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Fables of (Cuban) Exile: Special Periods and Queer Moments in Eduardo Machado's *Floating Island Plays*

RICARDO ORTIZ

The more we try to animate books, the more they reveal their resemblance to the dead.

—Geoffrey Hartman (548)¹

Between the time of its publication by the Theatre Communications Group in 1991 and its first major West Coast production at the Mark Taper Forum three years later, Eduardo Machado's four-play cycle of Cuban and Cuban-exile histories, *Floating Islands*, underwent major revision.² Of the four, the play that bore the most revision was the third, *Fabiola*. As a whole, *Floating Islands* recounts the story of three connected, extended, and eventually dispersed bourgeois Havana families, the Ripolls, the Hernándezes, and the Marquezes, beginning with the first family's rise to economic and social prominence in 1920s Havana, and taking us to the marriages that connect the three families in the decades preceding the 1959 Revolution, to the Revolution and its aftermaths in Cuba (the setting of *Fabiola*), and finally to the ambivalent moment of the family's exile "success" in 1980s suburban Woodland Hills, CA. The differences between the earlier published and later performed "versions" of *Fabiola* are considerable, and significant. In this first of four sections to this discussion, I will summarize the two versions; I then take up aspects of *Fabiola*, and of the *Islands* cycle that situate Machado's work in relation to the vexed ideologies still (mis)directing Cuban familial, (trans)national, and diasporic histories; the theory and history of theatre, drama, and performance as they inform the plays; and the legacies of spirit, ritual and religion, still haunting Machado's Cuban/American theatre.

I. HISTORICAL COUNTERTIMES

History can be neither a decidable object nor a totality capable of being mastered, precisely because it is tied to responsibility, to faith and to the gift. [...] The history of

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secrecy, the combined history of responsibility and of the gift, has the spiral form of these turns [tours], intricacies [tournures], versions, turnings back, bends [virages] and conversions. One could compare it to a history of revolution, even to history as revolution.

—Derrida (*The Gift of Death* 5, 8)³

In the first version of *Fabiola*, the eponymous character dies in childbirth in 1954, but the action of the play picks up from 1955, as the Marquezes, chief among them Fabiola's widower Pedro, continue to reel emotionally from her unexpected death and the odd disappearance of her body from the family's mausoleum. Performing by turns Catholic masses and santera rites, the Marquezes seem primarily concerned with freeing Fabiola from the purgatory in which she must undoubtedly still be caught, as well as freeing themselves from the anxiety that she may in fact be haunting them in their own house. This *Fabiola*'s first act also establishes that Pedro is desperately in love with his own brother, Osvaldo, and that the two have been having an on-again-off-again affair since their adolescence, and continuing even during their marriages to their respective wives, Fabiola and Sonia. While Machado strategically foregrounds these domestic scandals, they stand not so much in dramatic privilege as in narrative counterpoint to the "events" punctuating the story that *Fabiola*, in both of its versions, tells. Indeed, the element of fraternal homosexual incest in Machado's play functions quite centrally as one of the chief forms of the play's perversions of prevailing historical, familial, and even theatrical conventions and institutions; *Fabiola*'s "queer" moments, in both versions (as well as in *The Floating Island* cycle generally), simultaneously "queer" the "momentousness" presumptive in official readings of the historical event, the family crisis, and theatrical performance.

In turn, Machado's revision of *Fabiola*'s narrative figures a kind of historical marking that might best be understood as operating within the (il)logic of the play of historical "counter-times." My use of the term *counter* here clearly echoes the famous contrapuntal conceit of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortíz's classic study, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*.⁴ But while Ortíz emphasized the positive, productive felicity of the contrapuntal, allegorical dance between Cuba's two chief economic products in tracing Cuba's cultural history, my emphasis on the "counter" aligns itself more closely with Jacques Derrida's reading, in a short piece entitled "Aphorism/Countertime," of the negatively productive dynamic of the *contretemps*, that is, of any missed narrative and historical opportunity. Following Derrida's analysis of the *contretemps* that dooms the star-crossed lovers of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, I would argue that Machado's play analogously performs the tragic fallout of a missed historical rendezvous between the two chief forces, Revolution and Exile, marking Cuban time, and making (impossible) Cuban history, since 1959.⁵ I want to look at how Cuban national history has, at least

since the Revolution, obeyed the (il)logic of that *contretemps*, first through these larger, framing counter-times of Revolution and Exile, but also in the various “post-historical,” and even “Special,” period(s) following the end of the Cold War, when all parties involved contributed to the departure of Cuba from the general if not global historical processes that have at least since 1989 determined most other nations’ fates.

The rest of the earlier *Fabiola* follows the Marquez family through the events of the Revolution from the vantage point of the home in which all the play’s action is set: Fabiola’s body, it turns out, is discovered in another family’s vault, but this discovery only occasions further, deeper trauma – Fabiola’s body, already dead a year, is discovered perfectly intact, and, as the play’s action hurls through the New Year’s Eve four years later when Castro’s troops enter Havana, through the events in the spring of 1961 surrounding the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, and finally to the moment in 1967 when what remains of the Marquez clan in Havana exiles itself to Miami, Fabiola’s body remains unchanged. It remains unchanged until the play’s final scene, when Pedro reports that he has had it taken out of the mausoleum, and exposed it to light and wind: the body disintegrates in the breeze. Fabiola’s odd dis- and reappearances in this earlier version of the play thus occupy the opposed poles of absence/presence around which characters, actions, and themes orbit and collide like so many electrons in a crowded semiotic force field. Her impossible intactness immediately calls up associations not only of magical realism, but also of older, even ritual and ecclesiastical, ways of performing supernaturalism. When the rediscovery of her body is announced, for example, the following conversation ensues:

PEDRO. There must have been some decay.

OCTAVIO. No, it must be the marble. [...] no moisture gets into it, or worms. She looked perfect: beautiful, perfect and intact.

(Pause.)

CUSA. Like she was dreaming?

OCTAVIO. Yes, and happy at last.

OSVALDO. But intact. They used to make people saints who stayed intact.

MIRIAM. Or they called them vampires; depends on how much money you gave the Priest. (first version 67)

The rush of historical events that propels the action in most of the earlier *Fabiola* is thus strategically framed by the stillness of Fabiola’s stubborn refusal to mark “natural” time through what scenes like this report of her body’s failure to undergo the “natural” process of decomposition.

“Fabiola” thus simultaneously names at least two contradictory narrative operations in the body of the text it also names: “Fabiola” names both the trauma that refuses naming and any other symbolic capture, at the same time

that it names the paradoxical *necessity* of that naming; “Fabiola” in turn recounts the failure of any *syuzhet* to do real justice to a *fabula*, the incommensurable “reality” of whose events defy all conventional (especially dramatic or historical) narration, at the same time that it demands precisely such narration as perhaps the key instrument in its navigation toward what Geoffrey Hartman has termed a “traumatic knowledge” of such events (537). In this (as in the later) version of *Fabiola*, Machado’s political concerns are never upstaged, however, by the irresistible allegorical force of the story he recounts. As important as the haunting that Fabiola’s body performs on the Marquez family’s collective psyche are the complex processes of political affiliation and disaffiliation enjoined on various members of the family: in Act One of the first version, we learn that the Marquez patriarch, Alfredo, secretly and actively supports Castro’s guerrilla campaign, but that his wife, Cusa, remains primarily caught in religious belief, both Catholic and *santera*; by scene two in 1959, Cusa, whose name is an odd diminution of “Concepción,” has become an avid supporter of the Revolution, spending her New Year’s Eve not with her family dancing to Nat King Cole records in the ballroom, but in the kitchen with the radio, following reports of Castro’s advance toward Havana. By Act Two, however, everything changes: the Marquezes have already lost a farm to the Revolution’s nationalization of agriculture, and stand eventually to lose their mansion in the Guanabacoa suburb of Havana. Their sense of political betrayal at Castro’s hands compels them to support the counterrevolutionary movements outside Cuba, to the point of participating actively in the 1961 U.S.-based conspiracy to invade the island at Playa Girón. With the failure of that plot, they become ghosted subjects in a Cuba now radically foreign to them, haunting time and history until their departure into exile in 1967.

