

## Defining and Defying “Woman” in Four Plays by Luisa Josefina Hernández

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Luisa Josefina Hernández enjoys a unique place among Mexican dramatists. Well-respected, even revered, Hernández lives on her own terms, devoting herself to her family and her prose, and only writing plays when commissioned to do so by festival organizers or other producers (Nigro 103; Magnarelli “Entrevista” 399). Her dramaturgy spans four decades and her themes run the gamut from social realism to experimental explorations of myth (both national and Greek). Hernández is best known for two early successes – *Los frutos caídos* and *Los huéspedes reales* – in which her female protagonists represent “la pusilanimidad femenina” (Torner 565) and “la falta de voluntad” (Brann 27). Current theory would consider the personality defects that Torner and Brann criticize to be cultural constructs – roles and behaviors imposed from outside by the controlling patriarchy – rather than faults inherent in the female gender. This article examines Hernández’s female characters in the two aforementioned plays from the 1950s as well as in two later plays – *El orden de los factores* and *El amigo secreto* – both from the 1980s. I seek to redefine Hernández’s women and determine the extent of their (Hernández’s and the characters’) defiance of traditional interpretations of “woman.”<sup>1</sup>

Hernández belongs to the first generation of Mexican playwrights whose initiation into the theatre occurred through university training. Furthermore, this occurred in the 1950s, during the height of realism on the Mexican commercial stage. As a logical consequence, Joan Rea Boorman observes, “Hernández followed the dictates of her teacher and mentor, Rodolfo Usigli” (76).<sup>2</sup> Hernández herself acknowledges, “Ese [de Usigli] era el teatro que había que hacer” (Nigro 102). The product of a very traditional family (Knowles 133), Hernández has repeatedly claimed **not** to be a feminist (Muncy 75; Magnarelli “Entrevista” 404). Does Hernández’s use of female protagonists reproduce the ideologies of her male predecessors and contemporaries, or does it provide us with a truly female perspective on

Mexican reality? Evidence supports the latter conclusion, as later discussion will explain.

From the beginning, both Mexicans and North Americans have consistently praised Hernández's writing. Following her early successes, she appeared in major theatre histories of the 1960s written by Antonio Magaña Esquivel and Frank Dauster. Magaña Esquivel invokes the (dubious) *mujer varonil* compliment, saying that Hernández's playwriting, "se aparta de modo absoluto del que han practicado en México otras escritoras; gobernadas por su talento reflexivo, dominada toda llamada sentimental y aun romántica, sus obras dramáticas aparecen compuestas con el mejor estilo, acaso demasiado sobrias" (138). Dauster calls her an "autora de una obra copiosa e importante" (*Historia* 82), a sentiment that George McMurray echoes twenty years later when he proclaims Hernández "Mexico's most important living dramatist after Emilio Carballido and Vicente Leñero" (249). Ironically, the above statement appears in a section titled "And Many Others," not in the section titled "Major Dramatists."<sup>3</sup>

Despite earning such sweeping praise early in her career, Hernández's drama has drawn relatively scant attention, averaging less than one article per year. An unsigned editorial in *Tramoya* (which I presume was written by editor Emilio Carballido) finds:

asombrosa la falta de una respuesta pública más amplia. Mientras para todo conocedor o trabajador de nuestro teatro es respetado y consagrado el nombre de la autora, la presencia de sus textos en nuestros escenarios es infrecuente. . . . Los suplementos culturales hacen un notable silencio a su trabajo.... (12-13: 3)

This local neglect helps to explain similar lack of attention on the part of North American hispanists.

