, Carmelina, a young peasant girl is able, through her intelligence, to ward off the sexual advances of Gaudencio, the landowner. He, who approached her with the pretense of teaching her how to read, is taught a lesson on morality, as well as civil and human rights.¹¹

Published in 1961, Gas en los Poros ("Gas under the Skin"), falls in the category of the theatre of the absurd. It is a drama of two characters named Mother and Daughter, who are trapped in a room with nightmares of the past as their only means of communication. Their conversation often takes the form of theatre-within-the-theatre as they re-enact characters of the past and repeat their speeches verbatim. The Daughter represents youth trying to erase the past in order to attain a full and free life. The Mother appears as a domineering force who holds on to her past actions, justifies her errors, and clings to the Daughter in an oppressive manner. She says she is the one who governs their lives

and will continue to do so as she has done in the past: "You, my daughter, are not free. Although others may be free you are not, nor will you ever be."¹²

While depicting the relationship of two characters Montes Huidobro seems to use them as symbols of a situation of oppression and Tragedy. the Daughter may be taken to represent Cuba itself. At the end of the play, while dying, thus apparently finally giving the Daughter the chance of her freedom, the Mother exclaims: "Your freedom will not come by easily,"¹³ to which the Daughter replies: "You're right. We all know that."¹⁴

"La Sal de los Muertos" ("Salt of the Dead"), is a key work in understanding Montes Huidobro's theatre.¹⁵ Written in 1960, the play was published in 1961 and confiscated by the revolutionary government after Montes Huidobro's departure from Cuba. The play revolves around the problems of a Cuban family and particularly over the fourteen-year-old son's greed. Lobito anxiously hopes for his father's death in order to inherit his fortune. "In La Sal de los Muertos we see for the first time in the author's drama the conjunction of those constants identified by him as common to contemporary Cuban theatre."¹⁶ Among these constants are the struggle for power within the Cuban family nucleus, often impregnated by hate and Freudian complexes, the distortion of language or of situations, and the technique of theatre-within-the-theatre.

Montes Huidobro starts his play The Guillotine by using the technique of theatre-within-the-theatre, making obvious for the reader or spectator, right from the beginning, the fact that this a play. This technique brings about the feeling of theatrical distance or the alienation effect (German Verfremdungseffekt) preconized by Brecht:

ILEANA - What part do you have in this play?

MOTHER - I'm the mother.

ILEANA - Whose mother?

MOTHER - Yours and the manicurist's.

ILEANA - Of the two of us?

MOTHER - Yes, of the two of you.

.....
MOTHER - I'm your mother. I'm afraid that something will happen to you.

ILEANA - (Transition. Acting as if she really were the daughter) Mama, I'll know how to defend myself. Up to now, I've managed well, haven't I?¹⁷

A play in the genre of the absurd, The Guillotine takes place in Cuba, in 1959. It refers to the fall of Batista's dictatorship and the position of those, now under the revolutionary regime, who had collaborated with the former government. It is a time when informers are very active, and there is fear among the population, as is clearly exemplified in Ileana's lines:

ILEANA - This revolution has reached everywhere, and the opportunists and hypocrites are mixed up in it too, camouflaged so that no one recognizes them in the underbrush.¹⁸

Ileana had had relations with Commander Camacho, of the former regime's Secret Police. She now stands to go to trial and is fearful and upset as she says: "I'm not responsible for what he did or didn't do when he wasn't with me."¹⁹

In the play's final scene a guillotine is lighted upstage. The two sisters, Ileana and Sylvia, are seen. Their appearance is ghostlike, their hair loose, and they wear long tunics. The lights go dim, a scream is heard, and the mother is then seen, downstage, telling the hairdresser:

MOTHER - But you told me, you swore to me that it (the guillotine) Was made of paper. My poor, my poor and adored son dead! And now then, my daughters, my poor, poor daughters dead...²⁰

Montes Huidobro's technique of the theatre-within-the-theatre enhances his use of the absurd while maintaining the tension and conflicts of the drama. "Montes proclaims no thesis nor comes to any conclusion about the human circumstances in the majority of his plays."²¹

In Ojos para no Ver ("Eyes Not to See"), written in 1979, Montes Huidobro again resorts to the techniques of the theatre-within-the-theatre and of the absurd. One could "say that one of the constants in the play is power, and other is the theatre itself."²² The work revolves around the character of Maria (who is, at the same time, four different Marias: Maria de la Montaña, Maria de la Anunciación, Maria la Magdalena and Maria la Concepción), and the character of General Solavaya (sometimes referred to as Commander, Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, or Lieutenant), the epitome of political and personal abuses.

The play is a statement against repression and a bitter criticism of Cuba's historical destiny, although the author does not identify Cuba as the setting for his play. Some recognizable elements of the

revolutionary regime of Cuba are, for example, the references to the rationing card required for obtaining food and basic necessities, and to voluntary work, which is often taken for forced labor:

RUPERTA - At any rate you will have to do your voluntary work.

MARIA - Do I want to? Do I have to? Do I have to? Do I want to?²³

Aspects of the theatre of the absurd are found in several instances, such as in Solavaya's son weighing 160 pounds at birth, and in the character Ciego de la Bahia, who is killed time and again under orders of Solavaya. Another element presented by Montes Huidobro is that of black humor. Solavaya suggests, for example, that his son's enormous hunger be satisfied by feeding him soup made from prisoners.

Ojos para no Ver offers two representations of reality. Solavaya represents cruelty, while Maria symbolizes the human ideal. Montes Huidobro makes no attempt to reconcile the two realities. The play ends exactly as it begins, Solavaya's orders being carried out, and the Ciego de la Bahia, once again being shot to death.

In Funeral en Teruel ("Funeral in Teruel"), published in 1982, Montes Huidobro again uses the technique of the absurd. The play takes place in an enormous (38 bedroom) castle in Spain. Time is not mentioned, but references are made to conveniences of modern time such as the telephone, color television, and hi-fi. A sense of timelessness is accomplished by the fact that the characters wear costumes which range from the styles of the 1200's to the mini-skirts of the 1960's. The character Eva, according to the author's instruction, is to appear as immodestly dressed as stage morals of the moment will permit. One of the

characters, Caligula, wears the mask of sin. The play actually revolves around the theme of virtue versus sin. It also centers on the conflicts and attempts at communication within the family unit.

Don Pedro, the father of the family, is the symbol of authority. He is determined that his daughter Isabel marry a Count, while she insists--confiding in her mother--that she is in love with Marsilla, who is in Cuba. Tending to conciliate, the mother says:

GERTRUDIS - Your father does not want you to love the count. Your father only wants you to marry him.

.....
There is also the matter of money, for Castro has taken it all and I don't know how poor Marsilla will be able to take any money from Cuba...²⁴

Isabel argues that it would be immoral to marry without love and that her father is only interested in money and status. Eva and Isabel, the two sisters, symbolize sin and virtue. Eva and Caligula, who wears the mask of sin, are symbols of carnal concupiscence.

The father's authority also symbolizes immorality, for Isabel has to succumb to his will. He vociferously states: "And who is Isabel, the pure, the holy Isabel to determine what is done or not done in this house?"²⁵

The fact that the characters are dressed in costumes from such disparate time periods seems to emphasize the idea that family conflicts and the inability of communication, the loneliness of man, are age-old problems which persist in today's society. In Funeral en Teruel Montes Huidobro again shows his sympathy for victims of immorality and oppression.

