

## ***Una cubana in the Borderlands: Teresa Dovalpage's La hija de la Llorona***

### **I. Carolina Caballero**

In *La hija de la Llorona*,<sup>1</sup> author and playwright Teresa Dovalpage appropriates the culturally marked folktale of the *Llorona*, or the wailing woman, to tell the story of a Cuban woman negotiating her past in Cuba and present in the Southwestern US in an effort to address issues of community, gender roles and mental health. In doing so, the playwright furthers an evolved definition of *cubanidad* that eschews a traditional exilic condition in favor of a transnational identity for the Cuban protagonist, Caridad, which more accurately reflects the history and background of recent Cuban émigrés.

In the play, Caridad lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, with her husband, Michael, and her mother-in-law, Rita, as she cares full-time for her newborn son. Disillusioned with motherhood, Caridad desperately desires to return to work, her studies and life outside of the home. At odds with the traditional role advocated by her mother-in-law, she resents her husband's freedoms and Rita's constant presence and old-fashioned advice. Caridad focuses her frustration on her young son and it appears only a matter of time before he suffers physically for her unhappiness. As the *Llorona* wails in the distance on this Day of the Dead, Caridad deals with her emotions in relation to motherhood while navigating the painful memories of her own distinct immigration to the US. As a *balseira*, Caridad left her mother in Cuba with the understanding that she would soon follow on a raft. When she does not arrive, Caridad rightfully assumes that she drowned in the crossing and blames herself for abandoning her to a watery grave.

While the Southwestern United States in general and the *Llorona* legend in particular are traditionally the domain of Chicanos and Mexican-Americans, Dovalpage presents it as a new contact zone for Cuban, Mexi-

can-American and Puerto Rican characters. The playwright repositions the *Llorona* myth to highlight current concerns not only in the Cuban community, but also in the greater Latino community on the changing attitudes of and towards women. While Caridad embodies all of the characteristics associated with the *Llorona* legend, Dovalpage introduces a contemporary element in her version: postpartum depression, a still stigmatized disorder. As a result, Caridad's struggle becomes an issue neither exclusively of Cuban or Latino identity in the US, but potentially of all women.

I contend that *La hija de la Llorona* and the character Caridad represent the latest development in Cuban theater written in the US as it portrays the burgeoning transnational identity of recent Cuban émigrés and their attitude towards their homeland and new community. By actively rejecting her feelings of isolation and despair, Caridad establishes connections with her conservative New Mexican mother-in-law and her liberal Puerto Rican friend that transcend culture and place. With little regard for politics, nostalgia and idealized memory, *La hija de la Llorona* presents an alternative *cubanidad* that defies the typical "exile ideology" associated with much of the Cuban community, and some of its literature written in the diaspora (Grenier and Pérez 87).<sup>2</sup>

Before I explain, what I consider the transnational qualities of *La hija de la Llorona*, it is important to briefly trace the most salient characteristics, themes and elements of Cuban theater in the US since 1959. Many early examples take place in Cuba before the Revolution and are mostly written in Spanish. In contrast to many first generation Cuban exile writers who tended to idealize the era before Castro's government, José Escarpanter points out that many of these plays, such as Manuel Reguera Samuell's *Otra historia de las revoluciones celestes, según Copérnico*, are actually far from nostalgic about these years; rather, they critically portray them as exceptionally violent (Escarpanter 58). In these cases, the authors emphasize how the mistakes of the past led the entire country into its present predicament (Santiago 98). Either literally or figuratively, other plays from this group, such as *Ojos para no ver* by Matías Montes Huidobro, amply document the oppression, scarcity of resources and disillusionment in Cuba after 1959, as well as famous historical figures and events that defined their nation and their exile (60-61).

Once exile becomes more permanent, Cuban theater begins to portray the effects of transculturation and assimilation on members of its community in the US (Santiago 99). The playwrights, writing in both English

and Spanish, reflecting linguistically this transition, often utilize parody and black humor to soften the hard edges of the desperate situations that these often-pathetic characters endure (99). Many of these plays, such as *Thanksgiving in Union City* by Manuel Martín, treat nostalgic representations of memory and the past in Cuba, but only to prove that the exile community must not hide in history and memory, but, instead, embrace the present and move towards the future (Escarpanter 62). With the increased number of exiles traveling to Cuba since 1978, theater began to explore the topic of reunion and reconciliation as not only a hope but also a reality for the Cuban community both on and off the island (Domínguez 70). Plays such as *A Little Something to Ease the Pain* by René Alomá and *Nadie se va del todo* by Pedro Monge Rafuls are indicative of this theme. Inevitably, some plays imagining a return to Cuba are bitter and seek to assign blame; however, the majority highlight the cultural values beyond politics that still bind Cubans on the island with those living in exile (Santiago 101).