Nonetheless and despite gaps, existing criticism on Hernández's theatre provides valuable insights and a starting point for further discussion. For example, in a key article on women's roles in plays by Mexican women, Ruth Lamb observes: "El conflicto amoroso es el que determina, definitivamente, el desenlace de la vida de la mujer. Aunque en algunos casos la mujer parece tomar iniciativa propia, o control de su vida, depende casi siempre de sus relaciones con algún hombre" (443). This certainly holds true for Hernández's realistic plays, and also for several of her allegories and adaptations. Lamb also believes that conflict results from the discrepancy between the protagonists' idealized concept of love and the reality they face as Mexican women. Hernández employs characterizations based on

psychological models to portray this reality and to criticize it. According to John Knowles, Hernández's negative characterizations reveal her "moral anger" (137), while Dauster refers to her characters as "fracasos andantes" (*Historia* 83) and Brann determines that they are "incapaces de superarse a sí mismos" (26). In *Los frutos caídos*, Hernández's master's thesis from 1955, this appears to be the case, yet analysis of certain previously unexplored aspects of Celia's character may dispel some of this negativity.

*Los frutos caídos* finds 27-year-old Celia returning to the family home in the provinces. She takes off from work without permission, afraid of the feelings she has developed for a younger co-worker. Celia must support her second husband, a writer of some sort (not the last time Hernández casts aspersions on the literary field) and her two children (one from each marriage) with her earnings from an insurance company. Tired of working mostly for the benefit of others, she has decided to sell her family property out from under her uncle Fernando and his family. Fernando, the estate's manager, has effectively squandered her assets and has no records to show to any prospective buyer. After confronting Fernando in a searing verbal joust which nearly ends in physical violence, Celia finally decides to return to Mexico City. She will not run off with her enamored co-worker, and she will not sell the family house. She will eventually return to it, like the fruit that falls near the tree.

All the characters in this play reflect stereotypes and all are coping with choices they have made in order to survive in the repressive Mexican society of the 1950s. Most of their choices carry unpleasant consequences, but the characters accept them, because they have resigned themselves to the path of least resistance. Fernando, an alcoholic who rules his house with an iron fist, affirms the power that society grants him as the head of the household: "ustedes son unas pobres mujeres que se ven obligadas a tolerar mi violencia" (450). Fernando has the option of escaping the confines of the house (frequently referred to as a prison) for the work place or the bar. He blames his sister-in-law (Celia's mother) for exiling him to this house, and he resents his older brother for coddling him for so long, only to abruptly send him unprepared into the world.

Magdalena, his wife, is the traditional *ama de casa*. She had been quite popular in her youth, but she stayed with Fernando, reasoning, "de qué hubiera servido separarme de Fernando si quedaba la posibilidad de casarme con otro igual a él?" (465). Tía Paloma, well aware of her dependent position as an unwanted *solterona*, avoids direct contact with family members, but

listens to everything from behind closed doors and asserts her presence by playing her mandolin at odd hours. Berated by Fernando for being useless (“no ha sabido siquiera tener un hijo” 447) and senile (“Una mujer de más de setenta años difícilmente está en su juicio” 423), Paloma defies certain conventions inside the house, speaking plainly and truthfully about the family and their situation. She understands that Fernando’s system is “Decir la última palabra y luego enfermar[s]e para no recibir ninguna respuesta” (448). Paloma also astutely sees through Celia’s inability to reach a decision on selling the estate: “No quieres que por tu causa pase nada. Quieres pasar suavemente, haciendo lo que te viene en gana y sin que los otros se sintieran heridos. No quieres tener ninguna responsabilidad” (451).

Only young Dora seems willing to assume risk and responsibility, perhaps because she has not yet lost her illusions. Having grown up in poverty, she achieved a measure of upward mobility by becoming Magdalena’s “adopted” daughter, although Tía Paloma calls her “gente interesada” (411). Now, at age 18, Dora’s childlike demand for constant attention and reassurance masks her remarkable grasp of what she wants and how she plans to get it. After receiving her teaching degree, she asks Celia to intervene on her behalf so that she can secure a nice government job: “No quiero dar clases en una escuela particular. Quiero trabajar en el gobierno porque si se empieza joven y se trabaja mucho, hay ascensos y después una pensión” (416). Occasionally, Dora’s natural selfish enthusiasm overrides her learned tendency to say what she thinks others wish to hear. When Paloma suggests that Dora will soon be able to help support Magdalena, Dora blurts out “Si trabajo, quiero que mi dinero sea sólo para mí” (453). When Celia’s “friend” Francisco appears, Dora learns from Celia that he has a good job and is from a good family. Therefore, she sees marriage to him as a way out of the provinces: “Es un muchacho muy guapo y joven, y yo también soy joven como él y no tan fea. Es algo... natural” (462). Although she barely knows him, she tells Celia, “podría enamorarme en cualquier momento” (469).

