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The
CUBAN
SCENE:

**CENSORS &
DISSENTERS**

by Carlos Ripoll

The Cuban-American National Foundation, Inc.



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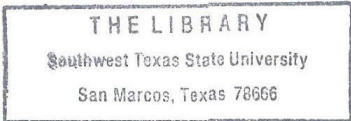
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The Cuban Scene:
**CENSORS &
DISSENTERS**



by Carlos Ripoll

The Cuban-American National Foundation, Inc.
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Carlos Ripoll exiled himself from his native Cuba in 1960. He has lived in New York City since then, where he currently is Professor of Romance Languages at Queens College. Professor Ripoll is the author of several books and many articles on Cuban culture and history as well as other writings on Latin American letters.

Carlos Ripoll

**THE CUBAN SCENE:
CENSORS AND DISSENTERS**

There are two categories of writers in Cuba today: those who police their own work and that of their colleagues, and those who are silenced, jailed, and unable to participate in Cuba's cultural life. The existence of these two categories, indeed the entire course of Cuban letters since the revolution, can only be understood in the light of the political events that have occurred since 1959.

Minihumanism vs. Ministalinism

The overthrow of Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship in 1959 brought new works and vigor to Cuban letters as young writers incorporated themselves into artistic life and those living in exile abroad returned. Very soon, however, a struggle began between two forces that held opposing views about the function of literature: Fidel Castro's former associates, who advanced ideals of liberty and democratic pluralism and were eager to open Cuban culture to all contemporary trends, and the Communists, who sought to bring every aspect of society under strict control and to press literature into the service of society. The second group was small in number, but not in aspirations. The liberal reformers, deceived by their own false hopes, fell short in the defense of their principles.

The first victories of the Communist ideologues came in the wake of the severing of diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba. The break occurred in 1961 and was accompanied by Castro's declaration that the Cuban revolution was socialist. It was at this time that the Marxists decided to make a strategic show of strength by launching an attack on the newspaper *Revolución*, the official organ of the government, which antagonized Marxist orthodoxy by putting out a literary supplement that published texts of Pasternak, Joyce, Camus, Mao, Lenin, and Trotsky together with speeches by Castro and Che Guevara. The opportunity for attack

came when the government convened the so-called "conversations with the intellectuals" to define the role of culture within the new society. Old quarrels were renewed at these discussions and ultimately the reformist cause and the humanistic spirit that had flourished briefly were dealt a crushing blow: the literary supplement was terminated, and Castro, notwithstanding his defense of artistic freedom during the discussions, summed up his ideas about the rights of artists in the ambiguous phrase, "Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, no rights at all."

Subsequent events confirmed that the Marxist view had triumphed. Its influence in cultural matters was immediately demonstrated at the First National Congress of Writers. In the Final Declaration issued by the Congress, writers were told that they must participate "in the great common task of enriching and defending the revolution," and they were warned that literature would have to be purified through "the most rigorous criticism." This was a Caribbean echo of the criteria established at the Congress of [Soviet] Writers in 1934 by Andrey Zhdanov, Stalin's commissar of cultural affairs.

Shortly after the foreboding pronouncements of the writers' congress in Havana, the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) was founded in imitation of the Union of Soviet Writers. UNEAC's role was not, as some had hoped, to protect the interests of artists but rather to protect those of the state in its bid to control the arts. The means of control were put in place with the nationalization of publishing houses and the institution of government monopoly over the press and electronic media.

March 1962 found the liberal reformers and the Marxists debating over solutions to the administrative problems that had come to plague the country, and a few months later the rift between the factions widened as a result of the announcement of Khrushchev's decision to withdraw Soviet missiles from Cuba. Humiliated by the pull out, Fidel Castro reacted by adopting policies and views that came to be known as the Castroite heresy.

In the next five years both factions, liberals and Marxists, scored victories in the realm of the arts, but neither could claim to have prevailed. For example, Che Guevara eschewed socialist realism, but at the same time the only remaining group of writers who had openly repudiated committed literature, the circle known as "El Puente," was disbanded because the government found its members to be "dissolute and negative." A short while later, the UNEAC hier-

archy decided that Pablo Neruda should be condemned for having visited the United States, and Cuban writers were obliged to chime in, but contrary to the wishes of the Communists, Castro authorized publication, albeit in a limited edition, of the novel *Paradiso*, by José Lezama Lima, notwithstanding its depiction of acts of sodomy among some of the homosexual characters. And so ground was gained and lost by both sides.

