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### Revolution from Afar

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#### Cuban American Perspectives

[Relational space] . . . is another space . . . actually lived and socially created spatiality, concrete and abstract at the same time, the habitus of social practices. It is a space rarely seen for it has been obscured by bifocal vision that traditionally views space as either a mental construct or a physical form.

—Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*

On 13 August 2006, Cuban president Fidel Castro celebrated his eightieth birthday, although recovering from major surgery and ominously absent from view. Miami Cubans who identify as political refugees danced in the streets at the news of Fidel's failing health but were also forced, yet again, to acknowledge his spectacular longevity as Cuba's charismatic leader. Their reaction added another episode to the problematic relationship between Cuba and the United States that deeply informs the entire Cuban diaspora. Cuba's reach extends far beyond the Miami-Havana nexus that Juan Flores insists is "incomplete without Washington, and New York, and by extension San Juan, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Madrid, Tokyo"<sup>1</sup> and, recently, Caracas or Beijing. Yet it is also clear that Cuba's "borders have proliferated, all the while showing their limited ability to contain, arrest, or limit the historic and present exchanges that continue to sneak through its cracks."<sup>2</sup>

Years of exchange and influence have permanently linked the island to its northern neighbor. However, since the Cuban Revolution of 1959, decades of unresolved political clashes, ideological disagreements, economic sanctions, and immigration crises have marred the two countries' once affable political, financial, and social affiliations. According to scholar Román De la Campa, the Cuban Revolution has certainly, "found its primary source of inspiration in confronting American brawn"<sup>3</sup> and to date, nearly a dozen American presidents have encountered a resolute, fiercely independent Fidel Castro. Political differences have had a profound effect on Cubans at home and in the diaspora. While more than one million former Cuban citizens live in exile *in* the United States, I contend that other Cubans have been undeniably

exiled by the United States. This chapter investigates how the experience of this postmodern dislocation is making itself heard in the theatrical language of two contemporary Cuban American playwrights, Rogelio Martinez and Nilo Cruz, both of whom concentrate on the interstitial space of the blended subject. They are a part of an ongoing conversation by a prominent group of Cuban American playwrights (including María Irene Fornés, Eduardo Machado, Carmelita Tropicana, Caridad Svich, Dolores Prida, and Jorge Cortiñas) writing about identifications, exile, and the island.

While exile can serve as a space of potentiality or a ground of possibility, it can also engender wrenching estrangement—its participants are not fully at ease in any country. Since the Cuban Missile Crisis, Cuba has been notably positioned as peripheral to the United States. The individual, personal consequences of Cuba's position are manifest in many Cuban American plays, including *Illuminating Veronica* by Rogelio Martinez (2000) and *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* by Nilo Cruz (2004). Both plays engage the ways in which various views of the United States as a “home” to the exiled are translated, transferred, and transformed by Cubans in the United States and in Cuba. Martinez and Cruz vividly express the tension of living at a murky, hyphenated crossroads.

Both Martinez and Cruz come from families that were ruptured by moves from Cuba to the United States. Rogelio Martinez came to the country with his mother when he was nine years old, during the Mariel boatlift of 1980, but his father was unable to join them until ten years later. Nilo Cruz left Cuba before his tenth birthday; he emigrated from Matanzas to Miami with his parents, leaving two older sisters behind on the island. Clearly, these two playwrights were children when they emigrated and did not make personal or political decisions to leave Cuba. *Illuminating Veronica* and *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* are included here because they take place in Cuba, but at the time they were written (in the early 2000s), neither Martinez nor Cruz had ever returned to the island. Unlike many other Cuban American writers, both Martinez and Cruz must fictionalize Cuba entirely or rely on their memories and research about their native country. Both authors rely on their intimate and immediate knowledge of life as Cuban Americans in the United States, allowing them to complicate the experience of exiles from the other side—looking inward at Cuba rather than outward from Cuba.

Martinez and Cruz reaffirm what Edward Soja contends, that “‘life-stories’ have a geography too; they have milieux, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which affect thought and action.”<sup>24</sup> Both playwrights contend with lives left elsewhere and lives rebuilt in new surroundings. Their plays accentuate the hope for reconstitution of the self and of the homeland within multiple competing exile conditions (internal, external, by a country, and within a country). Both artists write about modes of self-imposed exile

and exile *by* the United States, for those inside Cuba and outside it. Their works continually complicate notions of repatriation and assimilation, as they incorporate a keen personal awareness that these challenges exist both inside Cuba and in exile. Cubans on the island have had to reexamine and transform their identities, as have those Cubans who left the country.

In his play *Illuminating Veronica* (2000), Rogelio Martinez explores Cuba just after the Revolution, when the title character remains on the island although her family has relocated to Miami. Martinez portrays Veronica's exile within Cuba, her efforts to embrace the revolutionary socialist system, to reenvision her home and family, and to reconcile the personal sacrifices she will have to make to participate in Cuba's newly constructed society. He positions Veronica's cultural and personal memories as a dialectic between her view of the United States, of the world, and of herself. The play emphasizes the interplay of history (both personal and political) and geography. In *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* (2004), playwright Nilo Cruz depicts a pair of siblings as they return to Cuba seeking recollection, recuperation, closure, and conservation. Sent together to the United States as children without their parents, their separate homecomings are observably burdened by questions of identification and belonging.

Both plays engage complicated questions about the connections between place and personhood; they examine how Cubans in the United States view themselves and how they view Cuba (in memory and in actuality) and their relationships to it. The characters search for ways to traverse the deep ideological divides between homeland and exile. Wrestling with what theatre scholar Una Chaudhuri calls "the unsentimental recognition of home *as* a discourse, replete with ideological antecedents and consequences,"<sup>5</sup> *Illuminating Veronica* and *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* illustrate how the enduring, intricate relationship between the United States and Cuba has irrevocably shaped identities in both countries. Martinez and Cruz use the stage to boldly articulate experiences of hybridity and of transculturation (mutual borrowing and lending between cultures) that circumscribe their characters.

### *Illuminating Veronica*

Cuban American playwright Rogelio Martinez was born in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba, in 1971 and left the island by boat, via the port of Mariel, nearly a decade later. He and his mother relocated to Union City, New Jersey, an area known for its significant concentration of Cuban immigrants, second only to Miami. Martinez completed his undergraduate studies at Syracuse University and he later earned his MFA in playwriting from Columbia University. An alumnus of New Dramatists, his works have been developed and presented across the United States, by theatre organizations such as the Public Theater, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the Mark Taper Forum, the

South Coast Repertory, Primary Stages, and the Atlantic Theater Company. Martinez's plays include *All Eyes and Ears*, *Fizz*, *Learning Curve*, *I Regret She's Made of Sugar*, *Arrivals and Departures*, and *Union City*. He received the Princess Grace Award in 2001 and has earned NEA/TCG and Sloan Foundation grants, as well as several prominent theatrical commissions. The Denver Center Theatre Company premiered his play *When Tang Met Laika* in early 2010, and he wrote a new play, *Wanamaker's Pursuit*, for the Arden Theatre Company in Philadelphia's 2011 season. Martinez also teaches playwriting at Montclair University, Goddard College, and Primary Stages, where he is a member of the Strelsin Writer's Group. He currently runs the Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Lab at INTAR (International Arts Relations, Inc.) in New York City.

Martinez's play *Illuminating Veronica* begins in Havana in December 1960. It is an unsentimental, complicated (rather than nostalgic) view of Cuba's past. An educated but very sheltered woman in her early thirties, Veronica has chosen to remain in Havana after the Revolution although her birth family emigrates to Miami. She, her husband Manuel, and their former maid, Rosario, stay and support the Revolution. Manuel works for the Ministry of Culture and is promised a promotion from his job as a censor to a position editing books to "put them in a socialist context." Veronica, who is pregnant, learns that proving her allegiance to the Revolution will require putting her bourgeois past behind her, even if that includes betraying her marriage—Manuel's boss, Pepin, insists that Veronica sleep with him to prove her dedication to the Revolution, and to garner favor for Manuel. She reluctantly agrees to the affair and to relinquishing her ties to Havana's old society. Yet Veronica also demands that Pepin hire her, making her case by explaining that she already does half of Manuel's work. Instead Pepin uses Veronica's now counterrevolutionary collection of books (such as Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*) as justification to question Manuel's loyalty and to fire him. When the government begins moving rural Cubans into large homes in Havana, an old man named Ernesto and his twenty-something granddaughter Sofia are assigned to half of Veronica's house. Once they move in, Manuel, who blames Rosario (now their neighbor) for spying on him, is disillusioned and disgusted. He admits to Veronica that he never wanted her to work, and that he has arranged for them to be smuggled out of Cuba. In the next scene, two men take Manuel away, making it clear that Veronica has exposed his plan to leave the country. She chooses the egalitarian ideals of the Revolution over her marriage, suffering great personal losses in order to participate in the new collective. Five months later, Pepin visits Veronica (now the mother of triplets) and explains that he was fired for supporting her application to work for the Ministry of Culture. This reality tests Veronica's belief in the growing egalitarianism promised

by the Revolution. Yet soon after he leaves, Veronica embraces Sofia and Ernesto as her new family and, along with her three sons, celebrates her commitment to the Revolution and its future.