When Machado revised *Fabiola* for the Taper production in 1994, his revisions tended to compress rather than to change the basic narrative; the later *Fabiola* represents a unique case of the flexibility of a narrative’s *syuzhet* to tell differently a putatively identical *fabula*. On another, it poses the question of what exactly we take to be either the defining *fabula* and the *syuzhet* of so historically explicit a narrative, for both *Fabiola* and the *Floating Islands* cycle explore the disjunction of times and countertimes, how the plays’ temporal, chronological, and historical locations and dislocations destabilize the conventional authority of historical mimesis. The temptations to read either version of *Fabiola* allegorically are great, and perhaps not entirely worth resisting. If we keep in mind that *Fabiola* was first conceived and composed for production in the United States in the late 1980s, the competing temporalities at work in the earlier version correspond to the competing temporalities of Revolution and Exile. Because Machado himself belongs to that impossibly dislocated generation of Cubans who were too young at the time of immigration to understand the history so directly transforming their lives, I would

argue that his retrospective, “post-memorial” appreciation of that history,⁶ while powerfully mediated by his parents’ recollections, left some remnant still to be remembered, still to be accounted for with the aid of alternative historical and psychological paradigms still to be theorized, or even imagined.⁷

The differences between the two *Fabiolas* represent one significant attempt to imagine, and to dramatize, such an alternative paradigm. In the earlier version, Fabiola embodies the suspended *durée* of exile, a collectively imagined suspension of historical time in the preservation of an impossibly unchanging object held in a memory that operates more accurately as counter-memory, or perhaps even as a retrospective desire. In the second version, Fabiola remains lost; she is never relocated, and thus her haunting of Pedro and the family takes on an even more forceful and potent abstraction. In both cases Fabiola’s power as lost object lends itself readily to an allegorical correspondence to the “lost” Cuba haunting the collective imaginary of the exile community for and against whom Machado seems to write; the changes he imposes, the interventions he makes into his own text in these revisions, at once confirm and counter this allegorical reading of both *Fabiola* and exile memory’s resistances to time and history.

Beyond the strategic compression of *Fabiola*’s narrative to fit better into the more ambitious format of the Taper production – which attempted, as it had with Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, to make *Floating Islands* available in its entirety to an audience in the course of an eight-hour, day-long performance – Machado’s revisions to *Fabiola* also mark the historical changes occurring, or failing to occur, in the years just preceding the 1994 Taper production. The end of the Cold War and the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union and most of its satellite nations promised in turn similar changes in Cuba, changes the Cuban-exile community anticipated would follow as the immediate and inevitable consequence of these events in the first years of the 1990s. Castro himself famously termed the moment following the end of the Cold War Cuba’s “Special Period,” acknowledging perhaps that unprecedented, radically transformative historical turns could take on names other than “Revolution.” But just as everything changed after the Revolution in Cuba, the failure of “everything” to change with the equally revolutionary turn of events in the early 1990s seems to have exacted an equally severe trauma on the exile community’s collective psyche, a traumatic wound whose contours can be traced in the revisionary violence Machado does to the body of his play.⁸

Fabiola shrinks as it compresses in its later embodiment; now the action takes place in two more dramatically focused acts, both set after the Revolution (always already, then, in “Castro’s Cuba”), the first in 1960, the second in 1961. The fluidity of the action in the earlier version surrenders to a greater rigidity or tightness of narrative structure and momentum, especially in the form of a more simplified set of political exchanges among characters. This

simplification is perhaps most significant on the part of Cusa, the matriarch, who in the later *Fabiola* remains loyal to the Revolution, even as the men in her family side with the counter-revolutionaries plotting the Bay of Pigs invasion. Her stubborn refusal to change her affiliations guarantees in this later *Fabiola* a more intense rigor mortis; Cusa's political recalcitrance substitutes for the physical recalcitrance of Fabiola's corpse in the earlier version. There will be no resolution, even in disintegration, for the textual or other "bodies" of *Fabiola*/Fabiola in the later version. Instead, everything will end in stalemate and suicide – Cusa will remain in Cuba even as most of her family flees, refusing to compromise her allegiance to Castro other than to hide some of her relatives from the militia until they can escape to the United States. Pedro, her son, will commit a more violent and precipitous suicide than he did in the earlier version; rather than slit his wrists in 1967 after a prolonged psychosis, in the later *Fabiola* Pedro shoots himself in 1961, giving up the ghost of any possible redemption much earlier, and surrendering himself not to the hysterical but seductive pathology of "sensations" (to which he claims allegiance in both versions), but to the acutely historical but no less seductive logic of stalemate, impasse, and aporia.

The later *Fabiola* ends, evocatively, with an explosive, reflexive apostrophe. As he turns to shoot himself, Pedro speaks to Fabiola, resurrecting her in language if not in body: "Cubans are killing each other again. That's all. Cubans are killing each other again. Do it now! No one can move." The complex performatives in this brief speech, from the invocatory, apostrophic "Fabiola" to the repeated, helpless descriptives of historical, documentary reportage ("Cubans are killing each other again"), to the immediate and effective imperative ("Do it now!"), to the paralysis in suicide which that imperative effects ("No one can move."), the finale of *Fabiola* points to the complex interrelations of time and performance that both texts and *Floating Islands* manifest and embody. Indeed, Pedro's suicides at the ends of both *Fabiolas* mark dramatically, and grammatically, the interminable reflexivity of the Cuban situation since the Revolution: as the image of suicide demonstrates, "Cubans" continue to "kill Cubans," and if a Cuban national body should survive this ongoing and self-generating suicide, that body lives on, survives, only in the impossible "times" marked by the variously imagined afterlives of *Fabiola*. If Exile superficially seems to mark the time of counter-Revolution, as staged in what can only emphatically be termed, for all its provocations of Cuban-exile political orthodoxy, a play of Exile, *Fabiola* also demonstrates how Exile operates as Revolution's countertime; that is, rather than merely oppose one another, Revolution and Exile also and paradoxically *necessitate* one another as well. Through Machado's fastidious attention to dates and times and places, and his equally fastidious attention to the rhythms of dialogue punctuated and interrupted by strong, aphoristic declaratives (in the second *Fabiola* he has Cusa quote every cliché of the *Communist Manifesto*),⁹

Fabiola explicitly performs the various and contradictory times not only of Revolution and Exile, but of family and nation, and of history and drama.

2. FAMILIAL COUNTER-VALUES

In the postmodern moment, the family occupies a powerful and powerfully threatened place: structurally a last vestige of protection against war, racism, exile and cultural displacement, it becomes particularly vulnerable to these violent ruptures, and so a measure of their devastation.

—Marianne Hirsch (13)

HUGO. Fidel wants everyone to have everything equally.

MANUELA. You believe that?

HUGO. Well he does ...

(*Mario enters.*)

MARIO. Fidel wants everyone to lose everything equally.

OSCAR. We're your family, Hugo, only family give each other things.

—Machado (In the Eye of the Hurricane 122)

The complex trauma of national division and destruction in *Fabiola* marks both exile and revolutionary players in this struggle as familiarly, and so tragically, linked; *Fabiola* marks the fall of a house and the fall of a nation as more than analogous, without sentimentalizing either nation or home. The tagline advertising the 1994 Taper production read, “[P]olitics begins in the family,” and, according to Machado, it probably ends there as well.¹⁰ To Machado’s credit, both *Fabiolas* reflect his understanding that history’s stages are everywhere, including and foregrounding the spheres of domesticity;¹¹ historical events remain offstage and therefore obscene in relation to the dramatic action his work recounts directly, and for this reason such historical events share that space of obscenity with the body of *Fabiola* itself, which is only ever manifested to the audience as the object of reports and rumors.

One significant difference between the earlier and later *Fabiolas* is the inclusion in the earlier of the drama of the Márquez family’s final expulsion from their home in 1967. As two impatient government-assigned *milicianos* look on, Cusa and Alfredo create an inventory of the few possessions they can take with them and, more important, those they must leave behind.

MILCIANO 2. Four pairs of pants ... shirts ... an envelope.

MILCIANO 1. What’s in it?

CUSA. Photos. Photos of my old farm, photos of my car, photos of my old house.

MILCIANO 2. Photos. Should we let them take the photos?

MILCIANO 1. It’s against the rules.

CUSA. Take them. I don’t need photos to remember. (first version 106)

What poignancy there might be to Cusa's defiance of the police is undercut by the consistency with which she reports that the photos she's willing to leave behind are of possessions, not people; but at least two of those possessions, the farm and the house, combine in themselves simultaneous references to domesticity, family, and property. By 1967, most of the Márquez family is in exile anyway, so it could be argued that what Cusa most needs to remember are the spaces where that family regenerated itself for nearly a century. The photos presumably remain behind, but in their stead Cusa takes memories that aggregate into a spectralized history of reminders, remainders, and remains:

CUSA. In 1945 Pedro and Osvaldo had asthma attacks. The doctor said we needed to be near the beach. The first house I bought was haunted; we saw furniture move around. Two children had died in that house of scarlet fever in 1886. Their fever got so high they started to burn up and they screamed all night long before they died in 1886. [...] It was their ghosts we heard every night. I got my children out of that house. This house was built by an ambassador from Spain. He assured me that no one had died here; the gypsy said it was true.
 [...] I bought this place in 1945 for cash, my father's money. Only one person died here. Fabiola, June 11, 1954. The house was free of ghosts till '54. (first version 107)

Monologues like this one operate dramatically as set-pieces in Machado's work; they are tableaux in which a rather varied menu of leftovers may be displayed. In this case, the photos remain invisible, enveloped in the interdiction against their transportation, and give way instead to the recital of a history, of a complex set of dis-appearances or, in Derridean terms, *dis-partitions*. If the references to "ghosts" haunting the house from the nineteenth-century didn't sufficiently suggest that the hauntings of both domestic and national spaces in this scene are linked to colonial history, certainly the reference to the Spanish ambassador does. And if colonial and post-colonial, as well as revolutionary and exilic, histories in Cuba all appear to Machado as perversions of Cuban domestic politics, they simultaneously pervert Cuban domesticity, and domestic, familial relations and affiliations as such. Cusa's monologue results in nothing more than her expulsion from her home ("Lady?" one *miliciano* asks as she concludes, and when she responds "Yes?" he responds in turn, simply, "Get out." [107]), and nothing would seem as perverse to the conventional Cuban patriarchal mentality as this expulsion of a woman, a mother no less, from that most sacrosanct of spaces.