Then in 1967 political events seemed to give the liberals the upper hand. In that year Castro publicly berated the Kremlin for its foreign policy, its failure to support the Guevara expedition to Bolivia, and its interpretation of the doctrines of Marx and Lenin in general. At the time, the Cuban President, Osvaldo Dorticós, said with more than a hint of pride, "We have our little heresy." This political challenge was carried over into the cultural arena and culminated in two important events. First, in late 1967 the *Salon de Mai* of Paris was invited to Havana to display the ultra-avant-garde of Western European art. Castro was making an obvious show of independence and a play for leadership in cultural affairs by being host to a collection of works that could be considered far more "decadent" and "bourgeois" than those included in the "modernist" exhibit of paintings held six years earlier in Moscow to Khrushchev's great displeasure. Second, foreign writers and artists were invited to participate in a highly-publicized Cultural Congress in Havana at the beginning of 1968, and Castro seized the opportunity to taunt Moscow again. To the resounding applause of his international audience, he repeated his criticisms of Soviet foreign policy and contrasted the solidarity shown by intellectuals from all over the world with Guevara's adventure to the indifference and hostility to it shown by the Soviet Union.

In literature the period of the heresy was very productive. It seemed as if Stalin had just died in Havana; 1967 was reminiscent of the "Year of Protest" (1956) in the Soviet Union, when Vladimir Dudintsev succeeded in publishing *Not From Bread Alone* and Pasternak presented his manuscript of *Dr. Zhivago* without being punished. In Cuba, as a consequence of a similar relaxation of censorship, awards were given in 1968 to three works that would soon after be criticized for their "ideological elements frankly opposed to revolutionary thought": *Fuera del juego*, by the poet Heberto Padilla; *Siete contra Tebas*, by the dramatist Antón Arrufat; and the short story collection *Condenados de Condado*, by Norberto Fuentes. From 1966 to 1968, the peak of the "little heresy," Cuban writers were able to experiment with language and narrative structure untrammelled by the con-

straints of socialist realism. Their imaginative achievements in prose fiction were such that, between the publication of *Paradiso* (1966) and that of *El mundo alucinante* (1969), by Reinaldo Arenas, the Cuban novel seemed to be in the vanguard of the experimental "boom" that was going on in Latin America.

However, while the intelligentsia celebrated the Cuban challenge to Soviet dominance and the creative freedom that it had fostered, behind the scenes Moscow's reaction was sanguine, for Soviet control over the Cuban economy was such that it could be used to bring Castro to his knees at any moment. As was learned later, a high-level official of the Soviet embassy in Havana had said as much shortly before the Cultural Congress of 1968, boasting, "All we have to do is say that repairs are being stalled at Baku for three weeks and that's that." Indeed, all that was necessary to bring Castro's heresy to a halt was a lowering in the quota of oil shipped to Cuba; months later, when tanks were necessary to eliminate the heresy in Czechoslovakia, Castro defended the invasion. In the cultural arena the end to the Cuban heresy brought a swift and sweeping wave of repression the effects of which are still being felt.

The Terror and the Purge

The rebellions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia had begun with restive, dissatisfied intellectuals. The experience the Kremlin had had in these situations dictated stricter vigilance of artists in Cuba. In reality Castro himself had been the heretic; others, nevertheless, would have to go to the pyre.

In 1968 Cuba's Stalinists loudly denounced the awarding of national literary prizes to Padilla and Arrufat and condemned the publication of unorthodox works by others. Their views were again expressed at the Congress of Writers and Artists held in October of the same year, when writers were reminded of their duty "to contribute to the revolution through their works." Dissidents abroad and on the island were attacked in *Verde Olivo*, the magazine of the armed forces, in a series of five articles deploring "the low political level in art and criticism." It advocated "cleansing" Cuban culture of "counter-revolutionaries, the extravagant, and the soft" by means of "politically alert criticism" and concluded that the enemies of the Cuban revolution were the "false apostles who decided to leave the country" as soon as they were confronted with their "dishonest counterrevolutionary games." Many writers had already left: among the older

ones, Jorge Mañach, Gastón Baquero and Lino Novás Calvo; among the younger ones, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy and Carlos Franqui. After the charges in *Verde Olivo*, the doors of emigration were shut tight.

To demonstrate what was expected of cultural institutions, the political leadership of the armed forces organized a literary contest in which works were judged on the basis of political merit, not artistic value. The first awards, in 1969 and 1970, went to *Tiempo de cambio*, by Manuel Cofiño López, and *Relatos de Pueblo Viejo*, by Juan Angel Cardí, both collections of short stories that simplistically contrast Cuba's corrupt past with its presumably heroic and exemplary present.

The Union of Writers followed suit, conferring its 1969 award on a novel by Alcides Iznaga, *Las cercas caminaban*, an unimaginative critique of capitalist society combined with the obligatory heroic portrait of the Cuban guerrillas in the Sierra Maestra. At the awards ceremony the president of UNEAC, Nicolás Guillén, warned that any writer who failed to fulfill his political duty "would receive the most severe revolutionary punishment." At that session (during which the executive committee expelled José Lorenzo Fuentes, winner of honorable mention in a contest the previous year, as a "traitor to the country"), the members of the Union were exhorted to "redouble their revolutionary vigilance, to avoid all forms of weakness and liberalism, and to denounce any attempt at ideological penetration." In 1971 the *Casa de las Americas* prize went to *La última mujer y el próximo combate*, a novel by Manuel Cofiño López, praised as "revolutionary" for its "clear political objective" in presenting the development of a "socialist conscience."