Although the story is geographically contained in Havana, powerful links between Miami and Havana anchor this play. Miami was undoubtedly the most prominent destination among Cuban émigrés of the era. According to Cuba historian Louis Pérez, “Miami began as an imitation of Havana in the 1920s and 1930s, then was imitated by Havana during the 1940s and 1950s; in the 1960s it was a copy of a copy that was copied.”<sup>6</sup> Cuban culture dictated much of Florida’s imaginary, just as American culture shaped a great deal of Cuba’s aesthetic. A simple, visual example is that much of Key West reflects early-twentieth-century Cuban architecture, while much of the architecture in Havana imitates the American Art Deco style of the 1920s.

De la Campa, however, questions the particular choice of Miami as a popular exile destination to begin with. He writes, “I am not sure why Cubans went there instead of New York, Europe, or Latin America. . . . Perhaps it was the unconscious return of the possessive gaze: Cubans looking to Miami as the United States historically looked at Cuba.”<sup>7</sup> *Illuminating Veronica* investigates precisely how the Cuban characters who remain in Cuba respond to this gaze. Educated and pregnant, Veronica remains on the island because she defines revolution as Chaudhuri does, as “a painful turn in a long, ongoing narrative that has a logic of its own.”<sup>8</sup> For Veronica, the “turn” Chaudhuri mentions can only develop meaning within a particular cultural narrative—in Martinez’s play, that narrative includes the unambiguous division between Cuba and the United States after the Revolution. Theorist Edward Soja best explains the schism of the revolutionary narrative, in terms of space:

Those seeking the demise of capitalism . . . tended to see in spatial consciousness and identity—in localisms and regionalisms or nationalisms—a dangerous fetter on the rise of a united world proletariat, a false consciousness inherently antagonistic to the revolutionary subjectivity and objective historical project of the working class. Only one form of territorial consciousness was acceptable—loyalty to the socialist state.<sup>9</sup>

Martinez’s work traces the processes of re-identification, of forming the new loyalties the Revolution demands of Veronica, of her marriage, of her home. The first stage picture is that of Rosario, ex-housekeeper of Veronica’s now departed family, standing on a chair attempting to dust an heirloom chandelier. The bourgeois past immediately collides with the revolutionary present. Veronica compares Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin’s portrait on the back of the book she is reading with that of American movie star Yul Brynner, even though the familiarity that had formerly allowed the United

States and Cuba to influence each other, “to imitate each other, to borrow from each other, to become somewhat like each other”<sup>10</sup> had already been irrevocably altered. In these brief moments, a theatrical framework is created; both the past and the present, as well as the Soviet Union and United States, are ever-present in this Cuban world, despite their obvious antagonisms.

Cubans on the island live with what May Joseph asserts is the “impossibility of full citizenship by constituting its absences, its longings, its elsewhere.”<sup>11</sup> Their citizenship originates from a cultural rather than a geographical identity, as Soja suggests. The book Veronica has chosen to read comprises translated letters between Lenin and Soviet writer and activist Maxim Gorky at a time when reading Russian authors was highly recommended in Cuba. The book being a long-distance correspondence between two people in separate physical locations adds another important theme to the play, while keeping Russia foregrounded. The book insists that distance does not extinguish conversation. Veronica’s comparison of Lenin to Brynner signals that American culture remains ubiquitous as well. She soon reveals that she and her husband are the only members of her immediate family and friends who did not leave Cuba for Miami. An ideological rift, followed by physical separation, has fractured her former family and exiled her from them. Her local, territorial consciousness and its cultural influences have prevailed over her familial relationships.

The vestiges of a different life, of a prerevolutionary (and capitalist) society are still visible in Veronica’s home, despite the vast political changes around her. Several paintings, a lavish chandelier, and many European books adorn the stage—abandoned objects that once belonged to Veronica’s family. Although they readily acknowledge that it is a symbol of their previously bourgeois existence, Veronica and Rosario admit their sentimental attachment to the chandelier. Veronica remarks, “It’s part of my family now” and insists, “If my father could have stuffed it in his suitcase he would have taken it with him.”<sup>12</sup> Veronica insinuates that she will create a new family. Household objects and correspondences by mail with her departed family are her only links to a former life, a former self.

This is a major shift for Veronica, who has never been an independent woman. Although highly educated, Veronica concedes that she led an incredibly sheltered life before the Revolution; she divulges that she never ventured out alone because she could not have found her way back home. This metaphor is the foundation of Veronica’s experience in the play. Her view of herself has changed. Her refusal to go to Miami was a profound, initially solo venture and, because of it, Veronica is entirely unable to return to or to recuperate the home life she once knew. The very definition of *home* becomes incredibly malleable throughout the play. Despite her revolutionary resolve, Veronica grows pensive while poring over her father’s copy

of Proust, confessing, “All of a sudden I miss home.”<sup>13</sup> When her husband Manuel reminds her that she is “home,” she gently concedes, “Yes. I know. Isn’t that silly.”<sup>14</sup> Veronica suffers from what Chaudhuri calls “static exilic consciousness,” the condition of being homesick while at home. Chaudhuri notes, “Here the sentimental image of home—as an actual place correlated with a strong and desirable emotional experience (the sense of ‘belonging’)—unravels.”<sup>15</sup> As it unravels, the play raises important questions about the nature of home, about what a home entails, and whether or not it can be (re)constructed (physically and emotionally) in exile.

Although Soja suggests that in the recent past, “national patriotism and citizenship were usually couched more in a cultural than a geographical identity and ideology,”<sup>16</sup> Martinez’s Veronica views Miami as a physical space, complete with unfamiliar objects, that is distinctly disconnected from Havana. Manuel hands an already open letter to Veronica and tells her, “It’s a letter from your father in Miami. Telling you how life there is—he has a new Cadillac.” Manuel seems impressed by this information, but Veronica’s contempt for the American lifestyle is immediately clear, as she flatly responds, “As if that’s what life is.”<sup>17</sup> The United States is only a consumerist text to Veronica, a fractured dystopia that has been determined, corrupted, and transformed by commodity capitalism and personal hubris. She disagrees with Manuel, firmly asserting her opinion in a way she has not previously. However, the play suggests what Jimmy Porter noted in John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger*—that there is inherent difficulty in not being American while living in an American age.

No matter how many Cubans create enclaves in the United States, Veronica realizes that Florida can never replicate Cuba. Because all her friends and family have left, Manuel contends that Veronica does not “belong” in Cuba, but belongs “with [her] father” (i.e., in Miami).<sup>18</sup> The United States is never far from their consciousness. Yet Veronica deems it impossible to cultivate what De la Campa calls “an alternative Cuba through Miami.”<sup>19</sup> Her view corresponds with Foucault’s insistence that, “we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.”<sup>20</sup> A rift between the couple emerges as Manuel embraces the connections between the countries, the transculturations, openly discussing with his boss, Pepin, “how the Yankees just lost the World Series to the Pirates.”<sup>21</sup>

The fissure between Manuel and Veronica deepens when other cultural markers are considered, such as the books Manuel has been charged to rewrite. His list includes *Remembrance of Things Past*, whose “title alone is counterrevolutionary” because, according to officials, “the past is not worth remembering.”<sup>22</sup> Memory has become suspect. This sentiment not only applies to the Cuban Revolution, which often focuses on the future

of Cuba rather than its past, but also refers to personal memories of those who left the island. Manuel declares, “We can’t stop to think about [the past] when we’re making our own way in the world.”<sup>23</sup> The emphasis on Manuel and Veronica’s “*own* way in the world,” as unique and separate from their heritage, is key because their friends and families are now palpably absent. While Manuel struggles, Veronica has been exiled *to* where she belongs, not *from* it.<sup>24</sup> She discredits the past, moving away from her dependent, unassertive self. The egalitarian ideals of the new Cuban Revolutionary society shift her view of marriage and her capabilities.