If for Machado politics cannot be dissociated from family, neither can they be dissociated from domesticity and gender. All the "living" women in Machado's play, from Cusa to her daughter Miriam and daughter-in-law Sonia, to her maids, Sara and Conchita, eventually take political sides with respect to the Revolution and its counter-movements. Indeed, the only "living" character

who doesn't take sides is Pedro, who in both versions disintegrates psychologically, while Fabiola refuses to decompose. In the complex gender-play of both *Fabiolas*, Pedro stands as the embodiment of hysteria; as everyone else is caught up in the force of historical and public events, Pedro's stage of operation focuses increasingly on the private and the bodily. His obsession with the state of his wife's body parallels his two other obsessions, one with alcohol and the other with his brother, Osvaldo; Osvaldo, in turn, requites his brother's desire, but refuses to abandon himself so completely to it. As Pedro lives what is left of his life in the exclusive service of "sensations," a vocation that increasingly isolates him from the action of the play, Osvaldo is kept from falling into the same trap by his relationship with his own wife and son, the family he takes into exile and away from his brother in the second act. Osvaldo's fate does not reflect any judgment of moral or other superiority; he meets his own perverse destiny in exile, a destiny recounted in *Broken Eggs*, the fourth of the plays, and one no less compromised by "sensations."

One of Machado's favorite methods of perverting the institution of the Cuban family is to emphasize its always already perverse relationship to the Oedipal family romance. In both versions of *Fabiola*, Machado has Sonia berate others for not going to see therapists, and in general one of the more amusing asides in *Fabiola* is that Cubans to their chagrin have historically listened too seriously to Marx (and probably Hegel) and not seriously enough to Freud. It certainly does no justice to *Fabiola's* deep subversiveness, and its even deeper perversities, to dismiss its explicit representations of the narcissistic homoeroticism of Pedro's love for Osvaldo along conventionally Freudian or Lacanian lines of triangulated desire. The spectacle of Pedro's frustrated mourning of Fabiola does not at all mask or compensate for his scandalous love for his brother; it does not merely or predictably rehearse the hom(m)osocially conventional absenting of female figures in favor of stronger, and patriarchally enjoined, male-male bonds.¹² Osvaldo at one point in the first version declares his ambivalence toward his older brother: "I love him [...] And I hate him," to which his wife responds, "No. Jealousy." And when he asks why he should be jealous of Pedro, she simply replies, "Oedipus" (first version 60-61). Sonia's invocation of tragic drama's, and psychoanalytic theory's, paradigmatic text thus functions in this case as both the most, and the least, adequate of answers to Osvaldo's question.

According to Machado, *Fabiola* has historically been the most controversial of the *Floating Island* plays, especially with exile audiences, precisely, but not exclusively, because of its "homosexual content."¹³ Exile audiences tend not to identify Pedro's hysteria as their own, but in not doing so, they confirm Machado's desire to alienate his audiences from an easy identification with actions that are central to their own conventional sense of identity; it is, after all, only in *Fabiola* that Machado comes even close to dramatizing the expulsion leading to exile, and to its attendantly addictive, impossible mourn-

ing, while at the same time dramatizing it behind a screen of homoerotic and incestuous spectacle impossible for its audience to ignore. Of course, the narcissistic and reflexive dynamics conventionally associated with homosexuality and incest may be sympathetic to an exile audience. To this extent, what I have just called a screen dividing the audience and the play may also operate as a mirror, but one in which this specific audience might well refuse to find its reflection.¹⁴ Especially in the revised *Fabiola*, many events lure the audience's attention away from Pedro and his family's sexual excesses. Besides the failure of *Fabiola*'s body to reappear at all, Machado's other major revision in the later text is Cusa's deeper and more consistent adherence to the Revolution. What repulsion an exile audience might feel at the sight of two brothers (and, in one particularly provocative scene, the brothers *and* their sister Miriam) locked in highly sexual embraces, or of the fully nude Pedro desperately trying to seduce a Communist uncle before committing suicide in the last scene, could be surpassed only by their repulsion at Cusa's (and the play's) fervent, explicit, and frequent invocations of Marx and Castro.

If Pedro's intense mourning seems incongruous in the face of his equally intense desire for his brother, Machado gives us to understand that for Pedro both attachments grew out of a complicated libidinal and even moral architecture, one in which *Fabiola* herself found comfortable accommodation. Pedro confesses to Osvaldo while dancing with him in the darkened ballroom that *Fabiola* always knew of the brothers' relationship:

PEDRO. She knew, *Fabiola* ... Yes, you and me, ... my little brother, ... there was a time when I didn't know the difference between the two of us. There was a day when I looked at your face and thought it was me.

OSVALDO. Is *Fabiola* watching us?

PEDRO. Probably ... she thought it was erotic.

OSVALDO. She knew?

PEDRO. Yes, I told her ... She was my friend. She wanted to know every detail. I told her ... How many times ... who did what ... what your lips were like. That's how we spent our honeymoon. (second version 36)

At this point, their sister, Miriam, who had been spying on them, steps into the room and, rather than panic, the brothers invite her to join in their intensely erotic dance, prompting Osvaldo to remark, "This is good. Evil, but good," to which Pedro replies, "All good things are evil" (second version 58). In this, one of the more explicitly "queer" moments in a play that implicitly and emphatically "queers" moments, times, and histories, Machado seems to suggest that if Cubans to their detriment privileged Marx and/or Hegel over Freud, they also ignored Nietzsche, from whom they might just as well have learned a queer lesson or two about history, about morality, and about desire.

Indeed, connecting desire to history seems to be Machado's purpose in

Fabiola and the other *Floating Island Plays*, which challenge us to think in more complex and ambiguous ways about the deep perversity of both the political and the ethical. As the dance scene suggests, the vectors of libidinal and social transgression in *Fabiola* respect no conventional set of prohibitions and taboos; there is no obvious fraternal rivalry between Pedro and Osvaldo for the love of their mother, Cusa, and their libidinal ties to both their wives and to their sister Miriam occasion some rather impressively perverse, because impressively positive, combinations of non-competitive erotic exchange. Even the normally prudish Sonia finds herself caught in this network: when at one point she reports, for example, that she felt Fabiola's spirit enter her, Pedro asks, "She touched you?" in response to which Sonia confesses, "Yes, it was more like a caress over my entire body. It was soothing," to which Pedro responds, in a swoon, and an echo, "Soothing?" (first version 62). Explicitly eroticized desire (and its discharges) circulates among characters in Machado's play with no consistent regard for gender, kinship, vitality, or any of the other conventional and institutional categories governing official, normative sexual exchange in conventionally Oedipal societies. And if one instance of a paternal Logos appears to be dismantled here, others follow suit; Machado manages to maintain the erotic, political, and even economic dimensions governing familial arrangements while at the same time skewing significantly all the conventions normally determining those arrangements.

This thoroughgoing subversion of familial and social authority also characterizes Machado's treatment of fathers in his plays. Fathers in both *Fabiolas* are curiously, almost categorically, dismissed as dramatically unimportant or even uninteresting characters. Even as harbingers of most of the political action in the two plays, neither Alfredo Márquez nor Oscar Hernandez bears any of the psychological complexity of their children. Indeed, the only fascinating patriarch in *Fabiola* one or two is Fidel Castro, who, given the historical setting of the plays, functions as much as the upstart rebellious son to Batista's father as he himself does as a father to anyone. Castro also functions as Fabiola's counter, to the extent that his is the only other name repeatedly invoked through the course of the play without a body materializing to support it. In Act One, scene two of the earlier *Fabiola*, set on the eve of Castro's entry into Havana, the Márquez women discuss, not Castro's politics, but his body. "I think Fidel is sexy," Miriam confesses, to which Sara the maid responds, "I think Fidel should take a shower and shave," which prompts in turn from Sonia the observation, "He doesn't have time. He's a revolutionary" (first version 72). Revolutionaries, like the dead, may be said to have "no time" (or perhaps to occupy some position outside of time, certainly outside of history) even, perhaps especially, for reasons of hygiene, of any regimen, that is (aesthetic, erotic, etc.), which distracts them from the heroic/historic effort of establishing more just regimes (politically, economically). This, at least, seems to be Sonia's greater point in the scene:

He's up in the hills fighting [...] To get into power [...] After he overthrows Batista by force, revolution; he's going to have elections and he'll run for prime minister; and then he's going to stop prostitution. (first version 72)

Of course, the "history" Sonia tells here turns to fantasy when, within the crucial terms *force, revolution*, that history becomes prospective. Democracy and "free" elections are the protocol, the "hygienic" instrument Castro failed to make available to a Cuban national body. His own charismatic sexiness notwithstanding, Castro's seduction of Cuba proved, at least for the class that Sonia and her family represent, a tragic reversal and betrayal, as well as the occasion of their being "cleansed" out of the national body and into exile.