Celia resents the ease with which Dora contrives her schemes under the guise of innocence, yet she cannot reveal that the reason for her own uneasiness is her emotional attachment to Francisco. Though he proposes to legitimize his passion to her through marriage, Celia ultimately chooses against another divorce for reasons similar to Magdalena’s. Having suffered the social stigma of her first divorce, she sees neither benefit nor guarantee in giving up what she has for an involvement that could turn out to be equally unsatisfactory.

One previously ignored facet of Celia's character is that of her motherhood, traditionally considered the biological (and social?) goal of "woman." In this play, Hernández actually creates three mothers: Magdalena, Celia, and Celia's mother (absent, but referred to throughout). Though Magdalena has no children of her own, she now considers Dora, who originally entered the house as a maid, her "hija adoptiva." Because Fernando apparently spends his entire salary on himself, Magdalena, "true to her name, is . . . long-suffering" (Waldman 77). Celia's mother, though never present, is accused by Fernando of "una especie de invitación" (448), which ultimately led to his expulsion from the house in Mexico City to the house in the provinces. Paloma assures Celia that Fernando is twisting the facts and that the blame is actually his. Still, Fernando calls Celia "prostituta" and "ladrona," and insinuates that these characteristics are "algo hereditario" from her mother's side. Hernández indicates through stage directions that Celia is "[m]ás afectada de lo que quisiera demostrar" (444). Clearly, in this play the rewards of motherhood always have strings attached.

Celia's motherhood greatly influences her demeanor throughout the play. In the beginning, she declares about her sons, "bueno, los quiero mucho" (406) and "Yo no lamento tenerlos. Es maravilloso llegar a mi casa y saber que están allí" (419). She worries that because she must work, others have to care for them (414). However, in Act Two, Francisco offers another perspective: "Lo normal sería que se animara usted al volver a su casa, (irónicamente) ante la idea de reunirse con sus seres queridos" (436). He adds, "Usted me ha dicho a menudo que sus hijos le quitan y no le dan" (437-38). By the end of Act Two, Celia wishes to see herself "libre de todo y de todos" (453). By Act Three, she declares, "nunca me he visto menos libre" (464), and she considers her children just as much work as her job: "Trabajo mucho: todos los días, a todas horas. Si no es en la oficina, es en la casa, con mis hijos" (472). Yet when she decides to stay for a few days more, she experiences "ganas de verlos" (476).

Celia loves her sons, but their care exacts a toll on her. Her ambivalence and sense of fatigue realistically define what it is for some women to be mothers in modern urban society. Celia represents a pioneer generation of working women to whom the legal system accords the rights and responsibilities of men **in addition to** their obligations as wives and mothers. Celia finds that her access to a career, her license to divorce and her right to power of attorney do not constitute magic solutions to her problems. Her decision to keep the house does not constitute failure if we examine it through

the eyes of Celia as mother. Rather than a “fracaso de voluntad,” as Brann labels it (25), or an incapacity to “llevar a cabo su resolución de vender todas sus propiedades” (26), Celia recognizes her responsibility to her relatives who, after years of dependence, have assumed the role of children. Celia is not a fickle female; she revises her goals based on her updated assessment of the situation.

Thus, in *Los frutos caídos*, Hernández redefines the Mexican “madre abnegada” as a role not without serious consequences. She re-presents her as a protagonist in her own drama of conflicting desires, struggling to overcome problems and inequities that still trouble women today. In the character of Celia, Hernández manifests a uniquely female view that cannot be found in female characters written by contemporary male dramatists.