Manuel does not express the same sense of belonging Veronica does. Rather, he is highly critical of Cuba and notes the manufactured fear in the country when he comments that the recurring air raid sirens are “a false alarm every day.”<sup>25</sup> Manuel’s skepticism about any threat the United States poses to Cuba creates a nuanced incongruity. The connections and the antagonism between Cuba and the United States are conveyed simultaneously, as Veronica demands, “I want color television, Manuel. . . . My father has one in Miami.” No matter her ideology, Veronica’s desires are still fueled by American-style consumerism.<sup>26</sup> These kinds of contradictions trouble her identifications. Manuel’s immediate response reiterates his earlier opinion—“Then maybe that’s where you belong.”<sup>27</sup> Manuel’s comment could be staged as sarcastic or hopeful. He ignores the fact that “the immediate purpose [of departing for Miami] was to get away from an uncertain—and in some cases threatening—future, but it was also a way to communicate opposition to Castro’s regime,” what De la Campa calls “a way of voting with one’s feet.”<sup>28</sup>

The United States remains in the conversation, as a palpable adversary, when Veronica meets Pepin, the Minister of Culture and Manuel’s boss. Pepin reminds Veronica to keep her eyes open for Yankee imperialism and blames Cubans’ lack of “taste” on “what’s left of Yankee influence,”<sup>29</sup> highlighting the once closely intertwined relationship between Cuba and the United States. Pepin accuses Veronica of clinging to her privileged past because she has not destroyed a painting that her aunt left behind. He claims Veronica believes, and maybe hopes, that those who left are “going to march back in.” He firmly warns her, “You can’t live in two worlds,”<sup>30</sup> flatly rejecting Chaudhuri’s notion of “inhabiting two or more homes simultaneously.”<sup>31</sup> Veronica’s memories torment her and she implores Pepin,

Do you ever get—do you ever remember things from your past. Things you had forgotten. Like a painting has the—to remember what you were like. It happens sometimes when I’m alone. I go into my older sister’s room—she has this little music box that I open and Schumann plays. And just as it gets—I think she’s going to walk through the door. I wait and wait, but she never comes back.<sup>32</sup>



Veronica's memories forge a critical link to her identity and to her relationships with her family. She directly relates certain items to her former self. Yet she also acknowledges that she is in a holding pattern, waiting for something to change. She still calls a space in her house her "older sister's room" although that sister is no longer present. If, according to Chaudhuri, Veronica's home exists in relation to a familiar group of people, what becomes of it without those people? She is uncertain about the *stability* of home; or to put it another way, she has a deepening *suspicion* that home is an unstable container, depleted without one's memories.

This exile from her family and her former self grows deeper, as Pepin insists Veronica "can't have revolution under the values taught to [her] by [her] father."<sup>33</sup> He goes on to demand that Veronica "prove" to him that she can "let go of everything" in her past in order to secure a promotion for her husband. This rejection of her previous bourgeois values includes sleeping with Pepin so that he will promote Manuel. Veronica negotiates her own new identity, proving she can overcome her bourgeois past, as well as what Chaudhuri calls "the power of place."<sup>34</sup> As her formidable response, Veronica violently slashes her aunt's painting with a knife, signifying her willingness to brutally relinquish the past while recognizing her personal power to choose to do so.

Despite this strong display of her will to transform and to join this new society, Veronica's self-definition remains geographically centered, tethered to her home and her desire to reterritorialize it. Her adamant sense of place reemerges as she insists, "I was born in this house"<sup>35</sup> when Rosario explains that there is ample room for the government to house other families there. Rosario, like others, gruffly points out that Veronica is "too sentimentally attached . . . to the way things used to be,"<sup>36</sup> as the audience witnesses her fervent effort to transform her thinking, to reimagine herself.

Within a month, Veronica significantly modifies her view of her home. She brazenly informs Pepin,

This isn't even my house. Everything in it belongs to my father. Is it too much to ask to be taken seriously? Papi thought it was. Then I read Marx and quickly learned everything Papi had taught me was wrong. Submission. Grace. Weakness. They were nothing but antiquated beliefs. Now there are new ideas. Fulfillment. Equality. Strength. Ideas that have taken hold of me. That have filled me. And I don't ever see me letting them go.<sup>37</sup>

Revolutionary knowledge has altered Veronica's perspective. She now demands personal respect and recognition, ideals that were never important to her before. She has enacted a "transformation of the family," according

Prizant, Yael. *Cuba Inside Out : Revolution and Contemporary Theatre*, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/miami/detail.action?docID=1575542>. Created from miami on 2022-10-24 13:47:28.

to Chaudhuri, “from a living receptacle of the individual’s memory to the site of its being forgotten.”<sup>38</sup> Yet rather than simply forgetting the beliefs instilled in her by her family, she vehemently and actively rails against them. Veronica views herself as having been enlightened, having been schooled anew about agency and female participation. However, the price of her ideological reeducation and her new national identity is her familial one. Veronica understands this as a binary relationship—she decides she must shed one identity in order to incorporate the other. While exiling her family, she exiles herself from her past.

The play moves forward in time and Veronica, now seven months pregnant, expresses her disgust that Manuel has still not provided the color television he promised her. She feels utterly betrayed, misled by “another broken promise.”<sup>39</sup> Manuel, on the other hand, has begun to appreciate the markers of the past. He realizes, “There is an inherent value to things old. They contain within them years and years of survival” (137). Where he once criticized Veronica for her sentimentality, he begins to cling to what came before. He seems desperate to recover another time, to return to the relationship they once had. Veronica biting implies that Manuel only values his individual survival rather than having any sense of a collective and that he has not appreciated the Revolution. Their differences in perspective are immense; Manuel finally asserts, “I can’t live here—I want to go” and explains that pouring cement for seventy hours a week since losing his government job was not “what he bought into” (138). Veronica insists that Manuel does not understand the immense sacrifices that are called for, and she reminds him that she “gave up her family” (138) to further this revolutionary project. Manuel then informs his wife that he has arranged for their clandestine departure to Miami. During an impassioned exchange about his plan, Veronica painfully admits that she thought her husband was “another man” (139). The contrast of staying on the island as opposed to leaving for Florida has fractured their relationship, leaving no room for complicated or gendered nuances. Veronica and Manuel take sides against one another.

Veronica’s reaction to sudden explosions is also particularly revealing. Remnants of her hope resurface, as she exclaims, “My father. . . He’s come back” (141), assuming that Cubans in the United States have decided to attack the island. She excitedly believes that her father has not abandoned her and will reclaim his homeland. She believes he could reinstate the “dynamic adaptation and accommodation” that Pérez notes existed between the United States and Cuba for centuries before the Revolution.<sup>40</sup> The explosions are not an attack after all, but are the celebratory fireworks of Cuban carnival. Yet the scene exposes Veronica’s innermost feelings; the audience glimpses the naïve hope she has preserved underneath her burgeoning feminist, revolutionary

exterior. It signals that her past has not been entirely eradicated from her personality and may never be.

The deliberate conflation of celebration (carnival) with destruction or aggression (a military attack) exposes a major paradox of the Cuban Revolution and of exile: does the past have to be obliterated for a reenvisioning of the future? Veronica further illustrates this contradiction as she tells Manuel,

I always thought that all those books would change the way people think. That people would look at me not as a woman with a wealthy family but as one with no past. That you would look at me not as your wife but as your equal. That all of you would trust I'd find my way home—it might take me hours but I would eventually come home.<sup>41</sup>

Veronica's questions about how to create equality, belonging, and kinship are essential to her redefinition of herself and her definition of revolution. She slowly becomes aware that her past gender dynamic with Manuel could indelibly mark her future despite great changes, and she struggles to accept this paradox.

Manuel also discloses contradictory ideas, as he tries to accept that the past has become irrelevant. While talking with Sofia, a girl from the countryside who moves into Veronica's home with her grandfather, Manuel remarks, "History begins with Fidel." Sofia cleverly responds, "I suppose it will end with him as well" (143), emphasizing her understanding of just how little control rural Cubans in particular had over their situation in the early 1960s. As the only character who seems to calmly accept and comprehend the complicated nuances of the Revolution, Sofia informs Manuel, "Everything is up for grabs now. It's not the same. It's not what you're used to" (144).