In May-June, 1986, Montes Huidobro's La Navaja de Olofe ("The Razor of Olofe") premiered in Miami during the First Hispanic Theatre Festival. Under the direction of Rafael de Acha, the play was one of three one-act plays entered in the Festival by Teatro Nuevo. Rafael de Acha was also the director of Montes Huidobro's Exilio when it was first presented at the Coconut Grove Playhouse's International Playwrights Series, in January, 1986.

Raul de Cardenas was one of Cuba's most outstanding orators prior to the Castro regime.²⁶ His play Recuerdo de Familia ("Family Remembrances") was selected for presentation at the International Playwrights Series, in early 1986. That same year two other plays by Cardenas, who lives in Los Angeles, were premiered in Miami: Las Carbonell de la Calle Obispo ("The Carbonells of Obispo Street"), and Al Ayer no se le dice Adios ("One does not say Good-bye to Yesterday").

Las Carbonell de la Calle Obispo had its world premiere on June 21, 1986, at Teatro de Bellas Artes.²⁷ The plot of the play centers around the humorous escapades of four sisters in the Havana of 1949. Under the direction of Tony Wagner, the comedy was a bold production in which the four sisters were played by actors--Marcos Casanova, Eduardo Corbé, Reynaldo González and Jorge Ovies.

Al Ayer no se le dice Adios had its world premier in Miami, in September, 1986. The play, presented at Teatro SIBI under the direction of Manuel Juan Torón, is a political drama. The plot of the drama revolves around a family and its conflicts as they live through "the cruel experience of Cuba under communism."²⁸

Leopoldo Hernández, born in Havana in 1921, is one of the most prolific Cuban playwrights. His literary production includes over 50 plays besides numerous published short stories and poems. He has also written three novels which have not yet been published.

In Mexico, while in exile and fighting against the regime of Cuba's dictator Fulgencio Batista, Hernández had three one-act plays published under the title Teatro de la Revolución, using the pseudonym of Karlo Thomas. In Spain he was awarded one of the three finalists' prizes for his collection of short stories Cuentos Viejos, Breves, Minúsculos, in the 14th Literary Competition of San Sebastian.

With Castro's victory in 1959, Leopoldo Hernández returned to Cuba where, during the early period of Castro's regime, he was the recipient of four awards for his plays--La Pendiente (1959), based on his personal experience as a prisoner during the regime of Batista and reputed as "one of the best out of Cuba for some time,"²⁹ El Barquito de Papel (1961), El Mudo (1961), and Los Huesos (1961). When Los Huesos was presented on Cuban television in 1961, the author had already left Cuba, for he became as disillusioned with Castro's government as he had been with Batista's.³⁰ Since 1961 Leopoldo Hernández and his wife Josefina, a plastic artist, have lived both in Los Angeles and Miami. His later production also includes plays written in English. Hernández's writing is not limited to Cuban settings or characters, although the majority of his plays do concentrate on aspects of Cuba prior to and after Castro's revolution, as well as on the process of exiles' adaptation to their new environment and culture in the United States.

We Were Always Afraid, chosen by the Coconut Grove Playhouse for its first International Playwrights Series, was translated into English by the author himself. The play, which takes place in Havana, deals with a male Los Angeles Cuban exile, simply called "He." The exile, who is in his fifties, returns to Cuba to visit his elder and ailing sister ("She"), after a twenty-year separation. "He" and "She" are the only characters in the play.

They are alone in the house and "He" suspects the other members of the family are not present for fear. They do not wish to appear to be socializing with someone who deserted the revolution. Repeatedly, throughout the play, "He" inquires about the other members of the family:

He - Where are they, Why aren't they here? They knew I was arriving today...Why aren't they here?³¹

The repeated question goes unanswered by "She," who diverts the conversation to another path, in an attempt at establishing communication with her brother after twenty years spent in two different political regimes. "She" appears curious, though cautious, to know about Los Angeles. The city is not described favorably by "He." After commenting on the problems Los Angeles faces with traffic, mugging, and racial conflicts, "He" states that it is not really a pleasant place:

SHE - I am sorry; I thought you were happy.

HE - I am. At least I have freedom, and I live under a system that guarantees it.

SHE - Let's talk about something else. (I-5)

"He," however, cannot abstain from wondering why the other members of the family have absconded, and naturally feels the gulf which separates them from his statement that in Los Angeles he has freedom and lives under a system that guarantees it.

"He" had been permitted a two-day visit to Havana for humanitarian purposes: his sister's illness. Yet, he can be very trying for his sister with some of his statements:

HE - The permit I have to visit this damned country is good for a couple of days.

SHE - I asked you not to talk like that. I beg you...

HE - The System, in capitals, does not like those that mix with people without a country, like me.

SHE - Every day they discover spies trying to undermine the revolution.

HE - Actually, what they discover are former revolutionaries like me, disillusioned, betrayed, fed up with the great lie in which Fidel has deformed the beautiful ideal they had. It is for that reason that Haydée Santamaria, Fidel's most important aide, blew her brains out.

SHE - I beg you to change the conversation. (I-7)

The character of "He" is continually presented as one who is not happy because his dreams were thwarted. He wanted to enjoy democracy in Cuba, and these twenty years in Los Angeles have left a growing scar in him due to the feeling of having been betrayed by Fidel.

The fact that "He" and "She" are conversing in Spanish is characterized, in Leopoldo Hernández's English translation of the play, through description or explanation of terms. An example is when "He" is

talking about "The International" and says that it is a "march," which "in our language" is feminine. In other instances the character uses English terminology in his dialogue with his sister, such as the use of the words or expressions like "real estate" or "big deal," but he still explains their meaning due to his sister's inability to understand the English expression.

The formality of sentence construction in Leopoldo Hernández's English dialogues also evinces a Spanish or foreign sounding preciseness, at times:

HE - I do not remember your husband's age, but I guess, my nephew's. (She assents with a head gesture.) As to my grandniece, I don't know. I recall your advising me of her birth more than ten years ago, but I am not certain.

(I-8)

The aspects of the culture of Cuba occur frequently in Hernández's dialogues. Examples of this may be the male and female roles, for instance. "She" discloses she had a certain envy of her brother when they were young, for his being their parents' favorite child, to which he says:

HE - Those were male chauvinistic times. The son was the important thing at home.

SHE - And our destiny was to learn to play the piano or to sew.

(I-12)

Male and female roles were then definite: women were expected to become housewives and the parents' expectations for success lay in their sons. "He," who was expected to be the Cuban Abraham Lincoln by his father, now has to confess:

HE - And I became...a revolutionary that failed twice.
 SHE - And I became an abominable pianist, a mediocre housewife.
 (I-12)

The aspects of "machismo" is also brought forth. Speaking about a cousin, "He" states that he thinks he is a homosexual:

SHE - Jesus! Why do you say such a thing? He's such a good man,
 HE - I did not say that he is a bad person. I simply indicated that he might be a fag. Up there, in Los Angeles, you can be a homosexual and still be considered a good person. They are not condemned beforehand, as they are here. Down here you are "macho" or you are a bad guy. (I-9)

Although the brother and sister rehearse the type of conversation which should be carried on when the rest of the family arrive, they never do arrive. A warning of strong censorship is given:

HE - Why didn't you tell me when I announced my visit? At least I could have decided if I still wanted to come or not.
 SHE - (Lowering her voice.) There are things that are not to be told over the phone, let alone by mail... There are attentive ears at all times, in all places. (I-18)

Conflicts are continuous between "He" and "She," and communication is made more difficult due to the brother's bitter and biting words. A soft vein is taken when the two reverie about their childhood. "Let us

take advantage of the short time left," is a sentence often repeated by the sister, in order to try to attenuate the growing anger "He" displays for the regime in power.