The aftermath of that paternal betrayal, as recounted in both *Fabiolas*, primarily takes the form of the disappearance of bodies from the stage, especially as more and more members of the Márquez and Hernández families make their way into exile. In the later *Fabiola*, the two bodies that most significantly remain/persist in the play's simultaneous national, domestic, and dramatic stages are Cusa's and Pedro's, a mother and her son, but a deeply compromised Oedipal pair to be sure. Pedro's body, given his insistence on making his disintegration explicit, is more fully, literally "embodied"; in both *Fabiolas* he insists on making his family the audience for that disintegration: "I want to have you watch me while I burn," he says, in one of the rare speeches from the first version that Machado keeps in the second, "while my brain dissolves in front of your eyes. I want all of you to see the destruction" (first version 53). Pedro echoes the "burning" child in Freud's famous case study who, though dead, appears to his father in a dream, which wakes the father to the child's literally burning body. Pedro's "burning," however, occasions no significant awakening, and little in the way of significant, productive effect. Indeed, his fall into alcoholism and psychosis barely impresses his family; they are usually too consumed with their own political misfortunes to give much attention, let alone credence, to Pedro's rantings. This "burning" culminates in the sterile non-act of Pedro's suicide, the ultimate manifestation of a performative but ineffectual, paralytic reflexivity, one performed in this case naked, and in isolation, as the act that marks the end of the play, and the play of the end, not only for Pedro but for *Fabiola* the play, and for the ghosted and suicidal "nation" it allegorically conjures.

3. THEATRICAL COUNTER-FRAMES

The task of epic theatre [...] [is] to discover the conditions of life. This discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings. The most primitive example would be a family scene. Suddenly a stranger enters [...] [and] is confronted with a [critical] situation as a startling picture.

—Walter Benjamin, "What Is Epic Theatre?" (150)¹⁵

Performance [...] stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace. Hence flourish the abiding yet vexed affinities between performance and memory, out of which blossom the most florid nostalgias for authenticity and origin.

—Joseph Roach (3–4)

Perhaps the most accurate term to characterize Machado's compulsive solicitations of Western theatrical traditions in the *Floating Island Plays* is to call them promiscuous. Reading through them, one is reminded of forms as various as Sophoclean tragedy, medieval mystery plays, golden-age Spanish honor plays, sex comedies ranging from Wycherley to Wilde, social reform drama from Ibsen, Shaw, and Brecht, to absurdist theatre from Pirandello, Artaud, and Beckett, to modernist and postmodernist resuscitations of epic form from O'Neill to Kushner. Formally speaking, Machado is in bed with everyone. This promiscuity extends even further afield, if one includes in the larger definition of theatrical performance as varied an array of public rituals; each of the plays may be said to center on some occasion of ritualized public action across various degrees of formality, from Oscar's courtship of Manuela in *Modern Ladies*, to a family lunch in *Hurricane* (which might as well serve as a Last Supper for the Cuban bourgeoisie), to the various attempts at mourning in *Fabiola*, to the wedding that disorganizes the dramatic inaction of *Broken Eggs*.

This citational disorientation concerning the traditions of both theatre and ritual works against the canonizing effect that such gestures typically engage. Machado signals his attitude toward such gestures in various ways in his plays; we might read it behind the conversation between the Ripoll matriarch Maria Josefa and her granddaughter Sonia from *In the Eye of the Hurricane*:

MARIA JOSEFA. We'd sit with whole tablecloths, big ones, and embroider, my mother and me. [...] Whole tablecloths we'd embroider for tables bigger than this one. People had bigger families then, common to see a table that sat thirty. Easily.
[...]

SONIA. I wish ... [...] That we still had one of those tablecloths so I could study it, maybe copy it. Maybe you could remember the stitch. [...]

MARIA JOSEFA. Too late. [...] I don't remember the stitches, the pattern, just remember that it was beautiful and people envied us. [...] We got too busy for those things [...] Then one forgets.

SONIA. I've learned how to at school, but small things, towels, handkerchiefs –

MARIA JOSEFA. Your work, it's lovely.

SONIA. Nothing as monumental as a tablecloth, but – (*Hurricane* 133)¹⁶

So ambitious an undertaking as the composition of a four-play cycle covering a century's worth of one nation's and three families' histories will inescapably have about it the appearance of a potentially hubristic ambition, a

monumentalizing ambition at that. Both nations and families may have passed the point in their histories when anything like monumentalizing cultural work (whether in, say, the embroidery of a tablecloth or in the composition of a dramatic epic) can be adequate to the more deeply compromised functions those institutions now play on either public or private stages. In this sense, Machado's plays seem more like ruins than monuments; they testify to certain forms of ruination, none more so than that of the Cuban nation itself, as much as they engage in a certain ruinous, and ruinously critical, engagement of a canonical – or monumental – theatrical tradition.

This "ruinous" engagement with their own theatrical and ritual pasts is precisely the chief activity of Machado's work. To this extent, while they undoubtedly play well as "theatre," his plays manage to perform otherwise when they are read as "performance"; as Diana Taylor suggests, when we "replace the word theatre with *performance*" we can then not only "include all sorts of spectacles that 'theatre' leaves out," but can also "look at theatre itself from a more critical perspective" (Taylor and Villegas 11).¹⁷ The productive consequence of skewing the critical perspective we take toward Machado's plays is that such a reorientation of our own critical procedures will allow us to retain a set of terms and concepts central to, say, the canonical traditions of dramatic writing and its criticism, terms and concepts indispensable to any comprehensive reading of the plays, without reactivating as we do the usual political and cultural consequences of deploying this particular set of readerly protocols. There is no way, therefore, to read the complex play of gender in all of *Floating Islands* without some attention to the equally and commensurably complex play of genre. "The broad concept of performance," Taylor argues, not only "allow[s] us to explore numerous manifestations of 'dramatic' behavior in the public sphere which tend to drop out of more traditional approaches to theatre," but also allows us "to reexamine theatre itself as one of the various systems of representation in patriarchies which push women and popular audiences to the margins"; thus, she concludes, "Performance, seen as a deconstructive strategy in much feminist theory, enable[s] us to look at theatre in a way that critique[s] its own staging" (Taylor and Villegas 13–14).

The leap here from deconstructive to ruinous is certainly short. In both versions of *Fabiola*, Machado retains the vocabulary of both epic and tragedy to test the possibilities for forms of evaluation that might be applicable to the actions of his characters. In the later version, for example, one character's risky attempt to rescue a relative from the regime prompts the following dialogue:

CLARA. They told me that [my husband, Fernando] had driven through a gate to get Oscar into safety. Unfortunately, there was no way for him to leave the embassy and not get arrested once he drove in ... I drove to the embassy, and I saw the car riddled with bullets. And I thought, "Your husband is a hero." And I told the children, "Your

father is a hero. Now we must all escape.” So I sent them all ahead because that is the moral thing to do. I will not let my children be raised without Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

MIRIAM. We are lucky Fernando and Oscar didn’t get shot.

CLARA. No wounds, but still a hero.

MIRIAM. Does one heroic act make a hero?

CLARA. Yes.

CUSA. Or a fool. (second version 65).

In the earlier version, Sonia, Osvaldo’s wife and Pedro’s sister-in-law, comments that, in losing Fabiola, Pedro’s “been in touch with real tragedy. Something devastating really happened to him” (first version 60). But that “tragedy” is not the action of either of the plays that we call *Fabiola*; for all its complex choreography of characters’ histrionics, *Fabiola* is more about movement(s) than about action, and ultimately about the impossibility of certain forms of productive action in Pedro’s final paralysis and suicide. As Sonia goes on to generalize from Pedro’s mourning to everyone else’s (significantly, in a scene predating the Revolution), we hear the play mark itself as primarily a play of aftermath, of a general and indeterminate consequence of loss. “What’s [Fabiola’s death] the beginning of?” Sonia asks her husband. “Before Fabiola died nothing bad had happened to me, nothing unkind even [...] But she’s gone; she was our age. She’s dead. Lost. We can’t even find her body. There’s nothing left of her” (first version 60). The statement “she was our age” clearly resonates with a double meaning: Fabiola is both of Sonia’s generation, and the embodiment of a dead, or at least dying, historical epoch in Cuba.