More recent plays and performance texts, from differing generations, such as *Coser y cantar* by Dolores Prida, *The Floating Island Plays* by Eduardo Machado and *Milk of Amnesia* by Carmelita Tropicana, critically examine the exilic condition. They question and subvert social and cultural beliefs and ideologies in an effort to re-examine the “truths” upheld by the collective exile community (Obregon 23). This move to reevaluate attitudes towards Cuba, life in exile and the Cuban exile community appears in most contemporary Cuban exile theater as opinions and feelings evolve with time. Beatriz Rizk states that a more self-critical Cuban theater in exile stems from playwrights that “empiezan a cuestionar su posición respecto al exilio, respecto a los hechos que han contribuido a la formación de la comunidad y respecto a su vida, en el aquí y el ahora, norteamericano” (236-37).

Regardless of age or date of departure from the island, two themes are constant in the majority of Cuban plays written in the US: identity and family. Those plays delving into Cuban history before and after 1959 are attempts at identity affirmation through the narration of a life and culture before and beyond the present exile. With the passing of time in exile, this theme soon evolved into the construction of characters on stage struggling to save their identity at all costs. More recently, the theme of identity has turned toward the examination of the formation of the Cuban-American consciousness as it continues to develop away from the island. The topic of identity becomes a focal point in exile since its cohesiveness seems to be threatened the longer one is removed from her or his home country.

Another recurring image is that of the family, a site of salvation in some cases and oppression in others. In early plays, the family, representative of Cuba in general, is a stifling entity, violent in its practice and manipulative of its members. Through the theme of the disintegration of the family unit these playwrights commented on the demise of such intrinsic values as Cuban culture, customs, family and “la nacionalidad misma que el comunismo destruyó totalmente” (Santiago 98). Once in exile, the Cuban family became a defense against US cultural values and a source of identity affirmation or, alternately, a retroactive force hindering their assimilation (99). In essence, playwrights use the family, the sacred object of the Cuban community both on and off the island, to dramatize the positive and negative aspects of its strength and effect on its members’ lives.

In many ways, *La hija de la Llorona* examines some of the same themes found in most Cuban theater written in the diaspora; yet, the approach is from a universal perspective instead of the anticipated exilic outlook. Caridad’s dispassionate descriptions of Cuba in the 1990s are neither idealized nor politicized; she succinctly outlines the economic troubles she endured before her departure. While the protagonist does struggle with identity issues and culture shock, her Cuban identity is never really in question; instead, her new role as mother provokes the crisis. Her problems also stem from trying to integrate herself into her husband’s life, which includes the prominent role of her mother-in-law. Like much of Cuban exile literature, and the *Llorona* myth for that matter, loss is a principle theme in the play. Yet, in the end, healing and reconciliation are also possible. The treatment of these themes and Caridad’s representation portray a move away from the insular sensibilities characteristic of much Cuban exile theater.<sup>3</sup> Avoiding the word “exile,” I use the term “transnational” to describe this “new identity category” (Fernández xvi). The shift from exile to transnational is an ongoing process brought about by the changing attitudes and laws of both the Cuban and US governments towards immigration and migrants themselves over the last twenty years.

For decades the Cuban government’s official rhetoric on the diaspora was energized with hard-line descriptors such as *gusanos*, *corruptos*, *antisociales* or *escoria*. Its stance has softened considerably as a result of the economic crisis that befell the island after the disintegration of its primary benefactor and trade partner(s) the USSR and the Eastern Block in 1989 (Blue 28). Depoliticizing migration and increasing visits from families living abroad as well as remittances alleviated some of the economic strain of

the Special Period (28).<sup>4</sup> Visits both to and from Cuba to the US increased exponentially; according to Jorge Duany, 7,000 Cubans and Cuban Americans living in the US visited the island in 1990 (12). By 1999, that number had increased to 140,000 (12). Remittances, the money sent to Cuba by relatives living abroad, also increased steadily over the decade to 813 million dollars in 2001 (Pedraza 301). Immigration accords signed by the two countries in the wake of the *balseiro* crisis in 1995 served to curb illegal immigration and make the treatment of Cubans coming to the US a little less exceptional (Duany 17). Naturally, these new policies, and decades living under Castro's rule, also affected the point of view of the current migrants themselves.