The disappointments lived by "He," including the failure of his marriage, make him such an embittered individual as to cause his sister to say that he enjoys having enemies. The following dialogue summarizes the non-encounter of brother and sister after a twenty-year separation:

HE - This has been a disaster.
 SHE - You are talking about the visit.
 HE - Yes.
 SHE - We have seen each other. That is something.
 HE - What we have seen is each other's ghost. The real you and I do not exist. We faded away amid a bunch of red and black flags and death threats. (II-45)

In The Reunion Hernandez also writes of a visit. This is a Russian mother visiting her son in a prison in the outskirts of Moscow. Again the difficulty in communication is felt. This time, through the oppressive presence of a soldier during the mother's visit:

MOTHER - Let's talk about you, your health, your work here...
 SOLDIER - The prisoner is not allowed to talk about his work or life here. You may ask him about his health, though.
 SON - That is generous of you soldier... I did not expect that much.³²

As "He," in We Were Always Afraid, the "Son" in The Reunion is also embittered by being considered a traitor, an enemy of his own people. As he says odious words against the government and Stalin, the Soldier interrupts the visit:

SOLDIER - The visit is terminated

SON - It is not the visit, soldier. It is life...³³

Galeria #7 takes place in the United States during the depression. The characters are Polish immigrants working in an Eastern coal mine. This one-act play portrays the social injustices perpetrated against the less privileged in a society bent on financial gains.

Prejudice is the theme of Martínez, also in one act. Martínez is a Los Angeles Cuban exile who is overcharged for his rent, has to accept employment below the level of his capacity, and is almost charged with rape, by telling a girl she deserved a kiss. Martínez's stigma is his accent, and he says that an accent is like an illness. Still, the confused Martínez comes to realize that his cultural make-up is now truly ambivalent:

"I am not
español va
nor American
but casi
español casi
American
That is to say un poco
of each."³⁴

Martínez here makes a statement on his process of assimilation into the American mainstream. The ambivalence, however, is felt when Martínez repeatedly mentions his need to qualify for citizenship:

"In spite of all I'll be an American..."

An American citizen, and I will be able to tell you that I do not want the apartment because it is filthy, good only for foreigners, not for Americans like myself."

Martínez, as well as Hollywood 70, Hollywood 73, 940 SW Second Street and Do Not Negotiate, Mr. President were written while Hernández lived in Los Angeles, and were produced in that city, under the sponsorship of the Bilingual Foundation of Arts. The plays were directed by Efrén Besquilla, Margarita Galván, Carmen Zapata and Nena Acevedo. The latter is presently residing in Miami, where she is active both as an actress and as a director. The success of Martínez in Los Angeles, with Luís Avalos in the title role, was responsible for an invitation for performances in New York City.³⁶

Leopoldo Hernández's plays vary in historical times, settings and situations. However, they all portray a basic preoccupation with social injustices, political situations which create greater barriers in communication, and the loneliness generated by both these factors. In Los Rojos también Green ("The Reds also Believe"), Alicia is a young refugee in Spain from a Communist island. She eagerly awaits a visa to a country where she may join other exiles like herself. In La Pendiente, "The hero's mutilation by torture is symbolic of man's spiritual mutilation."³⁷ In the final scene of Do Not Negotiate, Mr. President, just as Boris, the hero, is about to be shot to death by a party member, Livia, he exclaims: "I am in peace. You are in Hell."³⁸

One of the best theatrically structured plays by Hernández, and one which has a definite universal appeal, is Tres Azules para Michael ("Three Blue Strikes for Michael"), written in 1976 and not yet translated into English. The play is set in a passenger airplane which

has been hijacked by terrorists. Though filled with suspense and emotion, the play is neither melodramatic nor sentimental. It is a drama filled with tension and impregnated with metaphysical and philosophical questioning on the fact that Evil appears to be a prevalent element in humanity. A very contemporary theme--terrorism--and an age old questioning on the forces that regulate man's behavior are intertwined in a most fascinating drama which is as contemporary as today's news.

Another Cuban author in exile featured in the first International Playwrights Series of the Coconut Grove Playhouse was Manuel Martín, Jr. Born in Cuba, Martín holds a B.A. degree from Hunter College and has studied under Lee Strasberg, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and the Goldoni Theatre, in Rome. In 1969 he and Magaly Alabau founded the Duo Theatre, a very active bilingual theatre which operates in New York City. Martín, who directs plays besides acting as artistic and executive director of the Duo Theatre says: "Sometimes I neglect my duties as a playwright to accomplish the work of our small but busy theatre group."³⁹ Plays written by Martín, which have been produced, include Union City Thanksgiving, Swallows, Carmencita, Rasputin (invited to the 1976 Caracas International Festival), Francesco: The Life and Times of the Genci, and Fight, with music by Feliz Méndez.

In 1973 Martín was awarded an America the Beautiful grant to conduct a drama workshop at Ossining Correctional Facility (Sing-Sing). Martín was the coordinator of INTAR's Playwrights-in-Residence Laboratory in 1980, and he has taught drama workshops at Boricua College and at the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. From 1982 through 1983 he was a member of INTAR's Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Laboratory. Some of his awards include the Cintas Fellowship for Playwriting (1985-86), ACE Best

Director of the Year Awards (1972 and 1975), the John Gassner Award for excellence in theatre criticism, and the Walter Prichard Eaton Award for Playwriting. His play Swallows has been optioned for PBS' American Playhouse Series. Martín is also the winner of the 1986-1987 New York Foundation Award for Playwriting.⁴⁰

Union City Thanksgiving, written in 1982, was selected for presentations by Miami's Coconut Grove Playhouse's first International Playwrights Series. The play was also invited to participate in the Festival Latino in New York, at the New York Shakespeare Festival, and has had other staged productions in and outside of New York. The play was written by Martín in English, and the Spanish translation used in the Miami production was undertaken by Randy Barcelo with assistance from Dolores Prida and Gonzalo Marduga.

As the title implies, the setting of the play is Union City, New Jersey, and the time is Thanksgiving Day, 1981. The action takes place in the kitchen-dining-room of a modest house inhabited by a Cuban family in exile. Except for a child, Ileana, merely mentioned as being in the house--either doing her homework, or watching television in another room-- the characters are mature people, ranging in age from their late twenties to early eighties. Catalina Valdés, the mother of the family, is a widow in her early sixties, who lives with her mother, Aleida, and her unmarried daughter, Nidia, who is in her late twenties.

Her daughter Nenita is married to Peter, a Nuyorican (New York Puerto Rican). They are both in their late twenties, and the parents of Ileana. These three, along with Tony (the eldest son, on leave from a

mental hospital), and Sara, from New York and a friend of Nidia's, are spending Thanksgiving at the Valdés' home. Aurelito, a married son in his late thirties, living in Union City, is also present.