We should recall Machado’s use of a more strictly Brechtian epic theatricality, and the consequences of this dramatic solicitation to an audience that might find any allusion to a Marxist aesthetic itself deeply alienating. Especially in the portrayal of Cusa’s character in the later version, the aggressively explicit foregrounding of Marxist ideology in her speeches would presumably have a very mixed effect on a Cuban-exile audience. Though the characterization of Cusa is not formally “Brechtian,” her stance is at once deeply political yet not likely to lead to raising either class- or national-consciousness in such a case.¹⁸ The heightened attention Machado pays to Cusa’s citations of Marx in the later *Fabiola* suggests that he both wants to present a more balanced picture of the Cuban ideological divide, and to transform the play’s engagement with genre.

In this respect, Machado’s dramaturgical moves recall Walter Benjamin’s analysis of Brechtian epic theatre. In his analysis of what he termed the “quotable gesture,” Benjamin draws a structural connection between interruption and quotation: “[I]nterruption,” he argues, “is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring. It goes far beyond the spheres of art [...] [and] is the basis of

quotation. To quote a text involves the interruption of its context" ("What Is Epic Theatre?" 147–48). Benjamin's formulation of this strategic use of interruption goes to the heart of the epic theatre's operation since, "being based on interruption, [it] is, in a specific sense, [...] quotable [...]" (148). Hence Machado's quoting of Marx through Cusa strategically interrupts the realistic flow of his own narrative enough to render it quotable, perhaps even memorable to an audience who, in spite of itself, might find such quotations at once alienating and compelling. The later *Fabiola* thus plays like epic theatre in the Brechtian sense, if only because it invites a reading as political rather than personal allegory, as political allegory rather than personal testimony. These correspondences make important corrective gestures, discouraging us from reading the play too classically, that is, within an ossified a set of traditional generic classifications.

At times, however, such traditional generic elements do engage each other in complex, paradoxical play in ways that also resist conventional classification. In the later *Fabiola*, for example, Cusa's conversion to the Revolution's vision for Cuba has already taken place, but she retells that story of conversion not as one of radical discontinuity (Fabiola's death does not figure the Revolution as cataclysm) but of the most incongruous of progressions. Contrasted with Pedro's unlimited libidinal economy of "sensational" abundance, his mother declares herself from the beginning an embodiment of libidinal scarcity and even cruel self-denial. Before her conversion, Cusa dabbled in *santera* practices to curse her philandering husband Alfredo and to appease Fabiola's spirit: "I stopped eating," she declares to her children. "As an offering to Changó, I became a vessel for my soul, not my sensations. And now the gods have repaid me my sacrifice by bringing me the revolution. The fire that will cleanse us all" (second version 15). This "cleansing," of course, bears its own peculiar and troubling semantic weight on stages other than the theatrical; on some level, the direct cause-and-effect link Cusa draws from her own ritualized self-denial to its consequence in the Revolution figured as purification ritual invites in its recounting of her personal and Cuba's national history some haunting on the part of the political. If cleansing and purification here invoke the ghost of classical catharsis, one can only wonder if Machado has Cusa speak against herself here; while she would never consider the Revolution tragic, her declaration nevertheless marks the necessary outcome of the Revolution in a "cleansing," a purging from the national body of an entire enemy class (those presumably comprising some part of Machado's audience) who understand their expulsion from nation and home precisely as tragic, and traumatic.¹⁹

Mother Cusa's fanatical devotion to the Revolution is, however, no more the object of Machado's critique than her bourgeois children's devotions to their various pleasures, perversities, and pathologies. The second *Fabiola* opens with her children, all grown and either married or widowed, dancing and drunk

in their mansion's ballroom. Any talk of politics, usually provoked by the women, is silenced by the men: "Mambo and forget," commands the third son, Fernando, and his brother Osvaldo chimes in, "I don't care about history, I just want to dance. I want to move to music and drown the world out" (second version 5–7). This decadent generation and class, expelled in Cuba's political self-cleansing, an anxious generation and class to be sure, leave more than one Cuba, to be sure. On some level, the "Cuba" they leave cannot be typified by their literal mother, Cusa, who is perhaps *too* engaged a political subject to tolerate any easy symbolic or allegorical objectification; instead, the Cuba they leave, the one they preserve and uphold as authentic in their collective memory, is the Cuba that "died" with Fabiola, the other mother, who died in a childbirth in which the child was also lost, and whose body, either as impossibly intact or utterly lost, belies the exile fantasies, either of eventual return or of their immunity to moral and other forms of decadence.

Fabiola stages a dance, an endless round of events that circulate and problematize dramatic genre as they do time and space. Occasionally characters make what are only apparently casual remarks about the absence or failure of time in its passing. In the later version, Sonia reports one appearance of Fabiola's ghost, prompting an interrogation from Cusa, which prompts in turn a dialogue covering most of the allegorical bases I've been covering:

CUSA. Did you ask her what's happened to her body?

SONIA. No, no time ... She was crying. And repeating the same thing over and over again.

CUSA. I thought you said there was no time.

SONIA. She just said, "Everyone is leaving me, everyone is leaving me." (second version 19–20)

While this touching scene encourages a dangerously sentimentalized reading of Fabiola's generation's eventual departure into exile as the painful abandonment of a national spirit and a national body in distress, Machado is careful in subsequent scenes to establish that such a departure may be read through as many historical and theatrical lenses as there are readers to read it, and that not all such readings easily bear the weight of such sentimentality. This openness to interpretation is Machado's chief guard against the conventional effects of melodrama, another genre that stands on the margins of his writing.

This strong resistance to sentimentality offsets the primarily personal, domestic, and familial relations central to the plays. In the later *Fabiola*, Pedro's suicide is significantly preceded by a duet he performs with his mother, Cusa, whose aesthetically self-denying relation to her own body can be figured as antithetical to Pedro's indulgences of his. In a tableau reminiscent of a *Pietà*, Cusa cradles the hysterical Pedro and, while he demands rather hopelessly that

she sing him a lullaby that he loved as a boy, she instead recounts Cuba's history to him, a history by turns permanently fulfilled, transformed, and fractured by the Revolution. But in addition to the obvious tension generated by the difference between personal and public narratives here recounted, Machado the playwright also dramatizes the further tension generated by genre itself in the performance-specific dimensions of their recounting.

The most effective way to play this scene would be as a duet rather than as a dialogue; Pedro and Cusa's lines here act out the contrapuntal relations of tempos and temporalities, of rhythms and rhetorics, typical of *Fabiola*. In performance, these lines, read simultaneously, mutually obscure each other's constative functions, deeply compromising the referential work they otherwise compel.

PEDRO. I want to remember nice times. Sing me to sleep. (*He lies down on the ground.*)

CUSA. If things were fair, our class wouldn't be blamed for all the ugly things! For the whims of corrupt men.

PEDRO. Men's whims. I want to remember nice times. The one about the little boat.

CUSA. You're too old for songs.

PEDRO. There was once a tiny little boat, there was once a tiny little boat, there was once a tiny little boat, that just couldn't, that just couldn't, that just couldn't sail away ...

CUSA. I used to tell you stories about Cuba. Remember them, Pedro? How we were discovered by Christopher Columbus and he said: "This is the most beautiful land that human eyes have seen."

PEDRO. He tried for one two three four five six seven weeks. He tried for one two three four five six seven weeks. He tried for one two three four five six seven weeks ...

CUSA. And how the Spaniards and the Africans came. And how people, after they'd been here for a couple of generations, started calling themselves Cubans ...

PEDRO. ... but the little boat just couldn't, just couldn't sail away. And if the story doesn't seem long enough, and if the story doesn't seem long enough, and if the story doesn't seem long enough ...

CUSA. ... natives of a new land. So they fought to be Cubans, to have an identity. But how could you believe me? How could even a little boy believe in something that never really existed? It exists now, Pedro. Fidel has given us a country. Defend it Pedro. It's worth it! Defend it for me!

PEDRO. We will repeat it, we will repeat it, we will repeat it once again. There was once a little boat ...

CUSA. We deserve a country. We've lived through one dictator after another.

(*Pause.*) When all you really wanted to do was to pick up a gun and kill everyone that oppressed you. Shoot it now! (*Pause.*) Defend your country. Do it now, Pedro.

PEDRO. Mother, I can't move.

CUSA. Cubans are killing each other again. Pedro, no one can move. (second version 86–87)

This complex, simultaneous divergence and convergence of the child's tale passing as national history, with the lullaby free of any pretension except to the interminable, lulling, addictive repetition of repetition, together most eloquently punctuate, and choreograph, *Fabiola's* play, and dance, *as performance* with time and history. Pedro the addict desires the narcotic whose fundamental attraction is the fulfillment of the desire it itself generates *ad infinitum, ad absurdum*; Cusa the converted dialectical materialist now sees the possibility for the first time of a genuine Cuban nation born out of a Revolution whose eventuality, not to say its inevitability, is precisely what the history preceding it could never have predicted, but whose logic it necessarily compelled. Between the anaesthetic narcosis of the lullaby's interminable refrain and the anti-aesthetic, pragmatic force of Cusa's imperative calls to political and historical action ("Shoot it now! Defend your country. Do it now, Pedro!") the "force" devolving from these conflicting centripetal and centrifugal movements seems itself to devolve into mere paralysis and, as this scene prefigures the play's last, suicide (second version 87).