*Los huéspedes reales* (1956) presents another perspective on women. The protagonist Cecilia stands on the threshold of adulthood. Engaged to marry an economically successful lothario whom she does not love, Cecilia secretly sees a young student with whom she shares a kind of adolescent infatuation. To further complicate matters, Cecilia really wants to remain at home. She and her father share a closeness that provokes jealousy in the mother. Many critics choose to read into this relationship “un claro complejo de Electra” (Torner 566). Pushed by the mother, Cecilia does marry Juan Manuel, but she returns to the shelter of her parents’ home after a disastrous wedding night. After admitting to each other their special love, the father feels himself without a clear social role: “Ya no soy esposo, ya no soy padre, ya no tengo honor, ni dignidad . . . no sé cuál es mi lugar en el mundo. . . .” (137). Consequently, he shoots himself, leaving the house and the future to the two women.

Frank Dauster observes that Hernández’s male characters can be negative: “[she] enjoys sticking pins into men upon occasion” (“Success” 18). Yet John Knowles sees the father as a victim, “a good man in many ways, but strangely unworldly and innocent” (137), whose “wife has ensnared him and rendered him impotent” (137). According to Knowles, the father’s suicide permits him to “obviate the women’s deleterious dominance” (137). On the other hand, Cecilia’s fiancé Juan Manuel represents a typical Mexican *macho* who intends to follow the dictates of society by creating a legitimate family which will in no way interfere with his relationship with his mistress. Rounding out the cast of masculine characters is young Bernardo, the student who nearly conquers Cecilia’s passion. The fact that he fails to do so supports arguments that Cecilia rejects the “normal” avenues of heterosexual relationships.

As evidence of Cecilia's incestuous feelings for her father, Enrique Torner cites this speech near the end of the play: "En las noches leeremos y cuando tú te canses yo leeré en voz alta... hasta que te duermas. En las mañanas me levantaré antes que tú, a hacerte el desayuno, te compondré la ropa, le pegaré los botones a tus sacos y . . . nos moriremos juntos..." (Hernández 135; Torner 566). However, this and similar passages may also provoke entirely different readings. Sharon Magnarelli points out that "the play's phallogocentric ideas and the Electra complex are undermined or negated as much as they are supported" ("Sub/In/Di-Verting" 94). For example, though Cecilia says "nos moriremos juntos," several times during the play, she does not choose death when her father commits suicide. Magnarelli notes that through certain stage directions, "Hernández discourages our interpretation of Cecilia's desire as incestuous by having her recognize that she and her father are play acting when they talk about their love and by having her laugh at it" ("Sub/In/Di-Verting" 96). This focus on the play's performative aspect provides a fresh interpretation that diverges from the traditional Freudian-based analysis.

According to Magnarelli's reading, Cecilia does not really wish to replace her mother in their home; she desires rather to remain in a childlike state of presexual security. The mother wishes to return to the past, before Cecilia's birth, when she and her husband shared an exclusive relationship; but the father's remarks imply that this past is false and idealized, not real. After Cecilia's negative wedding night experience, both she and her mother perceive the large gap between their notion of romantic love and their actual reality. Magnarelli emphasizes the similarity in the way both mother and daughter defy traditional social roles: "[Cecilia] rejects the symbolic phallus as implied in both an erotic relationship and societal gender roles, specifically the traditional female role of submission, a role which, by the way, her mother rarely assumes as anything more than the most superficial mask" ("Sub/In/Di-Verting" 105). Freed from their social contracts by the father's death, both women have their whole lives ahead to redefine and reconcile themselves and their relationship.

Following the international trends toward experimental theatre in the 1960s, Hernández turned to more universal themes in her dramaturgy in the 1970s. Palls notes her employment of Brechtian dramatic techniques in these plays (84-86), as well as her use of Greek myths, Bible stories and history as her inspiration. In 1982, Hernández returned to Mexican "reality" in her characteristically forthright manner in *El orden de los factores*. Though

brief mentions of this and other later plays appear in interviews, and in spite of their publication in *Tramoya*, to my knowledge this article represents the first intent to address them.