As the play opens one feels the aura of nostalgia in this family's day-to-day living. After eighteen years in exile, remembrances of life in Cuba keep recurring in their conversation:

NIDIA - Do you realize how many times we say "Do you remember" in this house?

NENITA - (Smiles) It has become as familiar as the Daily News.

NIDIA - (Looking out the window) I wonder what kind of life is out there.

NENITA - Why don't you go out. Explore. Be curious.

NIDIA - I'm more comfortable with the family, with the "Do you remember" of Union City. I'm getting too old for changes.⁴¹

Nidia, however, says she actually has few memories of the past which, for her, is like a movie, "a long strip of celluloid and certain frames are mission...I'm here now, Union City, New Jersey, U.S.A."⁴² This line by Nidia seems to stress the tone of the play, which deals with the reality of a family in exile and their continuous efforts to adapt to a new lifestyle and culture. A family which has come to realize they have reached the point of no return.

There appears to be a note of disenchantment in the fact that the Valdes are not as affluent as they might have been, were they in Cuba. Talking about her deceased father Nidia says he worked hard and was able

to build five houses, one for himself and his wife Catalina, and one for each of his children. Their property, however, was confiscated by the Revolutionary regime:

CATALINA - (Bitterly) Fidel must be very grateful to your father for his generous contribution to the Revolution.

NIDIA - Mama, do you remember what we discussed yesterday? No more talk about the Revolution in this house. We must live in the present. (I-17)

Aleida, in her eighties and the eldest of the family, states she sees nothing promising in the present. She says she had no choice regarding her departure from Cuba: "The whole family decided we were leaving. No one bothered to ask my opinion."⁴³

The tightly-knit family unit appears as an aspect of Cuban culture. That is presented in Union City Thanksgiving as also being a disturbing characteristic because members of the family have to forego their individuality in order to remain a working part of the family group. When Aleida states that they are a close family, Aurelito says: "We are so close we are asphyxiating." (I-22)

Nidia dreams of the possibility of moving to New York where she could work and share an apartment with her friend Sara. The simple mention of the possibility of her leaving causes an argument between her and Catalina, her mother. Reality for Nidia, who is in her late twenties, is to remain at home, caring for her mother and grandmother.

Further conflict comes into the drama when Aurelito reveals to Nidia his knowledge of the fact that she is a lesbian, and says that is why she and Sara see each other so often. That, he says, is also the reason why Sara has been a regular member of each Thanksgiving reunion of the Valdes family for the last seven years.

Nidia, on the other hand, has learned about Aurelito's connection with a terrorist group, which plans to overthrow Castro's regime. Since each has knowledge of each other's secret, there is a tacit agreement of silence on the subject, but the tension remains. Each is afraid the other will, in a moment of rage or spitefulness, reveal the secret to the rest of the family at the dinner table.

Racial prejudice among Cubans is also unveiled during the Thanksgiving dinner. Talking about a nephew in Miami who married a black woman, Aleida mentions how her sister and family "had to swallow their tongues"⁴⁴ after the black woman saved her husband from being killed by blacks in a Miami riot.

Aurelito intervenes with a statement that Cubans have a tradition of not intermarrying racially. When he is asked if racism can be classified as a tradition, he asks Nenita:

AURELITO - What would you do if when Ileana grows up she decides to marry a black man?

NENITA - I'll be very sad...

AURELITO - You see...

NENITA - I'll be very sad that my daughter and her black husband will have to face men like you during their lifetime.

(II-28)

The subject leads to an argument and in the heat of the discussion Aurelito lets out Nidia and Sara's secret. The Thanksgiving dinner turns out to be as sour as the grapes from Aleida's grapevine in Cuba.

No one finished his meal. The ghosts of the past hovered over the entire reunion. The present does not seem to be any sweeter for this group of exiles:

SARA - I miss my island. When I came to this country I wanted to be a part of it, but I always felt like a child who was invited to a birthday party and when I arrived the cake was already gone. (II-3)

The final words of the play are from Tony, the deranged son, who pleads: "Nidia, take me back to the hospital." (II-32)

Martín's play *Swallows*, written in 1980, takes on a documentary style presentation. Through the use of the technique of interviews, Martín creates an objective, impartial and unbiased presentation of Cubans and their view on the Revolution and its aftermath. Characters speak freely in favor of or against the regime, as it personally affected them. A musical play in two acts, *Swallows* presents an array of sixty-two characters. All these characters, however, can be played by eight actors, four men and four women, as the author indicates in his cast of characters.

In *Swallows* the stage is divided into two planes: four actors-- on a platform upstage--represent the characters who are in Cuba, while the four remaining actors, in the downstage area, represent those in the United States. "To represent the existing barrier between over there and over here our actors will bring down a plastic curtain, which will divide the two areas during the play."⁴⁵

The play opens on January 1st, 1959, just as former President Fulgencio Batista flees the country and the crowds jubilantly celebrate Castro's victory. A further technique employed by the author to enhance the documentary aspect of the play is the use of slides. This technique also makes for a swift change between recalled action in the past and the action of the present, that is, twenty-one years after Castro's victory:

WOMAN #2 - It was our moment of victory. Then came the time for revenge. The execution. Paredón!

MAN #1 - Then the exodus began. Thousands of Cubans left the island. Some of them legally, others illegally, in small boats, even hidden under the wheels of a jet plane.
(I-5,6)

The word used to classify Cubans who sought refuge abroad was "gusano", which translates as "worms." From these lines said by Man #4, Martin takes the title of his play, Swallows:

MAN #4 - They called us worms, I thought they should have called us swallows. Small and graceful, long-winged birds. They are swift and proud and well known for the migration habits. They are also known because they always return to their place of origin. (I-8)

These lines also refer to the fact that the majority of the Cubans leaving for exile in the earlier period of the regime, believed their exile would be short-lived. They expected events to take a different turn and that they would return to Cuba.

Among the characters representing those who remained in Cuba some felt the revolution was doing justice to the under privileged classes by, for example, confiscating the property of the wealthier population:

HERMINIA - Why don't you say the truth. Everything was going fine until the Revolution touched your property. You don't want to share it with the poor, you don't want to teach the illiterate ones...

DULCE - I was born naked, and God provided me very well to this point. So we are leaving Cuba the same way we were born. Do you know why? Because more than money and material things I love freedom. (I-12, 13)

In defense of the Revolution there is also the testimony of a peasant. He says that the Agrarian Reform had started in the Escambray before the triumph of the Revolution. Escambray is the rural area in the mountains from which Fidel and Che Guevarra led the revolution. Nemesio, the peasant, says:

"El Che promised us that everything in that camp--the grains, the cows and the land--was going to be divided in equal parts when the war was over. And that's the way it was done. He accomplished everything he had promised." (I-17)

But dissatisfaction began to spread among the people. Not only was property confiscated, but personal freedom was also denied. Censorship was the order of the day. Radio and television were used mostly for political propaganda and Fidel would speak for hours through those media:

PANCHO - They criticize capitalist propaganda. What's the difference? Before we were saturated with toothpaste, perfume, detergent and toilet paper commercials. Now we have revolutionary commercials. The selling of a revolution. What's the difference? (I-23)

As dissatisfaction increased, more and more Cubans sought a way out of the country. Even the young, who were mere children at the time of Castro's victory, questioned their activities in the Communist Youth, and the work of propagandizing they were to do, addressing the masses.