The antagonism that defined the relationship between the first generation of migrants and the Cuban government is not reflected in the most recent arrivals. Sarah Blue reminds us, "as opposed to early groups, who had fled a society in transition from capitalism, these were largely people who had grown up in Communist Cuba and who had strong ties to the new society" (27). The first groups effectively burned all their bridges when they left. They lost their jobs, property and rights as citizens; what's more they were not even allowed to visit until 1978 (Duany 13). In contrast, the majority of Cubans migrating between 1985 and 2004 were raised under the current government. Therefore, they have an innate understanding of the politics and culture of Revolutionary Cuba and formed profound relationships in that society (Blue 27). Unlike the first generation of self-proclaimed exiles, these young migrants (mean age 35) are predominately urban who come to the US for primarily economic reasons, much like the majority of emigration from Latin America (Pedraza 182). Characterized by their liberal political leanings and flexible stance on the embargo, these Cubans see little stigma in traveling back and forth. With the relative ease of communication and travel to Cuba, these émigrés are capable of living in the US while still maintaining and even nurturing their social and cultural space on the island (Blue 29).

Through these progressive changes in both laws and attitudes on both sides of the Florida Straights, one senses an inevitable shift. The "particular Cuban way of looking at the political and social environment" espoused by many members of the early waves of migrations, and reflected in its literature, has given way to a transnational Cuban identity (Grenier and Pérez 87). It is this transformation that I see incarnated in *La hija de la Llorona* and the character Caridad. Like the author herself, Caridad fits

the profile of the latest group of Cuban arrivals to the US. She is young, from the capital Havana and distinctively apolitical. Dovalpage further emphasizes this emerging identity by utilizing the legend of the *Llorona* as a vehicle for transnational connections between the protagonist and her new home. In *La hija de la Llorona*, the playwright reinterprets this traditional story and erases the artificial borders between different cultural groups by tackling contemporary issues that affect all women in the US and beyond.

Probably one of the most familiar folktales of the Mexican-American/Chicano community, the *Llorona* is the story of a guilt-ridden figure that wanders the countryside in search of her children. In most versions, she has either been rejected or abandoned by her lover or husband, and has “lost” her children either directly, through a vengeful act of murder and betrayal, or indirectly through an unforeseen accident. Traditionally, this loss occurs near or in a body of water, which the *Llorona* haunts, moaning and wailing, seeking her children. While tales of the *Llorona* transform over the years, the thematic elements of betrayal, suffering, guilt and deception continue to appear. Common symbolic essentials such as the sound of wailing or crying, the appearance of some form of water, and a mother and her child also remain constant (Pérez 103).

Frequently, modern versions of *La Llorona*, taking place on this side of the border, reflect contemporary cultural, political and social concerns of the Chicano population (Pérez 106). Reflecting the urbanization of the population, the figure has moved from rural to more urban settings and the staple elements of water and wailing appear in more subtle ways (106). Also, as addressed by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, the *Llorona*’s actions are no longer necessarily provoked by an unfaithful lover (77). Instead, an equally oppressive shadow appears in the story to provoke her desperation: poverty, pollution, sexism or even *la migra* (Pérez 107). Despite the multiple variations of the *Llorona* myth from past to present, her story continues to represent the primary theme of “physical and communal loss” (Pérez 105).

In *La hija de la Llorona*, this theme remains pertinent as Dovalpage weaves the more traditional elements of this folktale into this present-day version of a recently arrived Cuban émigré in the Southwest who struggles with issues of guilt and loss as she negotiates her identity in a foreign culture as a new mother. Through the *Llorona*, Caridad eventually finds a bond with her mother-in-law Rita that supersedes their obvious generational and cultural differences. By incorporating both Cuban elements and contemporary

issues in its re-working, the *Llorona* crosses its culturally defined border and becomes transnational, reflective of Caridad's identity.

The play opens with Caridad in her newborn son's room facing the crib and she is not looking her best: "*lleva una bata de dormir con manchas de café y está despeinada.*" Although the stage directions emphasize that the protagonist is in a frightful mood, her first lines indicate this clearly: "¡Coño, mira que los muchachos joden! ¡Me estás desbarantando la existencia, chico!" As the scene evolves, Caridad complains about her lack of sleep, while her husband "roncaba como un puerco." She works herself up into a frenzy, picks up a chair and throws it against the crib yelling, "¡Muérete de una vez!" With these words, the stage directions state "*afuera se escucha un lamento, casi un aullido, de mujer.*" Soon after, the mother-in-law enters the room with little baby Mike crying in her arms. Rita suggests that Caridad feed or sing to the child; yet Caridad tells her *suegra*, "Póngalo en la cuna y déjelo que se desgañite si le da la gana." Asked if this is the way children are treated in Cuba, Caridad responds, "Así lo hago yo. Ponga al niño en la cuna, le dije."