*El orden* is a slice of life piece with flexible staging that allows smooth transitions from scene to scene. In a notable divergence from Hernández's earlier writing, the treatment of her characters takes on a more sympathetic tone. The cast includes María Elena, a twice-divorced doctor who works in a neighborhood clinic; her mother, known simply as "Abuela"; her lover and colleague Manuel; and her son Ramiro and several of his friends. María Elena's main dramatic conflict involves her professional and personal relationship with Manuel. When Manuel informs her of the chance to make some money by buying and using drugs of questionable quality in their clinic, María Elena feels repulsed by his lack of professional integrity. His plan opens up several choices, all fairly negative to María Elena: she could participate in this immoral and unethical scheme or at least tolerate his participation; she could denounce him and lose him; or she could leave the clinic and face the dubious prospect of finding a new position. The subplots involve Ramiro and his young friends who search for work, for satisfying relationships, and for a workable philosophy of life that will enable them to survive in a Mexico City where everything has suffered a major devaluation.

Among Ramiro's friends, the curiously dysfunctional mother-daughter pair of Lilia and the Señora bears echoes of the family in *Los huéspedes reales*, but with a 90s spin. The reader/spectator may never be sure which one is the victim, which the victimizer. During the course of the play, each character lies convincingly, twisting the other's story around to suit her own purposes. The daughter feels ignored and unloved. The mother, torn between a demanding career and a second marriage in which she feels insecure, believes that "todos los hijos quieren llamar la atención para que sus padres no sean felices" (20-21). The Señora periodically threatens to lock Lilia away in a mental ward, to which Lilia responds by escaping her house for the sanctuary of friends. After several episodes in which the two women play these conflicts out in María Elena's home, the good doctor confronts the daughter:

María Elena: Has pensado en que mientras más molestas a tu madre más te jodes?

Lilia (*se atraganta*): ¿Jodes? Eso no puede ser un verbo.

María Elena: Pues es un verbo completito, con todas las conjugaciones posibles . . . tienes que escoger entre el placer de estar jodiendo y ser una mujer saludable y cuerda. (36)



María Elena's frankness shocks and surprises Lilia. No one has ever explained her mutually destructive relationship with her mother so clearly or in such strong language. Hernández has obviously moved from basing her characterizations on Freudian models to using current theories of co-dependency and passive-aggressive behavior. Like Celia in *Los frutos caídos*, the Señora finds that her roles as wife, career woman and mother create tensions and conflicts of interest. In this play, though, we also see the deleterious effects of these conflicts on the children. By the end of the play, though mother and daughter do not solve their problems, they at least come to recognize them.

Another young victim of parental neglect, Ramiro's young friend Reynalda seems to be too fragile and trusting to survive in late 20th-century Mexico City. Her parents, in their grief over her brother's recent suicide, ignore her and leave her to her own devices. Reynalda's search for love has so far resulted in an unwanted pregnancy and abortion. As she explains to the doctor, "No ando de puta. . . es que me gusta estar acompañada, cerquita de alguien" (25). After the abortion, Reynalda loses interest in school. She meets some Hare Krishnas in a metro station during her daily wanderings around the city. "Son como. . . feos," she remarks, "pero se pasa el tiempo muy bien con ellos. No se entiende lo que dicen. . . o más o menos" (25). On her way to a weekend retreat with her Hare Krishna friends, Reynalda becomes lost, and while trying to find familiar territory, is assaulted by a gang. After the attack, she returns not to her own home, but to María Elena's, where the latter cares for her wounds, both physical and emotional. As the play ends, Ramiro realizes that despite Reynalda's relative youth and immaturity, he loves her. Hernández raises the possibility that the relationship may grow into something serious and long-lasting, something that will provide the love and security that Reynalda so desperately seeks.