Life for those who left was one of continuous struggle and hard work. Through hard work, however, they prospered. After nineteen years in New York Dulce, who worked in a factory while her husband worked as a plumber, is retired. Though her son, a pianist, had to work as a dishwasher in his early days of exile, he is now recording his first album. Dulce says: "We are doing alright, but nineteen years is a long time..." (I-40)

MAN #1 - (On the upstage platform) After nineteen years Fidel Castro announces that Cuban refugees are allowed to return to the island.

WOMAN #1 - (On the downstage platform) It's absolutely forbidden to call Cuban refugees worms--gusanos. Now we are called butterflies--mariposas.

NAB #1 - It's amazing how money changes the aspects of things.
(I-40)

The affluence of some Cubans in the United States is depicted by the account of a Union City girl's fifteen-year-old birthday party. A big celebration is traditional among Cubans when a girl turns fifteen. Anyone familiar with Cubans' tradition of "Quinceneria" (the celebration of a girl turning fifteen), will appreciate this description. These are the most lavish parties ever planned by parents, and many families are

said to go into debt to offer the best they can imagine, or to outdo the last one they attended. The description of the birthday cake, alone, reveals the opulence of Ivette's feast:

"The birthday cake, in pink and white, was another masterpiece by Valencia Bakery. Fourteen swans holding the four tiers of the cake and on top a single swan on which a little doll, an exact replica of Ivette, was sitting...real water sprinkled from the tiny fountains in the bottom of the cake. Excerpts from Swam Lake were played through the quadrophonic system." (II-43, 44)

The scene describing Ivette's "Quinceneria" is changed abruptly to one of repression in Cuba. Agents go into the apartment of Antonio, a poet suspected of being a collaborator in counterrevolutionary activities. They examine his belongings, which include books such as Prometheus Bound and Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty. They then conclude Antonio is a sadist. A painting by Rubens is considered by them as pornographic.

ANTONIO - Compañero, Rubens was a respected artist before pornography became popular.

AGENT #1 - You'll say that in your trial.

ANTONIO - My trial? But I haven't done anything...

.....
They could never prove that I was a collaborator...

I was interrogated three times daily for thirty-seven days until I admitted I was a homosexual.

.....
I was condemned to one year in La Cabana prison. (II-48, 51, 53)

After exiles are permitted to return, some do return to visit friends and relatives in Cuba. One of these is Flora who, in a song and dance number, displays how she is able to take presents to her family. Since she can only take forty-four pounds of luggage, she puts on several sets of clothing and as she sings and dances she takes off the extra garments and paraphernalia. While she gives these to the three actors on the downstage area, the actors upstage react as if they were receiving the presents.

Among those who remained in Cuba, however, there are many who feel that everyone in exile contributed for the establishment of the system and is responsible for the executions which took place. Some exiles fear they will be rejected by their families if they try to visit them. To some the "worms" are traitors. To others, however, these visits have made a difference:

MAN #4 - (On the upstage platform) I don't know, it was kind of nice when my relatives came back. People say Cuba is a country of two nations. They only stayed one week, and we were learning so much about each other. (II-75)

A permanent establishment of relations, an acceptance of each other in peaceful, brotherly terms however, seems too distant for the most part:

WOMAN #4 - (On the downstage area) There is no solution! Are you going to resurrect the dead? Tell me, are you going to give me back twenty-one years of my life? There is no solution as long as there is Communism in Cuba. (II-75)

As the play comes to an end individual actors in both stage areas start to plead for understanding, for the curtain to be lifted. As two actors--one from each of the stage areas--try to reach the rope to lift the curtain, the others form a human barricade which prevents them from reaching their goal. While different actors say brief lines such as "Too soon," "No way," "Not yet," "I can't," they look at each other. Then, in a puzzled manner they stare at the audience, and the lights fade out.

The reader, or spectator, is left with the impression that the struggle is not over. Cuba's climate is still not ready for the return of the "swallows."

The success of the International Playwrights Series at the Coconut Grove Playhouse has prompted artistic director Arnold Mittelman to produce plays by Hispanic playwrights or plays translated into Spanish as a regular feature of the Playhouse's program. In February, 1987, the Playhouse presented Brendon Behan's The Hostage, an Irish play in Spanish translation, under the direction of Mittelman, himself.⁴⁶ Also scheduled for production in 1987 is the English version of the play Orquídiás y Panteras ("Orchids and Panthers") by Spanish playwright Alfonso Vallejo.⁴⁷

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CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF HISPANIC THEATRE

In May, 1986, Acting Together, Inc. was responsible for the First Annual Festival of Hispanic Theatre, the first festival of its kind in the Southeast. A non-profit organization, Acting Together, a consortium of theatre professionals, was created to foster theatre activities in Miami, as well as to bring the theatre groups to work together in an effort towards the preservation of Hispanic theatrical traditions. The Festival itself was also intended to be a means of calling the public's attention to the work being undertaken by Miami's artists, "many of whom can no longer act in their native lands because of politics."¹

Presided over by Mário Ernesto Sánchez, of Teatro Avante, the first board of directors of Acting Together was composed by Evelio Taillacq of the Centro Dramático Antonio Artaud, as vice-president, Norberto Perdomo, of the theatre group Mater Dei, as secretary, and Rafael del Acha, Teatro Nuevo, as treasurer.² The board was able to mobilize the community and obtain sponsorship from several official and private sources for the realization of the Festival. Support for the event was received from such sources as the Dade County Council of Arts and Sciences, the National Endowment for the Arts, the State of Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, Metro-Dade Park and Recreation Department, Miami-Dade Community College, Hotel Inter-Continental, Diário las Américas, American Airlines, Bacardi Imports, Inc., and the City of Miami. Acting as consultants and coordinators for the Festival were Ana Maria Garcia,

Polita Gordon, and Anne Lynn Kettles. Throughout the month of the Festival different theatre groups were scheduled to open plays in various playhouses of the Dade County area each weekend.²

After an initial conference and forum on "The Future of Hispanic Theatre in Miami: Goals and Constraints," the groups began their presentation of plays, which were produced either in English or Spanish. The event also brought outstanding Cuban playwrights and professors of Spanish literature and drama to lecture on different facets of Hispanic theatre, or to direct discussions and debates after the presentation of their plays. Among these were Professor Yára González de Montes, a Cuban exile and professor at the University of Hawaii, who spoke on "The Golden Age of Spanish Drama," at the Wolfson campus of Miami-Dade Community College. Yára Montes centered her conference on the outstanding Spanish playwright Lope de Vega, author of more than 1,000 plays. Like Shakespeare's many of Lope de Vega's plays, such as Fuenteovejuna, are as well received today as they were during his lifetime, and they constitute regular theatre fare, not only in the Spanish-speaking world, but wherever theatre is practiced.³

Cuban playwrights and professors in exile Matias Montes Huidobro (University of Hawaii), and Julio Matas (University of Pittsburgh), were present to discuss their works, particularly those which were presented during the Festival--Monte Huidobro's La Navaja de Olofe ("Olofe's Blade"), and Matas' Juego de Damas ("Ladies at Play"). New York based playwright Dolores Prida had an independent reading of her play Cantar y Coser ("To Sew and to Sing"), at Miami-Dade Community College, where she also led a workshop on playwriting, following the presentation of her play.