Dovalpage differentiates the two women culturally through their use of the Spanish language. Rita, a native New Mexican, constantly sprinkles English into her Spanish. To convince Caridad to spoil her young son more, Rita states "La infancia pasa rápido. Cuando te das cuenta, ya tu baby se ha hecho un hombre, tiene girlfriends, va al college...y perdiste los años más hermosos sin darte cuenta." Rita also makes use of Southwestern and/or Mexican Spanish vocabulary such as "ansina," "naiden" and "¿mande?" The out-spoken Caridad, on the other hand, does not code switch and is completely marked linguistically as a Cuban through vocabulary choices such as "alabao" and "fondillos" and phrases like "¡qué bueno es hablar mierda!" and "¡No jodas, tú!" With such colorful phrases, the older and more soft-spoken Rita cannot help but wonder "¡Qué grosera es esta cubana!"

In this first scene, Dovalpage introduces one of Caridad's principle issues: she is overwhelmed with the experience of motherhood. She blames her feelings of hopelessness on her husband who does not help with the child. There is also a clash of generations and cultures as Caridad and Rita vie for power in the household. Although Rita demurely admits, "Ya mi época pasó.... Aquí manda mi hijo, que para eso es el hombre," Caridad contradicts her emphatically: "En esta casa, ya sabemos que la que ordena y manda es usted." Rita vacations with her son and daughter-in-law and does all the cooking because Michael prefers his mother's food. Although



Caridad knows how to cook Cuban food, without *chiles* it is not considered edible by the *nuevo-mexicanos* of the house. Given the circumstances, Caridad interprets everything Rita says as an insult. Furthermore, her traditional attitudes towards the role of women and motherhood leave them with little in common.

Another point of contention between the two women is Caridad's desire to return to work. Rita reminds her, "yo pensé que te ibas a quedar en casa al menos hasta que Mike cumpliera un año" while she warns that her son "va a estar bien disgustado cuando sepa que quieres trabajar otra vez." Much to her *suegra's* dismay, Caridad simply retorts, "los corajes de su hijo yo me los paso por el culo." When Caridad breaks the news to Michael he attempts to dissuade her by assuring her that she has no need to work. A strong and independent woman, Caridad struggles against the traditional mother role exemplified by Rita and fully supported by her husband. She reminds Michael that, unlike Rita, "¡Yo no tengo vocación de florero!" She sincerely confesses, "El problema es que a mí la encerradera me mata." Unfortunately, Michael does not seem to hear the urgency in his wife's voice.

Caridad finally confides in her Puerto Rican friend Margarita about the difficulties she is having since the birth of her son. She bemoans the fact that she is now a size ten and that none of her clothes fit: "Estoy gorda, fofa, horrorosa...(*Se levanta la bata y le muestra la barriga*)...¡Fíjate en estas masas bobas!" This, of course, has affected her relationship with Michael. She tells Margarita that when Michael "me toca por la noche [yo] le digo: échate pa allá, tú, deja la jodedera...Y yo antes no era así, si a mí siempre me ha gustado muchísimo templar." Perhaps the most problematic change in Caridad is towards her son. Caridad admits: "me dan unos ataques que no me reconozco" (22). Caridad confesses that sometimes she cannot stand to be around the child: "Hay días en que hasta me da asco. Me le acerco y nada más que de sentir su olor me dan ganas de vomitar." Margarita agrees that Caridad should go back to work, but recognizes her behavior and reactions as symptoms of a much more serious problem: postpartum depression.<sup>5</sup>

Caridad exhibits many of the symptoms of this condition, even those associated with postpartum psychosis. She wonders out loud to Margarita about little Mike, "No sé qué pasaría...si lo empujara para allá dentro otra vez. ¿Se ahogaría? ¿O se volvería un feto de nuevo?" Margarita is able to make such a quick diagnosis because she had similar issues after the birth of her second child, so this odd confession causes her to urge Caridad to seek professional help. Although Caridad rejects this idea and believes these



feelings will disappear once she returns to work, Margarita warns, “Cubana, lo que tienes en la cabeza es arroz con culo, para que lo sepas.”