Shortly after this exchange, the ideological differences between characters in the play become especially tumultuous. Veronica notifies government authorities of her husband's plan to leave the country, resulting in his arrest and imprisonment for five years. It is unclear whether she does this out of spite, out of fear of his departure, out of fear for her own safety if the government views her as his accomplice, or due to her fervent belief in the egalitarianism of the burgeoning new society. (A complex blend of these motivations seems most probable.) Although not without turmoil, Veronica's actions privilege her new liberated identity over her dependent old one.

Rosario makes it clear that Veronica can never return to the past. She lucidly reminds Veronica, "Your father will never accept you as you are" (147). Rosario also rationalizes the losses required for Veronica to move forward, as they share the following conversation:

ROSARIO: Veronica. Do you remember when your father left? At the airport. All of us were there.

VERONICA: Yes. Why?

ROSARIO: You didn't want to kiss him good bye but I gently pushed you forward until you had to.

VERONICA: That kiss is all I have left.

ROSARIO: I want you to kiss your husband good bye so you can get on with your life. (147)

In this context, letting go of personal relationships—particularly those with her father and her husband, the males who have led her—becomes required for Veronica's life to progress. De la Campa asserts that "nationalism begets a sense of isolation, if not arrogance, that may well keep all Cubans from any sense of belonging."<sup>42</sup> This is the crux of Veronica's exilic experience. Her internal exile, complete with emotional isolation, seems required for change. Her perplexed state of continual development reflects Pérez's notion of national identity, "not as a fixed and immutable construct but as cultural artifact, as contested."<sup>43</sup>

What implications do these kinds of identifications have? What, if anything, remains? Memories comfort, inform, torture, revive, and destroy Veronica and others. Sofia's grandfather Ernesto has also been deeply affected by the ideological changes in Cuba. Displaced from the countryside to the city, he comments that the plans for the revolutionary government's continuation translate into a long stay in Havana, "away from the country. Away from where I belong."<sup>44</sup> Sofia quickly advises him, "The old belong where there are people willing to take care of them" (149). Ernesto is perceived as intertwined with others, a context from which Veronica has labored to remove herself. The fracture of the self that accompanies the new politic in Cuba is undoubtedly widespread and touches all classes. Veronica poignantly invokes her own eager transformation and its ongoing, accompanying loss, as she tells Sofia, "Isn't it funny how you can forget something that meant so much to you growing up. . . . Waking Papi up every morning. Duty. The duty towards my family. I haven't felt that way in a long time" (149).

By the end of act 2, it is especially evident that every character's previous perceptions of America have been considerably altered by the Revolution. Veronica explains how her father reacted when, as a five-year-old child, she told him she "belonged" where there was snow:

I told him I wanted to go to a place where everyone walked on clouds. He said it wasn't a cloud they were walking on but water. And I said, even better. He smiled and took me to a lake, threw me into the water and yelled for me to walk. And as much as I tried I couldn't. At that time my father was incredibly nationalistic. Nothing was better than Cuba and he was going to prove it to me.

She continues, “My father must be senile. He now believes in things he once told me were false” (150). Opinions have been turned upside down. The supposedly safe haven of exile also creates a torturous longing for the homeland, while those who have remained “at home” must reimagine it, and themselves within it. Veronica criticizes the changes in her father’s beliefs without acknowledging the vast changes in her own.

A similar yearning for connections and belonging drives Sofia to offer to become Veronica’s family. She tells Veronica, “I don’t want to give up the chance to have something genuine” (151). She implies that because they have not had sincere relationships with their actual relatives, family must be chosen or fabricated. An earlier reference to Goldilocks reemerges here, as the characters admit that no one knows how the independent, lost girl’s search for identity and belonging was actually resolved. This metaphor bolsters the provisional, unfixed nature of the postmodern exile identity. Goldilocks tries out the trappings of different identities to find one that is just right. Her story implies that there is an uncertain exploration and an unknown future subsumed in the search for identifications.

In the final scene of the play, Veronica divulges her pointed understanding of precisely how any ideology enacts change. Speaking about Pepin and power, she remarks, “That’s what this whole thing is. Taking an idea that is pure and corrupting it until it gets you what you want” (152). Veronica’s naiveté now eradicated, Pepin tells her, “Part of a Revolution is learning—growing.” Skillful adaptation has become a most necessary tool. Pepin continues, “We haven’t yet learned what to do with those of us who are genuine. It’s a lesson we’ll have to learn if this is going to work” (152). He does not explain what *genuine* means in this context or how one might recognize it in a world with relationships turned upside down.

The fracture of Veronica’s home is completed by the last letter she receives from her father. He writes that “memory either narrows a place to the point of disappearing or causes it to grow in your imagination” (157), yet he does not reveal which has happened for him. He admits that he can find no way to retain actual experiences. Although he remarks that his friends in Miami “want” Havana, he reveals, “I’ve decided to let go because for me Havana is a house on a quiet street—a house that no longer belongs fully to me. Street by street or room by room they’ve taken Havana from me” (157). His most chilling admission is that his own daughter grows faint in his memory—part of the “narrowing” he mentioned. He feels he must relinquish Veronica, along with Cuba itself, to live fully in the present. Veronica reads his explanation in a letter:

Last night I forgot what you look like and though the thought of forgetting you rattled me a little I soon decided that you were like the house that no longer belonged to me. With love, your father. PS. This is my

last letter to you. I have grown sentimental and I am embarrassed by everything I do or say in respect to Cuba. (157)

Veronica's father has incorporated the "combination of nostalgia and refusal" that De la Campa argues defines the Cuban community in Miami.<sup>45</sup> He has chosen to become a part of "a project that quickly went beyond the rejection of the old," according to De la Campa, "toward the creation of an alternative community, another homeland, perhaps a Cuba we never had or could have, in the United States."<sup>46</sup>

The letter makes Veronica aware of her father's decision to embrace another community and eradicate his past. Hence, in a brief exchange between Veronica and Ernesto, Veronica adopts a new family, a new father, a new identity. "The possibility of being exposed," writes theorist Zdravko Mlinar, "to the near infinity of places, persons, things, ideas, make it all the more necessary to have a center in which to cultivate one's self."<sup>47</sup> This impetus drives Veronica to replace her lost relatives with those who already share her house and accept her choices. Families become interchangeable. Veronica resituates her home life in order to reterritorialize what is local, the world inside her home, so that it incorporates her newly embraced agency.

The scene appropriately ends with the sound of Veronica's triplets crying, of the family that will surround her in the future. The end of the play reveals Veronica's attempt to firmly reinvent herself and her home, no matter what her father and the others who left decide to do. She remarks,

The man who wrote that letter and his friends. When they come back we will turn off all the lights and close all our doors and then we will hope they don't recognize their old homes. That they have forgotten them. We will hope they go away.<sup>48</sup>

Although Veronica's hope for their return remains, her point of view has changed. The alteration of her identity and belonging have come full circle. She no longer seeks a reunion and a return to past relationships but instead favors those she has recently established. Veronica's home has become "a place of discovery, a place to be discovered"<sup>49</sup> rather than the site of her physical and metaphoric exile from her family and her self. Both Veronica and her father forge new alliances that disregard the old and reject those who were once so vital—acknowledging that it is impossible to belong in both worlds. The rupture is severe enough that it has destroyed Veronica's ties and made them impossible to restore, yet it has also created significant new bonds to replace them.

The play does not assert whether or not this level of severity is necessary to form new political and gender identifications, to belong when exiled. Veronica's future will reflect Chaudhuri's inquiry about whether revolution is

Prizant, Yael. *Cuba Inside Out : Revolution and Contemporary Theatre*, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/miami/detail.action?docID=1575542>.  
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“an exercise in futility, a charade, an eyewash . . . or a radical change, altering the basic conditions of living.”<sup>50</sup> Martinez’s work demonstrates that these tensions remain unresolved because, as Ann Pelligrini contends, “Processes of identification are the subject’s constitutive condition. Through identification, individuals effectively solder their egos to others, both real and imagined.”<sup>51</sup> *Illuminating Veronica* depicts the problematical journey toward a somewhere or someone else, rather than an arrival at any fixed identity.