4. RELIGIOUS COUNTER-PRACTICES

There are several times of the specter ... no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or a living future ... Once again, untimeliness and disadjustment of the contemporary ... communism has always been and will remain spectral: it is always still to come and is distinguished, like democracy itself, from every living present.

—Jacques Derrida (*Specters of Marx* 99)

Hybridity is heresy [...] Blasphemy goes beyond the severance of tradition and replaces its claim to a purity of origins with a poetics of relocation and reinscription.

—Homi Bhabha ("How Newness Enters the World" 225)

[Sonia] sits at the piano and begins to shake [...] She swoons.

SONIA. *Is this a spiritual moment? Is this what being spiritual is all about?*

—Machado, *Fabiola* (first version 60)

In the spring/summer 1998 issue of its newsletter *Cuban Affairs*, the Washington- and Miami-based progressive and pro-dialogue Cuban Committee for Democracy (CCD) devoted one major piece to Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba the previous January (Castro 1). A minority voice in Cuban-exile politics in the United States, the CCD explicitly declared its hope for constructive exchange with Cuba's revolutionary government as a result of its good faith effort to restore Catholicism as a sanctioned form of public worship in Cuba, an effort

capped by Fidel Castro's personal invitation to John Paul to make the visit. While the visit, for all its historic importance, failed to effect any visible change in the U.S./Cuban situation, it did provide commentators on that situation with an opportunity to think more fully about the relationship between the Revolution and religion, a relationship Eduardo Machado foregrounds through *Floating Islands*, and especially in *Fabiola*, as a most fertile and vexed theoretical and practical problems. Beyond the associations already covered between, say, the Revolution and Cusa's conversions from Catholicism to *santería* to Marxism, and the Márquezes' failed attempts to mourn *Fabiola* as specifically a failure of spirit (and spirituality) in the face of a material fatality (or a fatal materialism), there may be other ways to read the theatricality of the pope's visit alongside the historicities of the plays, and the ways they mark the paradigmatic (il)logic of Cuban "time," a paradigmatic Cuban moment, and therefore a "history" for which the pope's visit might stand as both an endpoint and an endgame, a point of punctual closure as well as a play of perpetual, and indefinite (some might say interminable) reopening.²⁰

In the Eye of the Hurricane, Machado's counter-*Tempest*, provides a useful instance of the religious or spiritual marking of an alternative temporality. In a curious dialogue, Maria Josefa spies a lily blooming before its time and speaks about it with her daughter Manuela:

MARIA JOSEFA. One of the lilies of the valley has come out to look at me.

MANUELA. It's too early in the year for lilies to bloom. They're still little plants. In a month –

MARIA JOSEFA. No, look over there. (*She points out the door*) You see it now, sweetheart.

MANUELA. It's early, it's an early riser, that one.

MARIA JOSEFA. Flowers don't know about time.

MANUELA. Well, maybe not about time, but cycles, seasons.

MARIA JOSEFA. No, I don't think so. I think they just are. Once a whole field of lilies of the valley bloomed for me. [...] It's when we lived in a much more rural part of town. Guanabacoa was much more rural then, than now. More open fields, and we lived next to a huge field. It was the night before my first communion, I had been fasting all day, so I could be clean when the Sacred Sacrament entered my body.

Maria Josefa lights a cigarette. Pause.

MANUELA. And?

MARIA JOSEFA. What ... ?

MANUELA. Did you fall asleep?

MARIA JOSEFA. The day before my first communion?

MANUELA. No, just now.

MARIA JOSEFA. And it bloomed, a field full of lilies, and I knew the Holy Sacrament wanted me. (*She laughs*) Wanted me, that was the last moment I ever had in my life that was simple. And today "He" only shows me one. (116–17)

Maria Josefa's pastoral reverie, we are told earlier, is very likely the hallucinogenic effect of a serious imbalance in her blood sugar (a bad sugar economy, to be sure) brought on by her degenerative diabetes; on the other hand, her monologue effectively evokes the force of times other than the historical on the collective imagination of her class. If the force of dialectical, material history can still be argued to work mostly against the Cuban bourgeoisie, then one choice left to them is to revert to a belief in liturgical time, a cyclical time patterned after regular shifts in seasonal warmth, and marked, punctuated regularly by performance of both religious plays and rituals. This is a time that promises return *without* revolution; time "turns," but presumably always (re)turns back, giving (back) what it always inevitably takes: youth, innocence, a faith in life everlasting for the individual, the family, and all other life-giving forms of community, from the congregation to the nation.

But if Machado's motivation in composing these plays is decidedly not therapeutic, it is also decidedly not pastoral; it is, if anything, deeply vigilant, and testimonial, and if it insists on witnessing the failed vigil of his own exile community for a failed return, it cannot help but witness as well some of the more perverse ways to think a Cuban future, one way that "returned" dramatically in 1998 in the "promise" of Catholicism's return visitation to Cuba in the spirited guise of the pope. It may, indeed, say something of Machado's own shift in perspective from the time of *Fabiola*'s publication in 1991 to its Taper showing in 1994 that the earlier version begins in supplicating prayer, and the later version does not. The later version may be read for its greater secular orientation; the absencing of *Fabiola*'s body entirely in the later version erases the problem of her possible beatification. But Machado certainly had the parallel legacies of medieval and even earlier Christian ritual and theatrical practices in mind, even in the earlier version of the play. As Sonia, Miriam, and the family maids wrap New Year's grapes on the very eve of the Revolution, for example, they engage in the following suggestive discussion:

MIRIAM. Wrapping grapes every New Year's Eve. Eat a grape at midnight and you'll be lucky. Well, I'm living proof that it's a lie. [...]

CLARA. It's a custom. We have to do it.

MIRIAM. Why? Why do we have to do anything?

SONIA. Because it's normal.

MIRIAM. It's superstition. [...]

CLARA. Superstition is the truth.

MIRIAM. The truth. Little black balls around our necks. Saints with apples at their feet and glasses of water. Bodies that won't disappear ... [...] All these offerings [...] So Saint Barbara will do what Mama commands. Relics, icons; it's the Dark Ages. (first version 70–71)

All hope of beatitude or idyll is cursorily dismissed in the later version; the

play of piety there gives way even more directly to the play of heresy, the play of the sacred gives way to the play of the profane, the play of spirit and specter gives way to the play of matter, especially as progressive or even revolutionary (and decidedly not providential) historical force.

Yet something still haunts the material dialectic in the later *Fabiola*, a spirit that some claimed to have witnessed returning some years after the play's revision in the pope's "historic" visit. In one sense, both Fidel and John Paul verged on heretical violations of their own respective orthodoxies: Castro generally argued that "between Religion and Revolution there was no contradiction"; he also stressed the "great concurrence between Christianity's objectives and those we seek as Communists," citing a speech he gave in Chile in 1971 where he observed the affinities "between the Christian teachings of humility, austerity, selflessness, and loving thy neighbor and what we might call the content of a revolutionary's life and behavior" (Rohrter A12). The pope, for his part, sounded, if not like a dialectical materialist, a least like a neo-liberal political economist clearing the way for the greater circulation of global capital, if with a slightly more attuned sensitivity to a just distribution of goods: "The Pope," the *New York Times* reported, "first stressed the pastoral side of his visit, [...] [then] also urged the faithful to take their fate in their own hands, words rarely heard in a Communist state where the individual must cede to the collective. 'You are [he told the Cubans] and must be the principal agents of your own personal and national history'" (Bohlen A14).²¹ Later, he promised that, as "all things will be made new" through a resurgent devotion to Christ, that Cuba would be poised to "offer to everyone a climate of freedom, mutual trust, social justice, and lasting peace" (qtd. in Bohlen A14). Clearly the term absented here between the dialectical play of Revolution and Religion, but one fully present in the global audience – here embodied by the *New York Times* and for whom these performances were at least implicitly staged – is *global capital* itself, emanating primarily from the post-industrial West, and "present" at least in the form of an information-system installed beforehand to capture and disseminate this historic meeting to the rest of the world.