Prida's play was originally scheduled to be presented as part of the Festival. The group which was to produce the one-act To Sew and to Sing, Teatro Nuevo, withdrew the play from their program, however, due to bomb threats from members of the Miami Cuban community, which are opposed to Prida's political views. "Prida has visited Cuba and favors restoration of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba."⁴ According to singer-actress Marta Pérez, (Grateli), the threats occurred because "Miami is the capital of anti-communism and anti-Castroism,"⁵ therefore Miamians consider Prida's political views as pro-communist.

Miami's radio station WQBA--La Cubanísima, withdrew its sponsorship from the Festival due to the inclusion of Prida's play in the program. Stations WRHC and Radio Mambí also withdrew⁶ their support. On the other hand, when presentation of the play was canceled, Florida International University withdrew its bilingual production of Garcia Lorca's Buster Keaton Meets a Poet in New York from the Festival, in support of Prida. "The University stands foursquare on its commitment to freedom of expression and opinion,"⁷ said FIU's President Gregory Wolfe. The vice-president of Miami-Dade Community College's Wolfson campus, Eduardo Padron, stated that the position of the College was that Prida "was invited because of her background in theater, not because of her political views. To disinvite her would be censorship."⁸

Despite earlier threats, the independent reading of the play was presented at the College's Wolfson campus by Miami actresses Claudia Dammert and Anne Kettles, without any incident. Following the presentation, the author led a playwriting workshop. "Dolores Prida read

from her comedy. The audience, which had been subjected to security checks on the way in, laughed. And the only heat felt came not from political foes, but a faulty air conditioner."⁹

Prida, who studied literature at Hunter College and has lived in New York since the early 1960's, has had more than eight plays produced in the United States. She is also the recipient of the prestigious Cintas Award for playwriting. To Sew and to Sing, which was first produced by the Duo Theatre of New York in 1981, has had over twenty productions across the United States. The play has "absolutely no political content,"¹⁰ said Rafael de Acha, who originally scheduled the production. "It deals with the dichotomy in many Cuban-American women between roots and the future."¹¹

The one-act play, which has as its subtitle "A bilingual fantasy," is a comedy-drama about an exiled Cuban woman in her twenties. The play "contrasts a Spanish-speaking character and her alter-ego, who speaks English, making them reel from the often hilarious confusions which spring from living in two cultures at once."¹²

The plays presented during the Festival were not all written by Hispanic playwrights, nor did they deal exclusively with Hispanic themes. At Teatro SIBI, for example, the play produced by Maria Julia Casanova and Yoly Arocha, under the direction of the former, was the drama by Ronald Millar, Abelardo y Eloisa, as translated into Spanish by José L. Alonso and adapted by director María Júlía Casanova. This production was so successful that the play remained at Teatro SIBI for over three months. The actors who interpreted the title roles, Raúl Dávila and Aurora Collazo, are highly recognized for their talent, experience, and "unforgettable roles"¹³ in former productions.

Miami-Cuban playwright Norberto Perdomo's play Dos Reinas para un Trono ("Two Queens for one Throne"), presented by the theatre group Mater Dei under the author's direction, is a historical drama revolving around the lives of Mary Stuart (Ana Machado), and Elizabeth I (Daisy Veliz), and the court intrigues which led to Elizabeth I's reign. The play featured Carlos Gerardo Rodriguez, as special guest actor, in the role of Lord Shrewsbury.

While Sociedad Pro Arte Grateli presented El Barberillo de Lavapiés, (a zarzuela by Spanish composer Francisco Asenjo Barbieri which first opened in Madrid in 1874), the group Prometeo produced a contemporary Spanish play of the absurd, Suicide Prohibited in Springtime, by Alejandro Gasona. Directed by Nilo Cruz, the play was presented in English by drama students of Miami-Dade Community College.

Mimi y Fifi en el Rio Orinoco, by Mexico's Emilio Carballido, was the International Arts group's entry to the Festival. The play was presented in Spanish, at Teatro Miami, Westchester, and directed by Eduardo Corbé. Orinoco brought together "two of our finest actresses (Teresa María Rojas and Marta Velasco), to interpret the roles of two lowly vedettes in their total physical and spiritual decadence,"¹⁴ as they sail up the Orinoco river aboard the cargo ship "Stella Maris."

At Teatro Bellas Artes, René R. Alomá's A Little Something to Ease the Pain, in a Spanish translation by Alberto Sarraín, was presented by Teatro Avante. Directed by Mário Ernesto Sánchez, the play deals with the visit to Santiago, Cuba, of a former resident who is presently in exile in Canada. The play, a drama which portrays the conflicts between

two cultures, is tension filled, but not void of humor. The production was undertaken by Teatro Avante with utmost professional care. It was a memorable theatrical experience.¹⁵

"Three Playwrights in Exile" was the title of the program presented by Teatro Nuevo, which consisted of three on-act plays. La Navaia de Olofé ("Olofé's Blade"), by Matias Montes Huidobro, is based on Yoruba (African) mythology. It is a play in which the author tries "to show the multiple characters inside ourselves."¹⁶ The play featured actors Nattacha Amador and Reynaldo González in the roles of Mother-Woman and Son-Man. Juego de Damas ("Ladies at Play"), by Júlio Matas, deals with the reunion of two elderly sisters, Ernestina and Celeste (Cari Roque and Nattacha Amador), and the latter's old time rival, Florangel (Yamile Amador). Ladies at Play has a gripping plot in which the realities of envy and revenge stand out. While the two plays were performed in Spanish, The Business Matter ("El Asunto"), by René Ariza, was presented in an English translation by Rafael de Acha, who also directed the three plays. The Business Matter, a play in the genre of the absurd, featured actors Reynaldo González, as The Man who Smokes, and Hall Estrada, as The Man who Eats.

Theatre group Los Chicos, which usually produces plays for children, presented Apartamento de Solteras ("Single Girls' Apartment"), which had a particular appeal for adolescents and young adults. The play, written by Jaime de Armiñán, was adapted to an American setting by Nena Acevedo and Marta Llovio, and directed by the latter. The play, which was presented at La Comédia, ran long beyond the period scheduled for the Festival.

Theatre fare for children was offered by Teatro Guignol, which presented The Story of All Stories, a puppet play directed by Pepe Carril. The play was presented free of charge, at José Martí Park.

According to Kenneth Kahn, executive director of the Dade County Council of Arts and Science, the Festival "attracted record audiences to the theatres."¹⁷ Equal success is expected of future festivals. In the meantime, "the Hispanic theater community here deserves kudos for the theater festival,"¹⁸ an all-embracing effort which succeeded in its aims by bringing the theatre groups to work together, and making the community aware of the work being undertaken by them.

The original controversy created over the play To Sew and to Sing, "merely fueled the public, and put Hispanic Theatre on the public agenda for the first time,"¹⁹ said Kahn. Through the news media, it also brought national attention to Miami's first Hispanic theatre festival.