### *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams*

Nilo Cruz was born in Matanzas, Cuba, in 1960. His parents had initially supported the Revolution, but they grew concerned as it became more Marxist. Cruz’s father was imprisoned for attempting to leave the island when Cruz was two years old; upon his release, the family fled to Miami. Cruz wrote poetry in his teens and attended community college in downtown Miami in the early 1980s, where he met a theatre professor who inspired him to write plays. He later met Cuban-born playwright María Irene Fornés, who invited him to join her playwriting workshop at INTAR in New York and introduced him to the faculty at Brown University. Cruz eventually studied at Brown, earning his MFA in playwriting in 1994. In 2001, Cruz returned to Florida as the playwright-in-residence at the New Theatre in Coral Gables. There, he wrote his Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Anna in the Tropics* (2002), which moved to Broadway and was nominated for a Tony Award in 2004. Cruz was the first Latino playwright so honored. His other works include *Night Train to Bolina* (1995), *Two Sisters and a Piano* (1998), *A Bicycle Country* (1999), and *Lorca in a Green Dress* (2003). His plays have been produced by New York’s Public Theatre, Pasadena Playhouse, McCarter Theatre, and South Coast Repertory Theatre, among others. Cruz has won numerous prestigious awards, including a Kennedy Center honor for New American Plays and a Rockefeller Foundation grant. Like Martinez, Cruz lives in New York City and is an alumnus of New Dramatists. He has taught playwriting at Brown University, Yale University, and the University of Iowa.

Nilo Cruz’s play *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* (2004) takes place in Havana in 1998. Estranged twins Luca and Luciana, who have a physical condition that slows their aging processes, return to Cuba after more than thirty-five years in the United States. The twins were on the Pedro Pan flights (Operation Peter Pan), the clandestine exodus of roughly fourteen thousand children from Cuba in the early 1960s. The Catholic Church organized these departures of children, without their parents, when it was rumored that children would be sent to Soviet-style work camps to support the Revolution. The children were placed in Catholic homes or orphanages in the United States until relatives or their parents could reclaim them.<sup>52</sup> In 1998, a rare papal visit affords Luca and Luciana the right to travel for eighteen days to the island, where

they have separate but intertwined experiences as they seek to deal with troubling childhood memories and to find closure. Luca stays with his *tio* (uncle) Lalo and experiences the difficulties of daily life in Havana during the Special Period. He finds a Cuban lover (probably a prostitute) named Delita, who helps him understand the conditions in modern-day Cuba. Luciana encounters Havana as a tourist, escorted around the city by a Cuban guide while staying in a hotel. Luca's and Luciana's adventures expressionistically overlap and coincide onstage, although they are detached. When Luca attempts to meet with Luciana, she flees Havana to the town of Santiago de las Vegas, where she meets Hortensia and her twenty-something sons, Basilio and Samuel. Hortensia has lovingly created a Museum of Dreams, filled with letters describing the miracles and wishes of everyday Cubans. She and her sons assume Luciana is there to write about the museum and to gain the church's support because Cuban authorities, especially one General Viamonte, view the museum's spiritual overtones as suspect. Viamonte interrogates Hortensia and Luciana, insisting that the state will allow no such public (state-supported) museum. Hortensia continues to collect stories of miracles and encourages Luciana to seek her own miracle—reconciliation with her brother, Luca. As both Luca and Luciana confront the incestuous relationship they had in the past, miracles from the museum mirror their journey. When Luca and Luciana are finally reunited in the last few minutes of the play, they reconcile and are ready to learn how to be normal siblings. Safely back in the United States, Luciana and Luca send Hortensia a letter about their own "miracle," their reconciliation, to add to her museum.

*Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* takes place during Pope John Paul's historic first visit to Cuba. The papal visit serves as an important backdrop by which two Cuban American exiles visit their homeland. The papal gesture indicates Cuba's growing openness and its increasing desire to participate in the outside world. Modern Cuba—constituted by its fervent determination of sovereignty, its isolation and its shortages, its cultural exports, and its diasporic community—drew international focus in 1998 when it acknowledged all religions on the island and permitted their practice. Because absences make what *is* in Cuba as relevant as what is *not*, this historic moment of candor and tolerance signaled the willingness of Cubans on the island (and outside it) to imagine the country differently and to accept change.

*Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* deals with the loss intrinsic in exile, and especially within the experience of children who, as part of Operación Pedro Pan, were brought to the United States from 1960 to 1962. Cruz explains that Luca and his estranged sister Luciana "should look younger than their actual age, as if their lost childhood has stopped them from aging."<sup>53</sup> Cruz physically presents their bodies, as Ann Pelligrini might describe them, "as contested discursive site[s] through which ideological concepts are



naturalized as biology.”<sup>54</sup> Although Cuba has changed a great deal in the thirty-five years since the siblings were on the island, they do not appear much older. This is incongruent with the Cuba they now encounter. It is no longer a place of revolutionary hope and excitement and instead has been forever marked by the Revolution’s successes and failures. The economic hardships of the Special Period are evident in its long food lines, intermittent blackouts, and crumbling architecture, yet Cubans soldier on. They suffer and struggle to survive, forced to weigh their commitment to revolutionary ideals with their practical concerns about everyday needs such as food and housing.

The Cuban American siblings in the play embark on separate, very personal journeys, as they seek to make sense of their abstracted childhood, one shadowed by duality and partial identifications. Where the United States was once the utopia they dreamed about, they now imagine Cuba as their utopia. As Chaudhuri astutely articulates, their Cuban “identities have to be negotiated out of a welter of myths and stereotypes and desires and dreams and daydreams.”<sup>55</sup> The Cubans these siblings meet face a similar challenge. After nearly forty years of revolution, many are torn about the capacity for the socialist country to thrive on its own. The stresses of the Special Period have made them question Cuba’s fervent anticapitalist, isolationist positions. Cubans love their country but long to modernize, to integrate with the rest of the world, and to benefit from its goods and services.

Cruz specifies that the performance space for his play should have “a feeling of openness” and that a Tibetan bell should be used “as a way of suspending reality.”<sup>56</sup> While there are brief moments of theatrical realism throughout the piece, ambient sounds and commingled spaces often create an impressionistic, dreamlike stage environment. For instance, the piece begins with Luca and Luciana both on stage, but completely unaware of each other. They share the space but are clearly in separate environments while having simultaneous, parallel travel experiences. They go from the United States to Cuba, but their physical environment on stage does not change. Hence, the mental and emotional landscapes make up the foreground, rather than any specific place. Luca and Luciana also write in travel journals and impart these thoughts directly to the audience. Cruz uses theatrical elements like these to express the paradoxes and complexities of exile and reterritorialization, amid a loss of immediate geography. Questions about the crucial relationship between place and personhood emerge immediately, making it clear that exile has hybridity at its core.

Luca and Luciana come to the island with different purposes and distinct visions of their *cubanidad*, or Cubanness, a cultural identity that emphasizes diversity within the contexts of strong nationalism and anti-imperialism. (Because they left the island involuntarily as children, their departure is not viewed as political but circumstantial.) Luca explains to Cuban airport

agents that he has come to the island to visit relatives, with whom he will stay. Luciana discloses that she is a journalist and will stay at the Hotel Capri. One sibling has come home as a Cuban returning from the United States, the other has come to Cuba as an American tourist. Their varied perspectives are instantly evident: the Hotel Capri, once run by Miami mobsters, was open only to non-Cubans at the time. Locals were not permitted to stay there and were usually not permitted on hotel grounds.

Luciana's choice signifies that, as Chaudhuri contends, "tourism is a method of experiencing other places in terms one already understands, a method of canceling out unfamiliarity."<sup>57</sup> Does an exile inherently approach with a remembered, or possibly imagined, familiarity with his or her country? Both Luca and Luciana note the "same old" things in Havana, recognizing the city's streets and seawall. However, Luciana insists, "I didn't come here to retrace the past, I came to see the new generation . . . The new island."<sup>58</sup> Her statement raises questions about what is "new" in contemporary Cuba for her to see (despite its newness to her) and how her past may be reflected or obscured there. Along with changes since the Revolution began, Luciana's remoteness is used to reiterate Chaudhuri's view that the meaning of exile is usefully ambivalent, that "exile is branded by the negatives of loss and separation; on the other [hand] it is distinguished by distance, detachment, perspective."<sup>59</sup> Considering the contentious relationship between the United States and Cuba, the twins struggle with an amalgam of their memories and of their perceptions of the island. This is not the Cuba they left behind in 1961. Instead, it is a country that has been through many phases of influences, triumphs, and repression. The Special Period tempered Cubans' hopes to shape their futures by significantly diminishing their power to do so. Rather than looking forward, they had to concentrate on meeting immediate needs. Luca and Luciana have changed, too, yet they are partially stuck in a time gone by. Like Cuba, they want to move forward but cannot do so without reconciling the past.