That John Paul was importing a peculiar brand of pope-modernism for all the world to see was not lost on Castro. The same *Times* article reported that Castro justified the pope's visit to his fellow Cubans precisely through its value as spectacle: "Billions of people around the world are going to be watching images of Cuba these days and reading news about Cuba," Castro argued, concluding, "Nobody can change what is seen" (Rohrter A12). What may have been less obvious to Castro, and to Cubans, was the way the pope's visit functioned as well as speculation, especially as a way of testing Cuba's then-still-imaginable future profitability in an expanding world market. If, as John Paul declared, his intention was in part to encourage the United States to "Change! Change!" its standing policy of uncompromising economic

embargo against Cuba, then one can only assume that he at least cautiously welcomed the possibility of an influx of capital into Cuba's economy, not only in the form of resources to improve the material quality of life there, but also to reactivate a set of exploitative speculations into the profitability of Cuba's possible futures. Thus in the spectacle of the pope's celebration of Mass in Revolution Square, and to the extent that it was served up as simultaneously political theatre and consumable, commodifiable image for a speculating "global" audience, one at that point could have imagined witnessing the economic and historical transformation of Cuba into a potent, and potentially volatile, "futures" market.²²

Machado's active revisions of the discourses of religion from one version of *Fabiola* to another at least suggest the impossibility of extricating them from any attempt to understand fully the vexed relation between religious and historical "spirit" in the Cuban context, before, since, and certainly even "after" the Revolution. Machado may indeed employ Cusa in the later version to embody this co-instantiation of the devotee and the ideologue, particularly in speeches like this: "You see all the forces, everything, nature, ideology. The political gods and the mythic gods. The Earth itself is telling us to change. To give in ... we all must disappear in a ball of fire and be redefined again" (second version 20); but the jump from "political" to "mythic" gods may be shorter here than conventionally understood, and one need not deviate too far from Marx himself to be convinced on this point.

Indeed, this is where Jacques Derrida finds the most productive entry to his own reintroduction of the spiritual and the spectral in Marx: "Religion," Derrida argues, "was never one ideology among others for Marx," and in fact it enjoyed an "absolute privilege" because Marx often equated "ideology as religion, mysticism or theology" (*Specters* 42, 148). And as religion haunts the conceptualization of ideology, so does the specter in general haunt the constructions of the twin circulatory lubricants of money and commodity. "Marx," Derrida argues, "always described money [...] in the figure of appearance or simulacrum, more exactly of the ghost," and similarly "the commodity" as the site of an appearance of value, as a link in a chain of "the values of *value*, [...] *secret*, *mystique*, *enigma*, *fetish* and the *ideological*" never fails to link back up with elements of the religious (*Specters*, 42, 148). So perhaps the pope's visit helped to "redefine" in a "burning" transformation not far from sublimation not only the "contradiction" between "Revolution" and "Religion," but between the mystifying and alienating operations of capital and a not-so-incompatible "mystique" at the heart of even Communism's most material promise: "The religious," Derrida tells us, "gives to the production of the ghost or of the ideological phantasm its originary form or its paradigm of reference, its 'first' analogy" in *Marx*, which thus leads him to conclude that religion must also, and paradoxically, "inform, along with the messianic and the eschatological, ... [the] 'spirit' of emancipatory Marxism"

(148). In a move against most of the conceptual orthodoxies at work in our world, Derrida thus takes from Marx the cues he needs to make this last, conclusively heretical statement, that, in Marxist terms, especially the “messianic is always revolutionary, it has to be” (168).

There is, of course, more than one promise, more than one “messianic” and emancipatory arrival still awaited by Cubans on the island and across the diaspora. As Derrida makes explicit, there is no way to extricate, in any historical thinking after Marx, the advent of a pure democracy from a commensurable communism. The ideological wish propping the neo-liberal discourse of democracy’s “return” to Cuba with capital may in the end, or at least before any significant change, have to be the ghost that those still holding on to some wish of return to and recuperation/reparation of some past Cuba will have to surrender, abandon, or dispel. What freedom is likely to return to Cuba with capital is no more than the restricted, difficult “freedom” that a certain set of neo-liberal practices (which, to be sure, are nothing new, for all that they may signal a modernity missing in Cuba for these forty years, and which are at once economic, political, cultural, and therefore, certainly, spiritual) makes possible. What precise relation such freedoms actually have with anything like the ultimate justice that both democracy and Communism promise, may be what remains still, and perhaps always, to be seen. And before any significant speculative capital moving from the United States to Cuba accompanies significant movements in policy on the part of either polity, Cubans everywhere would do well to shatter the mirror on whose reflective surface they’ve so violently and reflexively misrecognized each other, and themselves, at least since January of 1959, and learn anew at least a practice, if not a politics, of mutually respectful recognition and address.

5. POSTSCRIPT

Cuban exiles have traditionally excoriated the Revolution’s official atheism as at least a sign if not a source of other various forms of spiritlessness and immorality; for this reason, exiles, who already figured one chief audience for Machado’s late- and post-Cold War work, were also a chief addressee of the theatrical display passing as John Paul’s procession through Cuba already as long ago as January of 1998. Similarly, revolutionaries have attacked exiles as decadent, materialistic bourgeois exploiters whose moral and political failures earned them no better than the status of worms in revolutionary discourse; exiles continue, however, to pour significant dollar values into the Cuban economy, primarily through gifts and contributions of hard currency to family members on the island. If (as mourning play) Machado’s *Fabiola* helps any of its possible audiences to see beyond consolation to some other way to “know” and remember even an unthinkable traumatic past, and if (as morality play) it helps these same audiences to see beyond good and evil to some other possi-

ble stagings for not only the familial and the erotic but also the political and the ethical, then perhaps in these ongoing gestures of a spirited generosity and respect among all Cubans, gestures that have for a very long time crossed all relevant national and ideological lines, we might be able to think our way beyond the ungenerous acts of refusal (embargo, stalemate, impasse) that continue to outweigh that eminently possible generosity, and towards some future whose “hither side” (to quote Homi Bhabha) we might still, together and at once, touch.

NOTES

- 1 My thanks to Brian Reilly for bringing this article to my attention.
- 2 This article also makes liberal use of a substantially revised script of *Fabiola* supplied by the playwright. For purposes of citation, references to the published version will appear as “first version,” and references to the unpublished revision will appear as “second version.” Since the 1994 Taper production of *Floating Islands*, Machado has continued to explore the Cuban/American experience in such plays as *Waiting for Havana* and *The Cook*, both of which enjoyed successful productions in New York City in the early years of the first decade of the new millennium.
- 3 In addition to this important meditation on the relationship between religion and history, two additional performances of Derrida’s also inform this article: his reading of *Hamlet* in *Specters of Marx*, and his less well-known reading of *Romeo and Juliet* in “Aphorism/Countertime.”
- 4 Ortíz wrote most of *Cuban Counterpoint* in the 1930s. Two other more recent works by Cuban intellectuals that implicitly but emphatically inform my understanding of more island-centered (and at the same time more diasporic) Cuban cultural and political dynamics are Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* (1996) and Rafael Rojas’ *La Política del Adiós* (2003).
- 5 In “Aphorism/Countertime” Derrida goes on to argue that, precisely through the dramatization of this spatio-temporal disjunction, *Romeo and Juliet* does more than tell a truth theatrically; it also tells the “truth” of “theatre”: “Disjunction, dislocation, separation of places, deployment or spacing of a story because of aphorism ... would there be any theatre without that? The survival of a theatrical work implies that, theatrically, it is saying something about theater itself, about its essential possibility. And that it does so, theatrically, then, the play of uniqueness and repetition, by giving rise every time to the chance of an absolutely singular event as it does to the untranslatable idiom of a proper name, to its fatality ... to the fatality of a date and of a rendezvous” (“Aphorism” 419). Derrida’s formulation may thus also guide us past the fatal untranslatability of *Fabiola*’s name, and namings; certainly the play may be said in part to speak its own theatrical “truth” as a “truth” about a “theatre” we usually name “history.”
- 6 *Post-memory* is a term deployed quite productively by Marianne Hirsch in *Family*

Frames: Photography, Narrative, Post-Memory to describe the persistence of historical trauma's effects on the children of immigrants. It "is distinguished from memory," Hirsch argues, "by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection," and it "characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (Hirsch 22).