María Elena's moral dilemma about the drugs at the clinic practically resolves itself, because Manuel decides that he prefers to act honorably rather than lose whatever relationship he has with María Elena. In fact, he offers finally to meet her family as a gesture of reconciliation and as proof that his intentions are now more serious. María Elena, meanwhile, still considers leaving the clinic, but finds justification for staying: "Si lo deajo, deajo también a los enfermos y quién sabe en qué manos. Eso cuenta. Una no puede hacerlo todo, nada más un pedazo y hay que conformarse"(38). She also discerns that the clinic "está en un barrio, en una ciudad, en un país que tiene ciertas características" (38). María Elena understands her own limitations, yet she

defines herself as part of a larger context. María Elena has created for herself a fulfilling career and a stable family unit, despite her two divorces. The presence and acceptance of the Abuela seems crucial to the family's success. In contrast, Celia's mother in *Los frutos caídos* seems but a shadow. For Celia, the extended family does not offer respite from her work; rather, it creates additional burdens. The major difference between these two career women is the choice of career. Celia's service at the insurance company does not extend the same satisfaction that María Elena receives from caring for the sick and injured. While Celia sees both her work and her mothering as a job, María Elena's vocation for nurturing and healing extends beyond her nuclear family.

Quite a contrast to María Elena from *El orden de los factores* is her namesake from a more recent play, *El amigo secreto* (1989). This María Elena greatly resembles Eva from Egon Wolff's *Flores de papel*. She is "30 años, nada fea, nerviosa pero capaz de la generosidad en tanto se lo permite su carácter" (334). A lonely professional woman, she, like Eva, experiences the invasion of a man into her world. In this case, the man is a bus driver who lands in María Elena's apartment after being badly beaten when his bus was hijacked. Jairo, the driver, needs to hide out because he knows that his boss will assume that he has sold the bus and profited from the scam. He wants to stay with María Elena until his bus is recovered and he can go forth and defend himself.

To further complicate matters, Jairo is possessed – he is inhabited by the spirit of none other than Toro Sentado, "perseguido muerto por ingleses en Wyoming" (336). In contrast to the brutish, physical Jairo, Toro Sentado possesses impeccable manners and a sympathetic ear, and he poses no physical threat. During the course of Jairo's convalescence, María Elena falls in love with Toro Sentado's spirit. In the end, he leaves Jairo's body to transfer into María Elena's, thus becoming the perfect companion. With his help, María Elena sets out to find the lover she rejected years ago due to her fear that he would be as abusive as her father and also to her class prejudice.

This play contains several problematic issues, all bearing on the use and perpetuation of negative cultural stereotypes. The most obvious example is Toro Sentado. He displays a curious mixture of elements taken equally from Rousseau's noble savage and from stereotypical Indians found in Hollywood Westerns. Wise and knowledgeable about things past and future, about secrets of the heart, he remains unable to conjugate verbs ("Toro Sentado contar verdad. ¿Querer oír mentira?" 340), and curiously unfamiliar with

certain modern urban conveniences like walk-in closets (“¿Cuántas horas al día tú caminar adentro?” 340). Having lived with(in) Jairo most of Jairo’s life, Toro Sentado can control his body at will and prevent him from causing María Elena any *disgustos*, at least until she decides she is ready and willing.

María Elena teaches literature, seemingly without much enthusiasm.<sup>4</sup> A typical “pluriempleada,” perhaps the wear and tear of traveling between several teaching jobs has dampened her zeal and replaced it with a tired cynicism. During the play we also learn that she is the victim of a despotic, violent and abusive father. María Elena’s obsessive-compulsive behavior, as shown in her constant tidying up of the kitchen, may result from this traumatic experience. Also, the mere proximity of a man seems to draw out coquettish behavior that implies long-repressed sexual desire (another similarity to *Flores de papel*). In fact, although “Jairo” disgusts María Elena, she quite readily kisses and fondles the man’s body when “Toro Sentado” takes control.