Basic privileges afforded to him in the United States alter Luca's view of Cuba. In a section entitled "A Place Called Home," Tio Lalo explains to Luca that, "It's better to bathe in the morning because the electricity is cut off after six."<sup>60</sup> Although he was aware of difficulties in Cuba since the end of Soviet subsidies, Luca is startled. The reality of daily life in Cuba in the 1990s is conveyed, as basic services were unreliable. This reality is directly contrasted with Luciana's posh experience of the island—the hotel receptionist informs Luciana that her "tour guide" will be Ramón. (Because Luciana is American and, thus, suspicious, she is required to have an escort.) Here, Luciana represents part of the "sociocultural world of the audience watching"<sup>61</sup> in the United States, with controlled tourist-only access to the island (if permitted access at all).

Since departing Cuba in the 1960s, these Americans have had little contact with the island. In the following scene, entitled “Maps and the City,” the siblings grapple with memory:

LUCA: I’m remembering the streets . . .

LUCIANA: The streets are remembering me . . .

LUCA: Blue skies, faded awnings, orange tiles . . .

LUCIANA: The world is not forgetful . . . A sidewalk never forgets to be a sidewalk . . . A tree never forgets to be a tree.<sup>62</sup>

Luca and Luciana question whether their memories are affected by whether or not one is remembered. They desire an exchange, or conversation, of memory. Chaudhuri observes, “Although the act of returning home is an archetypally regressive act—‘going home is always going *back* home,’ . . . it is used . . . not to recuperate identity but rather to stage the difficulties, even impossibility, of such a recuperation.”<sup>63</sup> Cuba’s isolation since the Revolution means much of the terrain has remained as the twins remember it, but they are surprised by its severe decay, especially because their bodies have not deteriorated with age. Nevertheless, they encounter a less dogmatic, much more nuanced Cuba than the one they left in 1961. Although Luca reveals that he and Luciana should “settle the past,”<sup>64</sup> Luciana seems more concerned with the memories and impressions she can presently cull from the island. Luciana remarks, “In a secret way I’m collecting faces, streets, and romantic corners.”<sup>65</sup> Like many tourists, she is far more interested in what she can take from Cuba than what she can offer it. She does not see her role as a contributor but as a recipient.

Cruz’s metaphor of Havana as “a sleeping madam who lost her pearl necklace”<sup>66</sup> exposes the loss that pervades Luciana’s experience. Her exile is complete in her definition of herself, when she tells Samuel, “I’m not from here. I’m from the United States” and insists she is on the island “for the Pope’s visit.”<sup>67</sup> She does not admit that her trip has any personal significance, nor does she divulge that she was born in Cuba. When Samuel’s brother, Basilio, insists that Luciana’s birthplace, “makes [her] one of [them],” she tellingly does not respond. She resists the “new hybrid identity” that May Joseph suggests may “continuously produce discursive critiques of the state, of patriarchy, and of capitalism.”<sup>68</sup> She clings to her American experience and will not identify with the material and ideological struggles, decay, and confusion she witnesses around her, as she is still unable to accept these traits in herself.

Basilio and Samuel, both in their twenties, explain to Luciana that their family has been treated with suspicion “because of all the letters [they] sent abroad.”<sup>69</sup> These letters reveal that, even before Luciana’s arrival, the world

abroad was always present and viewed with anticipation by these brothers. The young men were seeking support for the museum from beyond Cuba's borders, a comment about the outside world bolstering even Cuba's most intimate projects. Basilio welcomes Luciana to his mother Hortensia's house and to the Museum of Dreams in the same breath, conflating the two. The "museum" of "dreams" sounds like a place where unrealized dreams come to permanently reside and where realized dreams linger in limbo. It is a metaphor for the paralysis of Cuba itself at the end of the twentieth century.

As Néstor García Cancilini asserts, "It is not the same thing, of course, to preserve the memory in individual form or to pose the problem of assuming a collective representation of the past."<sup>70</sup> Museums aim to represent collectives. Yet, as Chaudhuri contends, "Only those things are put in a museum that have no 'organic' place within a society, because they either belong to a different time or a different place."<sup>71</sup> If dreams belong in a "different time and place" than present-day Cuba, the picture is bleak. Basilio's welcoming of Luciana is completed by the "sound of a large wave,"<sup>72</sup> a persistent reminder that Cuba is, psychically and metaphorically, an island and, quite possibly, an unaltered museum of another era. As Patricia Ybarra asserts, "Within Cuban American drama of the 1990s, the rendering of the sea as a liminal borderland . . . ingests and reimagines travel and the travelogue as chronicles of immobility and stalled motion."<sup>73</sup> The sea as a boundary insists that even though Luciana has come, Basilio is not going anywhere. During the Special Period, the outside world cannot fully penetrate this environment and remains distant.

Meanwhile, Luca tells his Cuban lover Delita why he does not really know how old he is—he explains that he and his sister suffer from an aging disorder. He explains that his "body has stopped recognizing"<sup>74</sup> his age. He implies that he has been physically unable to grow because of severed identifications. When Delita asks Luca why he is so "gloomy," he asserts that he is "just trying to adjust." He continues: "Everybody tried to prepare me for this trip. They told me about the power being cut off, the shortage of food. How buildings are falling apart. How people live double lives. . . . Well, nobody ever can tell you how it affects you inside."<sup>75</sup>

Luca's remark highlights the privilege he has known in the United States and echoes his past, during which he was forced to "adjust" to a life outside Cuba. He is dejected because he is confronted with what Soja identifies as "urgent awareness of geographically uneven development and the revived sense of [his] personal political responsibility for it."<sup>76</sup> Luca's intense memories of the island as it was thirty years before must be painfully reconsidered. Because Luca appears much younger than his age, the audience is confronted with the physical paradox within Luca's observation: although Luca still appears youthful, the years have drastically altered the world around him and

his perception of it. The ethereal nature of these conversations materializes again, as the end of this scene is punctuated by the border—the sound of a large wave that “takes Luca and Delita away.”<sup>77</sup>

Like her brother, Luciana is unable to “return completely” to her homeland, as Guillermo Gomez-Peña put it.<sup>78</sup> In a journal entry she shares with the audience, Luciana is exploring Cuba as a tourist and adventurer rather than as a native. She is utterly lost while at “home” in Cuba and describes how “the thrill and the fear of the unknown take over.”<sup>79</sup> Here, the play explores what it means to be lost in one’s native country. The specific language Luciana uses—that her homeland is “unknown” to her—pointedly reflects her bewildering experiences on the island. When Luciana meets Hortensia, Hortensia calls her “a woman from a foreign country.”<sup>80</sup> Only Luca consistently positions Luciana as a native of Cuba. He tells an absent Luciana, “I went back to our old house. I found you in every room. Even if you have chosen to remove yourself, you were there in the patio, in the living room, standing by the window.”<sup>81</sup> The place is marked for Luca and, in his estimation, his sister still belongs in it. Luca’s memories are crafted around Luciana’s presence, in sharp contrast with her choice to distance herself from Cuba and to see herself as an American outsider.

Basilio quickly reminds Luciana that, for his generation, the United States is always present in the Cuban psyche. He flippantly remarks, “I told [Samuel] he doesn’t want a wife, he wants a Girl Scout” (21), revealing his specific cultural knowledge of American scouting. Even Basilio and Samuel, born within the Revolution and therefore too young to remember any other system, understand and use American references. If they do so only for Luciana’s sake, it becomes evident that her American background changes the conversation between them. This highlights how the close proximity and historical relationship between the United States and Cuba mark both Cubans and Cuban Americans. Basilio, Samuel, Luciana, and Luca are all constantly aware of two countries, influenced by two sets of ideas and values—exile is not necessary for this duality to emerge.