- 7 The best reading of the varying political and cultural sensibilities of Cuban-exile and Cuban-American immigrant generations remains Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's 1994 study, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*. In the decade since its publication, Pérez-Firmat's founding contribution to U.S. Cuban cultural studies has been usefully supplemented by book-length studies across various fields and methodologies, including political science (María de los Angeles Torres' *In the Land of the Mirrors*, 1999), sociology (María Cristina García's *Havana USA*, 1996), and literary studies (Isabel Alvarez-Borland's *Cuban-American Literature of Exile*, 1998).
- 8 It bears noting here that while the post-Cold War period has been frustrating to Cuban exiles and others off the island who hoped the fall of the Soviet empire would lead fairly precipitously to the fall of Castro's regime, that "Special Period" did usher in profound changes within Cuba. According to Damián Fernández, "the Special Period [...] was an austerity program" that "reduce[d] social programs dramatically" in Cuba (see Fernández 59). He goes on in a later passage to specify that beginning in 1986, the Cuban government "closed factories, laid off workers, opened the economy to tourism and foreign investment, and expanded the legal space for self-employment" (Fernández 126).
- 9 In Act One of the second version, Machado has Cusa read out of a selection of Marx's texts, from the "Theses on Feuerbach," to *The German Ideology*, to *Capital*; all the quotations, immediately recognizable, simultaneously delay the momentum of the actual dialogue, and distract the audience to a larger ideological and theatrical message to which they must attend. In Derrida's terms, Cusa's aphoristic ejaculations demonstrate why "each aphorism[']s] temporal logic prevents it from sharing all its time ... with the discourse of the other," and why, then, these aphorisms might be strategically out of place, or not at home, in a dramatic dialogue. Aphorism marks, for Derrida, the "impossible synchronization ... of the discourse of time, of its marks, of its dates, of the course of time and of the essential digression which dislocates desire and carries the step of those who love one another off course" ("Aphorism" 418).
- 10 This slogan appeared on the cover of the playbook to the Mark Taper Forum's 1994 production of *The Floating Island Plays*. The Cuban/American situation has, of course, traditionally played itself out in part as a very public, even scandalous, narrative of familial crisis, most memorably perhaps in the media circus surrounding the Elián González affair in late 1999 and early 2000. For an exhaustive treatment of that moment in the context of post-Revolutionary and post-Cold War

Cuban/American history, see journalist Ann Louise Bardach's *Cuba Confidential: Love and Vengeance in Miami and Havana*. In her preface to that volume Bardach addresses her decision to "view this forty-four-year-old quagmire" through the "prism ... of the broken family," explaining in part how this "trope of the shattered family has infused the Cuban conflict with an emotionality that is the stuff of Greek drama, with plotlines borrowed from Shakespeare and afternoon telenovelas" (Bardach xvii).

- 11 This analysis owes something at least in spirit to Lora Romero, to whom this article is dedicated. In her trenchant, cautionary introduction to *Home Fronts: Domesticity and its Critics in the Antebellum U.S.*, Romero makes a typically articulate case for analyzing the operations of power in radically local and localizable ways, for acknowledging, in other words, that power's stages are, because they are also history's, everywhere, and ultimately not given to conceptual generalization or totalization.
- 12 See Melissa Zeiger's argument connecting gender, homosociality, and mourning in *Beyond Consolation*; for Zeiger, "the complex, often fraught interplay between male homoerotic desire and heterosexual cultural norms embodied in marriage is prefigured in the Orpheus story, as is the conflict between the erotically charged impulses of the living to remain connected to the dead or aggressively disconnect themselves from them" (Zeiger 2). Zeiger's formulation of this tradition helps to illustrate the congruence rather than the contradiction between Pedro's hysterical mourning of his wife and his equally compulsive desire for his brother. Indeed, the shift from an Oedipal to an Orphean model does some of the work of refiguring, and reconfiguring, the familial and gender paradigms at work in *Fabiola*, which can be argued generally to re-situate familial relations outside prevailing and constitutive political and symbolic "frames," like the Oedipal model, in favor of (m)any others. This shift also exposes the tortured logic behind a kind of gendered division of labor determining who traditionally bears the burden for mourning in most patriarchal societies. Judith Butler in *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* also suggests ways to extend the analysis here further in this direction.
- 13 From various conversations with the playwright in the course of the late 1990s.
- 14 The conflation of Cuban and (mostly male) homosexual identities here could just as easily hold a mirror up to Cuban audiences on the island as well as off; by now we can point to the long, complex history of both creative and critical commentary on the way that the politics of gender and sexuality have been implicated in Cuban cultural, national, and state politics. Reinaldo Arenas's life's work was arguably dedicated to the documentation of precisely this vexed node of political forces, and from that work and work like it has issued in turn a very rich critical legacy, especially in the United States by scholars in a variety of fields. See for example, José Quiroga's chapters on Virgilio Piñera and the film *Strawberry and Chocolate* in *Tropics of Desire*, the section entitled "Critical Cubañía" of José Muñoz's *Disidentifications*, and all of Emilio Bejel's *Gay Cuban Nation*.
- 15 Benjamin's own work can certainly be said to constitute its own theatrical history;

- in addition to the explicit discussion of both his and Brecht's theories of epic theatre in this section, Benjamin's variously "theatrical" analyses of both seveneenth-century German mourning plays (in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*) and of history as such in his own famous (and famously discontinuous and aphoristic) "Theses on the Philosophy of History" implicitly inform everything I say in this section. Benjamin's essay can also be read as a resonant precursor to Derrida's own "Aphorism/Countertime," discussed above.
- 16 This play, which is set during two days in Havana in 1960, and *Fabiola* actually overlap chronologically; depending on the production, either play can be performed as the second or the third installment in the cycle, constituting, in their ambiguous, even dubious interchangeability yet another instance of theatrical countertime. María Josefa is the matriarch of the Ripoll clan; she is Sonia's maternal grandmother. Sonia is the same woman married to Osvaldo in *Fabiola*, and as such she is the character bridging the major generational and familial divides in the four plays. This dialogue occurs as the Ripoll women prepare a lunch for the family on the day the Revolutionary government will come to claim title to the family's bus company for the state.
- 17 By no means do I intend to credit Taylor with inventing the theoretical distinction between theatre and performance, though her work is the most useful to me here; in addition to Taylor, this argument owes a significant and profound debt to the work of such influential practitioners of performance studies as José Muñoz, Rebecca Schneider, and David Román.
- 18 I take Machado's solicitation of Brecht, and especially of *Mother Courage and Her Children*, to mark his dramaturgy as profoundly as any other I may discuss here; Cusa in the later *Fabiola* witnesses the disappearance of each of her children, victims either to death or to exile, as distractedly as Courage does hers in Brecht's play, and, at the time of the composition of *Floating Islands*, Machado could be said to be witnessing himself the fallout of a different kind of "thirty years' war" in chronicling the thirty-plus years' "cold" war waged between revolutionaries and exiles since 1959.
- 19 A considerable body of scholarship has in the last decade taken up the challenge of articulating the relation of literature and theatre to trauma more explicitly, and helpfully. In his essay "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literature," Geoffrey Hartman analyzes literature's negotiation of the pain or wound of trauma in a manner that reactivates both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic terms in the service of a new ethics (rather than, say, a new therapeutics or even epistemology) of reading. To this end, Hartman reads "against" catharsis as a chief aim of literature that takes on the responsibility of testifying to historical trauma; as such, he also reads, in ways applicable to Machado, against sentimentalism and melodramatic "seriousness." See also in this respect Cathy Carruth's equally unflinching reading of theatre's responsibility to witness the traumatic (with specific and, in relation to Machado, resonant reference to the dream of the burning child in Freud), in "Traumatic Awakenings," and Elin Diamond's fascinating, anti-therapeutic re-

theorization of catharsis in “The Shudder of Catharsis,” both of which appear in the collection *Performativity and Performance* edited by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.

- 20 John Paul II’s visit to Cuba faded quickly from at least U.S. public awareness, and public memory, because of two far more showy events; it coincided with the week of disclosures in the U.S. press of then-President Bill Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky, and it was upstaged again exactly two years later by the Elián González matter, which turned its own peculiar kind of trick in marking Cuban time.
- 21 This declaration was echoed by an equally astonishing one in John Paul’s homily during the Mass in Havana’s Plaza de la Revolución, where he told Cubans that they should continue to struggle to be subjects rather than objects of history.
- 22 Months after John Paul’s visit, an article in the *Nation* describing the ongoing crisis afflicting both Cuba’s revolutionary economy and culture left no doubt of the kind of speculation still presiding over both. Entitled “Cuba’s Suspended Revolution,” the article describes how, “in the post-cold war era, the social fabric of the revolution is unraveling,” and how in turn Cuba has turned to policies like the following to “stave off a complete meltdown” (20) of its economy: Castro’s government, according to the *Nation* contributor and *Los Angeles Times* business editor Kevin Baxter, “has participated in more than 200 ‘joint ventures’ with major foreign capitalists – with the Cuban state’s ‘investment’ often no more than its supply of a cheap and disempowered work force” (20). “The US dollar,” Baxter goes on, “has been legalized as a parallel currency and has, to no one’s surprise, created a parallel speculative economy” (20). This process has both slowed down and gone underground since the ascension of the more conservative (and exile-friendly) Bush administration in 2000, but it has not halted completely; there remain in the U.S. Congress lawmakers from both major parties who see in Cuba the potential for further, if incremental, democratization through strategic economic engagement of the kind that has slowly relaxed some forms of state repression in nations like China and Vietnam. It bears noting that, in February 2003, as attention in most of the world remained fixed on the impending U.S. invasion of Iraq, Fidel Castro visited a China so transformed by liberal market reforms that it left him, according to one Associated Press report, “amazed” (“Castro Stunned by Changing China”). The characteristically cagey Castro didn’t let on whether the amazement was positive or negative; certainly nothing has changed so dramatically on the Cuban as it has on the Chinese scene. One can only wonder whether Castro left China having witnessed a version of a Cuban future that he might welcome, or resist.

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