Later, as Caridad and Rita sit in the living room looking through photos from Cuba, Caridad reveals some details from her difficult past that lend insight into her behavior both towards Mike and Rita. In this scene, the stage directions require that different scenes from Cuba be projected on the wall in front of the characters. These projections represent not only the photos, through which Caridad and Margarita are looking, but also Caridad’s memory and Cuba’s recent history. Caridad confesses to her stint as a *jinetera* in Havana in the mid-nineties during the Special Period. As a teacher she was not making enough money to eat. She complains, “después de lidiar con los muchachos todo el santo día, me tenía que acostar con un vaso de agua con azúcar y una tajada de aire en la barriga.” When she began to escort tourists, she quit her job and was able to provide for her family until she left the island.

In this scene, the audience does not see either Caridad’s or Margarita’s faces, but only hears their voices. On stage, one sees Rita’s illuminated *Altar a los muertos* and the projections of Cuba. The connection between the two is clearly made when a picture of Caridad’s mother in her rundown apartment appears before the audience. Caridad explains that although she tried to convince her mother to come with her, she did not want to leave without her sons who were working in the School of the Fields. The last foto to appear on the wall is of “*la madre de Caridad y dos adolescentes a bordo de una balsa pequeña, frágil, construída de maderos claveteados.*” She tells Margarita, “nunca más se supo de ellos. Fue culpa mía....ni aunque viva cien años me voy a perdonar.”

Although Dovalpage maintains many of the traditional elements of the *Llorona* folktale, there is a definitive *cubanización* of the story and a reversal of its components. As in the more traditional stories of the *Llorona*, here water is both a giver of life and cause of death (Figueredo 237). For Caridad, water undeniably forms part of her identity as an islander. As a *balseira*, her successful journey across the Straights of Florida brought her to a new beginning in the US. Conversely, in this same body of water her mother and two brothers drowned. With this in mind, it is ironic that the protagonist’s name is the same as the Patron Saint of Cuba, *La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, whose venerated image commemorates her saving three men in a boat during a storm off the coast of Cuba. Unlike her namesake, Caridad could not save her mother and two brothers from a watery death.

While the audience hears the wailing of *La Llorona* each time the protagonist comes close to harming her child, voices of her family haunt Caridad in her dreams. She tells Margarita, “me llaman, cuando una ola está a punto de tragárselos. Oigo a mi madre gritándome: ¡Caridad! Y me despierto empapada en sudor.” For Caridad, her mother’s lament, not that of the *Llorona*, keeps her awake at night.

As mentioned previously, the *Llorona* is a tale of “physical and communal loss” (Pérez 105). Caridad suffers a crushing guilt over her mother’s death and feels her absence now that she has a child of her own. Caridad has also suffered communal loss in that she has not only left Cuba, but the Cuban exile community in Miami to live in Albuquerque, New Mexico. These issues are compounded by her need to negotiate not only her Cuban identity in a new environment, but her identity as a mother and a relationship with Rita.

During the play, the audience also comes to know Rita’s story of guilt and loss with her own daughter, Angelica. In flash backs to a rainy November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1973, Dovalpage reveals the difficult relationship when Rita disallows Angelica from going out that evening. When Angelica questions why she does not get paid to babysit her brother and has to make tamales for the dead, Rita accuses her of “volviendo como las gringas...qué indecencia.” In these scenes, Rita insults and hits her daughter and attempts to keep her in line with her antiquated ideas about boys, honor and *gringos*. Like Caridad, Rita seems consumed in rage, but instead of taking it out on her newborn son, or even her drunkard husband, Angelica takes the brunt of her anger. Tired of trying to reason with her mother, Angelica defiantly goes to the party without her mother’s permission. As the car drives away, Rita looks out the window and says: “que se la lleve el diablo si es su destino. Que se la lleve, sí.” The scene ends foreshadowing Angelica’s untimely death in a car accident in the flooded Río Grande with the sound of “*un lamento, casi un aullido, de mujer.*”

Not until the final scene does Caridad become aware of Rita’s difficult marriage and the existence of Angelica. In tears, Rita admits, “Le daba demasiados deberes. La tenía puro ayudándome en la casa como una criada.” Like Caridad’s mother, Angelica’s body was never found; she is buried in water. In the end, Rita acknowledges, “No la ahogué con mis propias manos, pero la dejé que se ahogara...Me porté igual que La Llorona.” Rita’s confession, reminiscent of Caridad’s feelings over her mother’s death, unites both characters as daughters of the *Llorona*.