This moment is juxtaposed with Tio Lalo explaining to Luca why he and his sister were sent to the United States. Lalo describes the perception on the island: “Everybody thought there was going to be a war, you see. And there were rumors that the government planned to send children to work on Soviet farms, so [your mother] wanted to protect you” (24). The binary between the United States and the Soviet Union emerges here—the United States was perceived as a safe haven for the children while the Soviet Union was feared. Yet the attempt at finding a safe haven in the United States caused the twins’ greatest calamity: their incestuous relationship. It looms much larger than the threat any Soviet work farm may have been. This passage also notes Cuba’s position between the super powers and anchors Cuba’s

difficulties within the Cold War framework. Cuba is isolated. Because they leave the island, Luciana and Luca suffer a parallel isolation in exile. Being Cuban isolates them once they are in Ohio, and living in the United States isolates them anew once they are in Cuba. Like Cuba, they are trapped in between, existing in an undefined, interstitial space where they cling to each other.

Despite Luciana's fractured childhood, Hortensia insists, "Oh, the body never forgets love, Luciana. It has its own time and memories." She goes on to say, "And the old days come back, like a forgotten season and restore all of what I was and am" (26). Hortensia's descriptions reflect Luciana's journey as much as they do her own. These memories on and in the body seem particularly poignant because Luciana's body has not aged normally. Time has not passed as usual. Basilio soon shares a memory with Luciana, a file of "a few of the miracles that came last month." One memory in particular is staged. A man named Faustino appears as the lights change and the Tibetan bell chimes. Wearing an old straw hat, he begins, "On the ninth of September my father left the country and told me to take his little statue of the virgin to the wilderness and place it in the river" (27). Departure to a foreign land is central yet again, clearly part of the entire Cuban experience. As if transported elsewhere, Luciana walks to center stage and recites poetic dialogue about journeying and feeling lost. She admits, "No, I can't go on pretending" (28). It becomes obvious that a particular memory plagues her. Then Luca and Delita appear. Luca carries a suitcase and opens it as he asks Delita, "Tell me what do you want to eat?" (29). This suitcase is completely stuffed with American food and toiletries. Luca ironically adds, "I told you I came prepared" (29), and he did, by consumerist standards. Delita eats a biscuit and quizzically comments, "They taste like paradise" (29). Cuba was often envisioned as a paradise, with its warm tropical weather and sandy beaches. Ironically, Delita's perception of the United States, with its abundance of goods, has now become the ideal.

To soothe Delita's extremely emotional reaction to the abundance before her, Luca gently says, "We have everything we need, and what we don't have we'll do without" (29). Here, this comment is framed as a decidedly Cuban mentality rather than an American entrepreneurial spirit. Cubans, as represented by Delita and Hortensia, are more concerned with what Jon Erickson notes as "a relationship to *being* rather than with *having*" (31). Although Luca has a suitcase full of products and Luciana has the freedom to travel, the access and excess of American capitalism has not soothed the emotional ruptures of their exile and isolation. They do not have a relationship with each other. To an island that has few material goods, they come seeking recuperation, a reconciliation that could never happen in the United States, despite their wealth of possessions.

The angst that the trip to Cuba has created for Luciana is evident when Samuel and Basilio share parts of her travel diary aloud. They note that she “just want[s] the trip to end,” that she is “in a quandary” that causes her to wander through the streets (30). The psychic toll of rediscovery, of attempting to reconcile the past, has disoriented her. Yet she also writes, “Here, I can only anticipate the gifts that come with each day, whether it’s a walk to the square with Basilio or a smile from Samuel” (31). She acknowledges that Cuba offers time, that the pace on the island is much slower than in the United States, and that human connections are therefore paramount.

Yet it is Luca’s intense longing that seems to beckon to his sister. She faces the pinnacle of her identity crisis, just as Luca enters the stage and remarks,

I went to the house we used to visit every summer. . . . The place looked withered and old, as if the sea had entered the house. . . . The old swing was still there swaying in the breeze . . . And the hum of mother’s song in the air, telling you to come back. (32)

Because of his estrangement from Luciana, Luca chooses to imagine his sister through his early childhood memories from Cuba rather than in the present, clearly equating her with Cuba’s locations and climate. Luciana tells her far-off brother, “Because I can only love you best when you’re far away, I’ve chosen to love you in the distance” (33). This is also true of Cuba, of her experience of exile from her homeland. The rupture caused by involuntary relocation, combined with the ominous secret of the incest in their childhood, creates an internal exile in Luciana that mirrors her physical stagnation. Her identity is in turmoil, as she begins to understand her condition. She tells Hortensia, “Little by little I realize why I am playing this role, why I can’t face myself. . . . Why I am living a lie” (35). She slowly discovers that she has been exiled from her own feelings as well as from her country.

Luciana’s quest for self-discovery and recovery is complicated by General Viamonte, who ruthlessly interrogates her and Hortensia. Although Hortensia insists that Luciana is “not a foreigner” because she was born in Cuba, the general replies, “She’s a foreigner to me!” (37), marking Luciana’s distinct difference from those who stayed on the island. Viamonte also points out that the process of childhood exile manufactured identifications: “the Pedro Pan project, they called it, like the children’s book about the boy who runs away to never-never land and never grows up” (38). Because their childhoods were irrevocably altered, many Peter Pan survivors who were separated from their families and raised by strangers abroad feel as if they never fully experienced childhood.<sup>82</sup> Even if sarcastically, Viamonte positions the United States as a faraway land where all is supposedly well, a utopian “Never-Never Land” where no one ages and new, joyous identifications can be created. Yet the story of Peter Pan does not end well. The

others around him, whom he loves dearly, do grow up—they become adults and leave him behind, stifled by his immaturity.

The general later refers to Luciana as a “tourist” and asserts,

We live in an age of reason, of natural science. We take pride in the real. Our system gave me a pair of shoes, a home, a refrigerator. If compañera Hortensia wants to call our accomplishments miracles, then these are the miracles that need to be exhibited in her museum. (39)

Viamonte firmly situates practical, material accomplishments of the Revolution in opposition to hopes and dreams. His edifying and unsentimental assessment of modern Cuba troubles Luciana’s utopian vision of her homeland. Viamonte also points out that Luciana’s visa is for journalistic purposes, yet she is not in Havana following the pope. When Luciana insists she came to see Hortensia because Hortensia wrote to her in the United States, the general explains that the letters were intercepted and never left Cuba. He attacks Hortensia, saying, “You live in a world of fantasy, with angels and spirits, and you don’t want to face reality” (39). He claims that, because “nobody wants tourists” in this small town in the eastern part of the island, the museum was voted down. Its purpose and merits were not discussed. As a government figure, Viamonte’s blatant rejection of dreams, of faith and hope at a time of opening in Cuba, is an especially revealing comment on state bureaucracy, one that directly contrasts with Hortensia’s (i.e., the people’s) idealistic project.

Upon their return to the museum, Luciana criticizes Hortensia’s passivity in the face of the general:

LUCIANA: (*With contained anger*) It seems like this whole island is always waiting! Waiting! Waiting for something to happen. And nothing ever happens. Who’s going to be the first one to stop waiting! Who’s going to be the first!

HORTENSIA: You have your ways . . . You come from a different world.

LUCIANA: No, I come from the same world.<sup>83</sup>

The women’s disagreement over the form of resistance, of action, reflects their unique perspectives. The play insists that Cubans have a different worldview than Americans. It raises the pointed question May Joseph asks—“How are hybrid identities shaped in excess of, and in relation to, the boundaries of nation?”<sup>84</sup> It is indicative that in this exchange, Luciana reveals her understanding that her two experiences, as a Cuban exile and as a hyphenated American, are not separate. She acknowledges her connection with a Cuban world just as Hortensia denies it. While Hortensia now views Luciana as



different, Luciana has begun to see herself as a part of Cuba, as within its revolutionary purview. She finally considers both her American experience and her Cuban experience as parts of the same whole.

This characterization affirms Homi Bhabha's observation that identification is "always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image."<sup>85</sup> Luciana gradually accepts her Cuban identity. Yet the complexity within this identification emerges soon after their discussion, when Hortensia tells Luciana about a Cuban mantra, "You must learn to endure what you can't change."<sup>86</sup> This type of resignation does not sit well with the typically innovative, entrepreneurial American ideal. When Hortensia gently asks Luciana why she chose to stay with them in Oriente (rather than remain safely in Havana), Luciana replies, "Because for a moment I needed a sense of place, to belong."<sup>87</sup> Hortensia wisely informs Luciana that, "everything in life is trying to find its place but also its absence. And already from the beginning the absence had begun."<sup>88</sup> What *is not* is as significant as *what is*. Then, without any prior knowledge or discussion of Luca, Hortensia suddenly encourages Luciana to go find her brother. This surreal moment, filled with Hortensia's premonition, intuition, and compassion, concludes their intense exchange.