Jairo represents a typical Mexican working-class macho – hard-working, physical, vulgar, yet proud of his distinction as “operador de una unidad” and not a mere “chofer de autobús.” Nevertheless, Toro Sentado constantly refers to him as “la materia,” thus denying him any intellectual or emotional depth. Jairo’s current romantic relationship is volatile and sexual; his partner Estela obviously exemplifies the other sexual extreme from the repressed María Elena. However, she cannot actually “embody” sexuality, for she never appears onstage. Because she threatens to call a priest and exorcise him, Toro Sentado holds a low opinion of Estela: “Celosa, un poco sucia no limpia cochina” (351); additionally Toro Sentado reveals that she “haber hecho hijo y ella querer hijo para ver si él casarse” (350). From what Hernández indirectly reveals about her, Estela seeks security, not necessarily love, from the relationship.

Mexican society tends to associate “woman” with two cultural icons: the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche. According to Luis Leal, they represent two archetypes: “that of the woman who has kept her virginity and that of the one who has lost it” (227). The Virgin is also associated with the mother, whom Leal contends is traditionally “suffering, humble, and passive” (232). Octavio Paz declares that “Mexicans consider women to be an instrument, either of the desires of man, or of the ends assigned to her by law, society, or moral codes” (35). However, Marcia Welles contends that “the characterization of women by female authors . . . fit[s] into no specific classifications – as wife, mother virgin, or prostitute. The all-good or all-evil feminine archetype does not exist” (280). Welles’ statement certainly describes Luisa Josefina Hernández’s characterizations.

Although schooled by the symbolic patriarch of modern Mexican theatre and quick to incorporate the structural and formal elements of realistic playwriting into her own works, Hernández has created and maintained a unique vision of Mexican society that manifests itself in the complexity of her female protagonists and minor characters. Unlike Usigli's idealized mothers in *Las madres*, Hernández's mothers like Celia and the Señora are not so eager to play the role of the "madre abnegada." Nor are these two willing to raise their children without a father figure. Both women remarry after their divorce(s), which supports Ruth Lamb's observation that Mexican women generally define themselves in relation to men. Only María Elena, the doctor from *El orden de los factores*, feels independent enough to reject the idea of remarriage. In addition, María Elena's defiance of corruption, in a society where "la mordida" is as entrenched as the PRI, shows her to be far from "participat[ing] passively as depository of certain values" (Paz 35).

In the four plays I have discussed, Hernández's women understand the discrepancy between what society expects from "woman" and what they live as "women." They are able to use expected behaviors to accomplish their goals, or to openly defy passivity and take control. Cecilia actively evades the advances of Bernardo, then employs an exaggerated passivity to free herself of her marital duties to Juan Manuel and return home to her non-sexual relationship with her father. Magdalena suffers Fernando's physical violence and bows to his delusions of power, yet she "adopts" Dora against his wishes and secretly manages an in-home sewing business. Celia comes to understand that passion can cloud judgment and that fatigue can influence decisions as well. Motherhood, a difficult and continuous enterprise, can mean extending care to all dependents, regardless of their age. In most cases, Hernández provides her female characters with depth and complexity, defying stereotypes and creating "women" who live "en un barrio, en una ciudad, en un país que tiene ciertas características" (*El orden* 38).

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## Notes

1. In the introduction to *Alice Doesn't*, Teresa de Lauretis defines "woman" as "a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures . . ." (5). She contrasts this abstract construct with "women," real people within real societies and histories. My use of these terms contrasts the abstraction with the "real" life of literary characters.

2. Usigli is commonly regarded as the "father" of modern Mexican theatre. This fact adds a curious spin to Hernández's interest in basing some of her plays on the Oedipus complex. Or perhaps there is a Bloomsian "anxiety of influence" at work?

3. Hernández also falls victim to what Beth Miller refers to as "the widespread Hispanic convention of referring to women writers by their first names," (9) rather than by surname, as is done with male writers. Magaña Esquivel's "Introduction" (20) and Arturo Ramírez Jurez's article (1280) are but two examples of this condescending practice.

4. This is not the first time that Hernández, herself a teacher, portrays literature as useless and shows the teaching profession in a negative light. In *Los frutos caídos*, Fernando insinuates that Celia's second husband (who teaches a little and studies to become a philologist) doesn't really "work," but rather is "supported" by Celia.

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