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CHAPTER IX
TEATRO NUEVO/NEW THEATRE

Teatro Nuevo made its debut in May, 1986, with Three Playwrights in Exile, a theatre bill consisting of three one-act plays, presented at the Museum of Science, in Miami. "If we must define ourselves before we begin our work, we do so by calling ourselves a Bilingual Theatre Company."¹

The first undertaking of the Company brought the public two plays in Spanish, and one in English. "We want to share our cultural heritage with the public at large: both the 'Latin' and the non-Latin audience."² The Company, composed of artistic Director Rafael de Acha, Managing Director Ray Dielman, Dramaturg Hall Estrada, and Technical Director Art Chassman, was formed with the intention of creating "a nucleus of artists who will attain, by virtue of repeated teamwork, a style of their own, within a true repertory system."³

The five actors in the first production of Teatro-Nuevo--Hall Estrada, Reynaldo González, Cari Roque, Nattacha Amador and Yamile Amador--interpreted the nine different roles required for the three one-act bill. The three plays were directed by Rafael de Acha, the Company's artistic director, who has been a resident of Miami since 1985. deAcha, who left Cuba in 1960, came to Miami after acquiring remarkable theatrical experience, upon completion of his university studies at UCLA. He has been director of Boston's Chamber Opera Group and of the Manhattan Music Theatre. He has also been musical assistant to the New York Shakespeare Festival, and has directed operas and musical plays throughout the United States.⁴

Matias Montes Huidobro's La Navaja de Olofé ("Olofé's Blade"), although not a musical play, does present many musical elements, such as drum beats and brief chants, like "Oculé Maya."⁵ The author states that the play could, in reality, function as an Afro-Cuban ballet and he gives directors full freedom to experiment further on the musical aspects and ritualistic characteristics of the play.⁶

The characters of La Navaja de Olofé are based on mythological figures of the Yoruba cult introduced to Cuba by African slaves brought to that country during its Spanish colonial period. "The introduction of the Negro slave to replace the exterminated Indian...left its imprint on Cuba as it has on the South of the United States."⁷ A syncretism between Yoruba rituals and elements of the Roman Catholic faith, known as Santería, has developed in Cuba since that time. According to Montes Huidobro this syncretism appears as a spiritual integration among Cubans, and one which indicates the equality of the human condition.⁸

During a panel discussion, after a reading of the play at Miami-Dade City College, director de Acha mentioned that Luis Prichardo, Miami's high priest of Santería, "took violent exception in Chango's bisexuality, as presented in Huidobro's play."⁹ The author then stated that he did not intend, in his play, to transcribe or copy the original myth. He simply used the figure in order to create symbols and thus project a new Freudian-African reality. That Huidobro is knowledgeable on Afro-Cuban mythology is quite clear when one reads his extraordinary study of Cuban drama entitled Persona, Vida y Máscara en el Teatro Cubano (Ediciones Universal, 1973).

La Navaja de Olofé is to be staged with a large mirror placed on the center of the stage, to symbolize Olofé's narcissism. The barber's blade held by Olofe may be taken both as a symbol of a phallus and of the Freudian castration complex. The relationship between Woman-Mother (played by Nattacha Amador), and Man-Son (Reynaldo González), is permeated by incestuous innuendos, which relate to the Freudian Electra complex. The roles of the Woman and Man are also interchangeable with those of Mother and Son. At some points in the play the Woman takes on a male characteristic, such as the male dominance in copulation. The play's main theme relates to the battle of the sexes as it revolves around the basics of human life: birth, copulation, and death. "The action of the play is centralized in and around a bed: one is born in bed, life is continued in bed through the sexual act, one dies in bed."¹⁰

La Navaja de Olofé is a complex one-act play which differs greatly from the other plays written by Huidobro.¹¹ His play Exilio, which was presented in a reading at the Coconut Grove Playhouse's International Playwrights Series, has also been scheduled for a production by Teatro Nuevo.

The second play in Teatro Nuevo's program was produced in English. The Business Matter ("El Asunto") was written by René Ariza while he was a political prisoner in Havana.¹² The play, in the genre of the absurd, deals with a man calling on another to discuss a business matter, which is never disclosed. Throughout the dialogue the two men talk about their vices--gluttony and smoking--as each voraciously eats or smokes. Occasionally The Man who Eats (Hall Estrada) asks the caller, The Man who Smokes (Reynaldo González) if he recalls the reason for his visit. The

closest he comes to answering is his merely saying "I have it on the tip of my tongue."¹³ The business matter that the two men have to discuss "is never discussed because of the phobias, excesses, and obsessions that occupy the two."¹⁴

Juego de Damas ("Ladies at Play") was written by Julio Matas, who holds a Doctorate of Law degree from the University of Havana, and also studied drama at that University's Academy of Dramatic Arts. Upon his exile to the United States Matas attended Harvard University where he obtained his Master's and Doctorate degrees in Romance Languages. He has taught Spanish language and literature at Harvard, and is presently on the faculty of Pittsburgh University. Matas has been in the United States for over thirty years, and "he has distinguished himself as an educator, director and dramatist."¹⁵

The play presented by Teatro Nuevo has been published in English, with the title "Ladies at Play," in Selected Latin American One-Act Plays (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973). It is one of the "most often produced plays (by Matas) in the United States."¹⁶

"Ladies at Play" revolves around three female characters, Ernestina and Celeste, who are sisters, and Florangel, a one-time friend. The action takes place about forty years after Florangel betrayed Celeste by marrying the man who was engaged to be married to her. Throughout all those years Celeste felt deprived of the life of wealth and travel that she would have had, had her marriage to the American diplomat taken place. Instead, Florangel had been victorious. As the two sisters live their middle-class existence in progressive financial decadence, they plot to revenge whenever the opportunity occurs.

The play, through its clown-like characteristics, takes on tones of the genre of the theatre of the absurd. The two sisters through years of suffering, have become grotesque characters and this is accentuated by their make up, which is exaggerated and ridiculous.

After approximately forty years Florangel returns to the city and the two sisters invite her for a visit. During the visit they transform Florangel (who was finely dressed and bore the dignified appearance of a lady in her social station), into a grotesque figure like themselves. The transformation takes place as the sisters, under the pretext of fixing Florangel's hair, put on the grotesque make up on her face.

Florangel doesn't understand what is happening. She says the sisters are still the children she used to know long ago, and bids them farewell. As she walks out the door Celeste has her chance for the long-awaited revenge: she pushes Florangel down the vacant elevator shaft.

As the play ends, the two sisters laugh and dance with the alacrity of their triumph. Finally Ernestina says: "Now we can rest Celes. We can rest Celeste."¹⁷

Although written by three Cuban playwrights in exile, the three plays presented by Teatro Nuevo have universal themes and carry no regional characteristics in their plot. Huidobro's "Olofe's Blade", which contains elements of Afro-Cuban mythology, was referred to by a member of the audience during the panel discussion, as a play which gave her the impact she received from a Greek tragedy. In this respect it is interesting to draw a parallel between Huidobro's play and The Guthrie Theater's (Minneapolis, Minnesota) adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus. Considered one of the highlights of that Company's 1986-1987

season, the adaptation, entitled The Gospel of Colonus is set in a black church. "The unlikely marriage of Greek tragedy and American Gospel Music has been called brilliant by the critics."¹⁸

After its debut at the Museum of Science, and readings at Miami-Dade Community College, Teatro Nuevo became an incorporation under the name New Theatre, Inc.. The Company's next production, Woyzeck, by Georg Büchner, was presented at the studio of Creation Ballet Company, in Coral Gables. Beginning in December, 1986, the Company also started presenting a monthly production of play readings, under the title "Hispanic-American Playwrights: An Evaluation," at Hotel Inter-Continental Miami.