The most impressionistic scene in the play, entitled "Entering the Night without Electricity," takes place in near darkness. Cruz creates two conversations that overlap considerably, often making it unclear exactly who is being spoken to, or being spoken of:

DELITA: You must not remember much about this place.

BASILIO: You're almost American . . .

LUCA: Are you saying that I'm American?

BASILIO: You were so young when you left.

LUCIANA: But I don't feel American.<sup>89</sup>

What does it mean to "feel" Cuban or American? These cultures coexist in the characters' bodies, perspectives, and memories. Their self-definitions are both chosen and circumstantial.

Both Luca and Luciana experience what Mae G. Henderson calls "the outsidedness of insidedness."<sup>90</sup> The siblings are trapped between rootedness and estrangement, in their homeland, in their adopted nation, and within themselves. Their dichotomy of consciousness is due to, as Chaudhuri argues, "the most fundamental rift between the figure of America and the old discourse of exile . . . from the grim reality of home—and homelessness—that greets the already unhomed immigrant."<sup>91</sup> Delita exposes a crucial nuance of exile when she admits, "I never thought that life would be difficult up there" (in the United States). Luca replies, "It was. I remember

Prizant, Yael. *Cuba Inside Out : Revolution and Contemporary Theatre*, Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/miami/detail.action?docID=1575542>.  
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it as if it was yesterday. A cold town in Ohio. An old building falling apart . . . Children and more children. The stench of urine.”<sup>92</sup> Luca incisively dismantles the fantasy that America is a paradise. Luciana poignantly adds, “In Ohio my heart was circumcised.”<sup>93</sup> Clearly, the sense of trauma that De la Campa considers has molded these exiled adults. Cruz decisively echoes De la Campa by dismantling the notion that only positive traits and experiences are obtained abroad.

Luciana and Luca’s young-looking bodies act as the sites of inscription of their exilic experiences. When Basilio asks Luciana if she loves Luca, she replies, “He was my mother, my father, my brother, my sister, and also nothing. Nothing. So he could be everything. Everything. On his mouth the seaside. On his eyebrows my old school.”<sup>94</sup> She explains that in exile in Ohio, her brother became all she had and wanted. He became the vessel for her memories, physically as well as emotionally, crucially and continually reconfirming her identity. The incest that caused their estrangement from each other is gently revealed, as evidence that their reconciliation could only occur on Cuban soil, where they were still innocent. Reconciliatory action is only possible, as De la Campa explains, because “behind their anxieties lies a need to come to grips with a complicated national history that affected them so deeply at an age at which they could not act for themselves.”<sup>95</sup>

In an ethereal scene called “Mercedita’s Miracle,” a woman relays that, after her husband was shot by rebels, she sent her children abroad because she “wanted them to be safe.” She explains that San Cristobal came to tell her that her children were, in fact, “safe in a small town up North.”<sup>96</sup> The United States is viewed as a useful point of intervention, a safe haven from rebels and strife. It is faith (in the north and in San Cristobal) that reassures this lonely mother in Cuba. However, it is in the United States that Luca and Luciana unknowingly transgress, allowing their attachment to one another to grow incestuous. This contradiction plagues them. In addition, the timeline is unclear for Mercedita, Luca, and Luciana—it is unclear how long the children must stay away to remain safe and whether staying away too long can render them unsafe. Moreover, there has been no path for safe return established.

As music plays and Luciana says farewell to the museum, she reads, “I write this as though I am claiming and taking back with me a box of embraces . . . A box of dreams . . . A jar of memories.”<sup>97</sup> The notion of claiming, or reclaiming, one’s heritage is crucial in various theoretical frameworks. Yet taking something back infers it was once lost, once separate from the individual. Cruz’s play seems to suggest that it was never disconnected, never missing entirely. In fact, during a reprise of brief moments from Luciana’s experience in Cuba, Hortensia remarks, “They come with invisible suitcases full of maps,”<sup>98</sup> clearly acknowledging that those returning know something is there and only seek the direction to reclaim it. Cuba has been “mapped,”

charted in some way, and therefore seems recoverable. As she leaves to find Luca, Luciana declares, “Now it was time to find my way back to what I had left behind,”<sup>99</sup> keenly aware of the journey of repossession, the journey to recover something absent.

When the siblings finally meet again face to face, they share the following exchange:

LUCA: Do you regret our past?

LUCIANA: I regret nothing. But you and I . . . We have to find a way.

LUCA: I’m learning how to be your brother again.

LUCIANA: You never stopped being that.

LUCA: For a long time I had thought about this moment, when we would finally talk.

LUCIANA: Me, too. I thought I had to find a way to tell it to myself, like a children’s story that explains the world.

LUCA: And how would the story go?

LUCIANA: Two children dressed up in airport dreams. Two children who thought the world was going to end. Two children who only had each other.<sup>100</sup>

For Luca and Luciana, the airport was thrilling, filled with anticipation, but it was also the beginning of a violent rupture from their homeland. It marked a continually shifting border that these siblings spent their lives negotiating. For them, this border signified a constant state of transition, an interstitial space in which they still reside. Their exile shielded them from the changes in Cuba but also engendered the incest that eventually led to the considerable separation between them. Within the play, this fracture also creates their vivid fantasies about a distant, special reunion.

Despite fear, loss, displacement, and disjuncture, Luca and Luciana remain imaginative and hopeful, optimistically childlike. They embrace what Chaudhuri describes as the “possibility of entertaining two or more cultural contexts simultaneously”<sup>101</sup> and find comfort in it. The play ends with the miracle they send to Hortensia. In it, Luca and Luciana describe themselves by their professions (salesman and journalist, respectively) and by their present addresses (one in New York, the other in Rhode Island) rather than by their nationalities or by their past affiliations. They finally create self-definitions that do not include the rigid spatial binary (United States vs. Cuba) that caused them such turmoil. Instead, as a borderland entirely constituted by boundaries and its own daily transformations, Cuba becomes the ideal physical location for their personal reconciliation and renewal. Cruz uses the intersection of space and time as a border where subjects with ties to two identifications constitute crucial acts of self-representation.

## Staged Pluralities

If, as De la Campa suggests, “the most realistic way to inhabit one’s nation . . . is to recognize the conflictive pluralities it contains,”<sup>102</sup> then the characters in these plays prosper. Their geographical and emotional displacements are eventually subsumed into their daily realities. De la Campa’s most difficult question is eloquently posed by these dramas: “Can exiles ever recapture a lost past, or register suspicions about historical events that engulfed everyone, most of all themselves?”<sup>103</sup> *Illuminating Veronica* and *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* defy closure by refusing to resolve key paradoxes like these. The binaries become untenable as identities are not clarified, but further complicated. Constant loss and expectation frame multiple and incomplete identities, creating intricate levels of hybridity within these subjects.

The result of the theatrical layering of discreet spatial and temporal domains in these plays is the exposure of the enigmatic qualities within all recognizable relationships. Going back to Cuba, or remaining there amid profound changes, helps these characters deconstruct their experiences in order to reveal and celebrate new possible paths of identification. Ultimately, Martinez and Cruz use unfixed, yet confined stage spaces to challenge, incorporate, and overcome the radical insecurities of displacement. Their works position the theatrical voice of the hybrid immigrant as intact in its own right while also characterized by what has been left behind. *Illuminating Veronica* and *Hortensia and the Museum of Dreams* are significant for various audiences because they focus on the simultaneities that, as Soja suggests, “intervene, extending our point of view outward in an infinite number of lines connecting the subject to a whole world of comparable instances.”<sup>104</sup>

Although only ninety miles separate Cuba from Florida, the extreme division of the two countries over five decades has created acute dislocations for Cubans, both on the island and living in the United States. Merely being in the United States isolates Cubans—the embargo separates them from their families, their culture, and their heritage, while complete assimilation to American standards is expected, encouraged, and rewarded. However, remaining in Cuba isolates Cubans as well, due to their limited access to the outside, especially to the United States. Exiles constantly float in between, fervently trying to incorporate pieces of two disparate cultures into individual, reconstituted hybrid identities shaped by profound emotional ruptures and losses. Many people experience a dichotomy of consciousness, brought on by the residue of previous associations mingling with the present and the future. These plays posit how and why exiles manufacture new identities and spaces, actively fusing together the past and the present in the hopes of creating viable futures.