The *Llorona* tale brings Caridad and her mother-in-law Rita together. Caridad now understands that Rita's behavior is a result of her difficult past with her alcoholic husband and the death of her daughter. According to María Figueredo, the most painful part of the many versions of the *Llorona* is that the "mother child bond has been severed" (240). For both Caridad and Rita, the loss of this important bond causes their guilt and pain, yet, eventually, healing as their shared difficulties in their role as mothers bring them to a tacit understanding and acceptance of each other's differences. Perhaps in the future, Rita and Caridad will form a mother/daughter relationship that they both desperately miss and desire.

On a symbolic level, using the *Llorona* story allows Dovalpage to build bridges between different Latino communities in the US. By including Cuban, Puerto Rican and Mexican/Chicano characters, the author concentrates on the similarities instead of the differences, particularly in terms of women's issues such as the continued struggle against traditional gender roles. By and large proscribed to the specific geographical locations of Miami and New York, Caridad and Margarita now find themselves in Rita's cultural and ethnic backyard, where they unite due to their shared concerns as women and mothers. Although the play never explicitly states who, in fact, is the daughter of *La Llorona*, the contemporary connection made between this legendary figure's misunderstood behavior and postpartum depression serves to universalize the themes of this play beyond folklore, geography and culture to speak to all women. In the end, Dovalpage's play begs the question: *¿Somos todas hijas de la Llorona?*

Through this contemporary reading of the *Llorona*, Dovalpage also brings to the stage a character that exhibits the traits of an emerging *cubinidad* reflective of the more recent arrivals from the island. Although still exhibiting a definitive cubanness in both speech and behavior, Caridad is not an exile; instead, she portrays a transnational identity. While transnational refers to the recent migrant group's more fluid relationship with their home country, in this play it also refers to Caridad's capacity to successfully cross the invisible cultural and ethnic borders that separate her from the other Latinas by finding a bond in shared experiences. Consequently, we must consider that terms such as Cuban exile or Cuban American are no longer accurate to discuss plays like Dovalpage's. *La hija de la Llorona*, with the character of Caridad, defies categorized paradigms as it ushers in the latest evolution in Cuban and Latino theater written in the US, as the author at-

tempts to represent on stage the next generation of Cuban migrants to this county and their distinct experience.

*Tulane University*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Written in 2005, *La hija de la Llorona* is Dovalpage's first play. It was staged by *Teatro Agujón* in Chicago, Illinois under the direction of Rosario Vegas in the fall of 2006 to positive reviews (Maya 20).

<sup>2</sup> According to Grenier and Pérez, an "exile ideology" consists of three characteristics: "1) the primacy of the homeland 2) uncompromising hostility towards the Castro Government and 3) emotionalism, irrationality, and intolerance" (87).

<sup>3</sup> Although Dovalpage was educated on the island, recently emigrated and writes in Spanish, characteristic of the first generation of Cuban exile writers, the themes set forth in her play display an obvious minority consciousness that is more often associated with Cuban-American or Cuban-ethnic writers raised and educated in the United States, according to the groups outlined by Eliana Rivero and Isabel Álvarez-Borland. This detail signals yet another departure from typical exile literature categories and further emphasizes this play's, and the author's, transnational qualities.

<sup>4</sup> *El período especial en los tiempos de paz* or the Special Period was the name the Cuban government gave to the measures put in place to curb the severe economic crisis and scarcity that characterized the decade of the 1990s.

<sup>5</sup> PPD is a term used to describe "psychological disturbances" that occur in women after childbirth (Chrisler and Johnston-Reboledo 179). Although they range in severity from the mild baby blues (which affects 50-80% of women) to severe postpartum psychosis (affecting .1-.2% of the population), there is only a small percentage of new mothers who do not suffer any form of PPD at all (179-180). More common symptoms are irritability, anxiety, tearfulness and sadness, but PPD can also manifest itself through a loss of control and hallucinations that involve the baby (180). Unfortunately, most cases of PPD go untreated. Because the symptoms must be self-reported by new mothers, many still choose to remain silent for fear of not living up to the idealized "motherhood mystique" supported by our culture and through the media (187). Although PPD is recognized as a potentially serious problem, it is still widely believed that "good mothers really enjoy motherhood and all the work that accompanies it" while any difficulty or conflict in this role is "unnatural" (187).

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