A bi-monthly newsletter--New Theatre News--published in English, also began to appear in late 1986, and in its second issue the newsletter announced that the theatre had now its own space at the "Aurora Square" building in Coral Gables, and that the seating capacity of the theatre remained "just as we want it--small and intimate, ranging downwards of eighty,"¹⁹ depending on the configuration of the stage which is to change according to the production. "We plan to continue challenging ourselves and our audiences with theatrical fare not available anywhere in the area."²⁰

In February, 1987, New Theatre presented Chopin in Space, by Philip Bosakovski, under the direction of Kathleen Toledo. The play ran to March 1, 1987. Beginning in March and running through mid-May, 1987, New Theatre scheduled weekend matinee performances of the Carousel theatre's production of Rumpelstilzkin, a German classic fairy tale adapted for the stage by William Cartotto. A co-production with Florida International University, Three by Three, "a powerful triple bill of new works by Julio Matas, Matias Montes Huidobro and Leopoldo Hernández"²¹

was also scheduled for the month of April, to be presented at Florida International University's Miami Campus. Concurrently, the Modern Languages Department and the Center of Multicultural Studies of that University, in cooperation with New Theatre and the Dade County Public Library--West Dade Regional Branch, scheduled the presentation of the First Conference on Cuban Theatre in the United States, with the support of the Florida Endowment for the Humanities. Scheduled for opening May 8, 1987, in New Theatre's own theatre space in Coral Gables, was the play King Ubu ("Ubu Roi"), by France's Alfred Jarry, under the direction of Nilo Cruz.

New Theatre's activities for 1987 include a twelve-week Musical Theatre Workshop, taught by Rafael de Acha and Kimberley de Acha, a two-day Symposium, "Viewing the Play," on critical perception and the relationship of the critic, public, and the creative artist. The symposium will feature guest critics such as George Capewell (WTML) and Diane Montane (Miami News). Another scheduled activity is a workshop on new trends in European and American theatre, with the participation of Crystal Field, Artistic Director of Theatre of the New City of New York City and James Leverett, National Director of Literary Services of the Theatre Communications Group. For the summer of 1987, New Theatre has scheduled a Children's Theatre Workshop and Festival, and "The Dog Days of Summer Marathon of new and not-so-new Works-in-Progress."²²

A preview of the theatre's 1987-1988 season includes the production of such plays as The House of the Seven Gables, an adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 19th Century novel which "has been called by some, the greatest classic American work,"²³ Arthur Miller's adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People, Lulu, "a new version of

Wedekind's Lulu Plays, in an ambitious multi-media production, and the American premiere of The Story of Mahew, by Edouard Manet, which was the hit of the 1986 Paris season."²⁴ New Theatre also has scheduled for its 1987-1988 season, a mini-series of "World Theatre" plays, and a play-reading series: "The Jewish Experience."²⁵

The first year of New Theatre has certainly proven it to be a most active and enterprising company, and one which has maintained its original purpose of providing a varied and out-of-the-ordinary theatre fare for Miami area theatre-goers. Its second year of activities promises to be just as varied and innovative.

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CONCLUSION

In May, 1986, the Florida Professional Theatres Association held its first major symposium in Boca Raton, Florida. During the two-day symposium of that organization Richard Fallon, "patriarch of Florida theater and founder of the state system,"¹ stated that thirty years ago Florida had no professional theatres and that, whereas the state "was a wilderness in 1955, it is now a frontier."²

It was precisely to this "wilderness" that thousands of Cubans came for exile, bringing with them a century old theatrical tradition. Florida today has achieved "a fast growing theater industry."³ The Cuban exiles, on the other hand, have brought to the area a cultural diversity which has enriched its theatrical panorama.

While the Florida Professional Theatres Association, which is comprised of fifteen theatres, was holding its statewide symposium in Boca Raton, the City of Miami was also experiencing its first major endeavor in coalition of local Hispanic groups: the presentation of the First Annual Hispanic Theatre Festival, organized by Acting Together, Inc.

The purpose of the present study was to analyze the Miami Cuban theatre in exile for its social and political significance, its dominant themes, as well as to determine factors of assimilation into the American mainstream. Surely the results of the research point to the fact that the Cuban theatre in Miami is a vital source of information on the historical and political events which led to the Cuban exodus. It is also a mirror-like reflection on the process of that group's adaptation to a new environment.

The Cuban theatre in Miami presents a varied and multi-faceted view of the problems exiles had to face in adapting to their new society. A great number of the works presented blend characteristics of this process of adaptation with nostalgic tones of reference to the life left behind. Many are plays in which political satire and the humorous experience of the immigrants are presented as a form of relief or escape from the tension or frictions felt by the new exile. The theme of the majority of the works, however, stresses the need to forget the past and face today's reality.

While earlier most plays were written and presented in Spanish, more and more works are appearing in English. One of the factors for this occurrence is the desire to reach a larger, multi-ethnic audience. Another is the fact that, with the passing of the years, a new generation has been formed and, while bilingualism is prevalent among Miami-Cubans, many--educated in the United States--feel more capable or confident of expression in the English language.

Actress Christina Sánchez, who has also adapted plays for the stage, came to Miami when she was four years old. She, for example, states that English for her is a better vehicle of expression since she feels more secure when working in that language. The most important roles played by Christina in Miami's theatres however, have been in Spanish. Most of her English-speaking roles have been in films, such as Cease Fire, with Don Johnson, the star of the television series Miami Vice.⁴

Another factor denoting the Cuban exiles' assimilation into the American mainstream is the fact that Miami-Cubans feel they are a part of a community they helped to build, for the city mushroomed with the exodus from Cuba. Also, more and more Cubans have been appointed to

high-ranking positions in business enterprises and government offices. In November, 1985, for example, Xavier Suárez, who arrived in Miami when he was eleven years old, became the first Cuban mayor of Miami.⁵

One year later, in December, 1986, Bob Martínez became the first Hispanic to be elected governor of Florida. One of the first public appearances of newly elected Governor Martínez was as Grand Marshal of Miami's Parade of the Magi, a cultural tradition which became outlawed in Cuba in 1970, and which was revived in exile in 1972, through the efforts of Radio Station WQBA-La Cubanísima.⁶ The Parade of the Magi is a Cuban tradition of European roots which celebrates the trip undertaken by the three kings to the place of birth of Jesus Christ, according to the Bible.

The preservation of the Cuban cultural heritage appears to be instilled in the younger generation of Cuban-Americans, many of whom have no recollection of Cuba, or have never been to that country. This younger generation, though definitely guided by American values and institutions, shares a bond of Cuban cultural traditions due to the tightly-knit family unit, as well as the larger community which shares a common heritage.

Bilingualism and the appreciation of Cuban cultural values are bound to persist in Miami. The theatre appears as a catalyzing element through which the Cuban-American will continue to reflect his cultural values. Through the theatre the Cuban-American also enriches the American cultural scene, and contributes to a better understanding of American society, and the values it represents to those who have chosen the United States as their place of exile, the land they now call "home."

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