The First Congress on Education and Culture, in April of 1971, officially ushered in the Stalinization of art which has prevailed in Cuba ever since. In preparation, a campaign was waged to terrorize the intellectual community. It culminated with the arrest of Heberto Padilla, who was made to denounce his friends and colleagues. He had failed to follow the basic guidelines recommended by Soviet writers in Stalin's time: "Don't think. If you think, don't speak. If you speak, don't write. If you write, don't publish. If you publish, don't sign." As a result, he had to obey the last of those rules: "If you sign, recant." Against the backdrop of Padilla's public embarrassment and forced confession, the Congress proclaimed that culture, like education, was not and could not be "either apolitical or impartial," and in a speech delivered at the close of the proceedings, Fidel Castro stat-

ed: "We, a revolutionary people in a revolutionary process, value cultural and literary creations with only one criterion: their utility to the people. Our valuation is a political evaluation." That was to be the governing precept for Cuban art thereafter, and because the Communist party of Cuba has always considered itself the embodiment of the will of the masses ("the highest leading force of society," as the Constitution says), in the final analysis Castro's remarks meant that the government would judge cultural activity and literary creation on the basis of usefulness to the party.

The purges of intellectuals intensified immediately after the disastrous 1970 sugar cane harvest and continued in succeeding years. All those who did not conform to "parameters" established by the Department of Culture as standards of conduct, morality, thought, and preferences were to be excluded from a variety of occupations and professions. Numerous members of the faculty at the University of Havana were dismissed in the early 1970s for failure to fit the prescribed mold. Several of those singled out were professors of philosophy who were also editors of *Pensamiento Crítico*, the only remaining journal permitted to print interpretations of Marxist-Leninist doctrine that deviated from the official line. With the purge of its editors, *Pensamiento Crítico* ceased to exist. Similar purges were carried out at cultural institutions and government offices, in theatre and dance companies, and in the student body at the University of Oriente. At the same time, the persecution of writers continued. Once labelled "parametrados" (misfits), some were expelled from cultural organizations and dismissed from their jobs. Others were denied permission to publish their works and shunted into obscurity. Still others landed in jail.

In this atmosphere, those who wished to continue writing professionally had to submit to official directives. As editors and judges in literary contests, they could not express their reservations about the quality of the works presented as long as those works satisfied requirements of subject and taste. To secure their professional survival, many felt obliged to keep watch over and inform on their colleagues, since such behavior was considered the best proof of revolutionary conscience.

Those who chose not to submit or whose past did not clearly bespeak loyalty to the government were excluded from cultural life. The number of writers who were restricted in varying degrees or silenced altogether is easily gleaned from a review of Cuban bibliographies from the 1960s on.

Gosizdat, Samizdat and Tamizdat

In Communist countries writers generally have three ways of making their works known: "state publishing," "self-publishing," and "publishing abroad"—*gosizdat*, *samizdat*, and *tamizdat*—as they are called in the Soviet Union.

In Cuba writers are prepared for state publishing in *talleres literarios*, literary workshops scattered throughout the island and patterned after the literary studios promoted by Lunacharsky after the Bolshevik victory. There, works are read and discussed in the presence of watchdogs from the State Security police. If an author decides to enter his manuscript in a literary competition or submit it for publication in one of the literary periodicals or by a state publishing house, he must present it with a detailed description of his background—identifying his immediate family, his political activities, community service, participation in voluntary work projects, etc.—and a recommendation from his place of employment, which must refer to his political attitude, his revolutionary conduct, and his performance as a worker.

The juries and editorial committees consist of party members and yes-men whose loyalty to the government has been clearly demonstrated. They judge works according to established criteria and the political background of the author. Those are the appropriate standards according to an official statement handed down by the Second UNEAC Congress, which was held in 1977. At the Congress, Cuban writers were told that the Union would only promote "the creation and dissemination of literature that serves to mold the thinking of the general public through its ideological content and aesthetic quality." Members of UNEAC, they were told at that time, are expected to continue their studies of Marxist-Leninist doctrine "so that their works may reflect the essence of social phenomena with the greatest possible depth."

Given these standards and strictures, the works accepted by the state publishing houses have much in common. To please the authorities, they strip reality of its gray areas for the sake of clear, easily digestible contrasts, or they dress official slogans and catchwords in thin fictional disguise to serve an overriding didactic aim. They bear out the fears for literary creativity expressed by Che Guevara in his criticism of "the rigid forms of socialist realism," which he described as a kind of "straight-jacket on artistic expression" with which one can give only "a mechanical representation of a social reality that

one would like to see, the ideal society nearly devoid of contradictions or conflicts." To achieve this vision, Guevara added, "one looks for simplifications, what everyone can understand, which is what the bureaucrats comprehend. This approach nullifies authentic artistic exploration and reduces culture to a mere representation of the socialist present and of the past which is dead and therefore safe." Whether or not the literary standard imposed on Cuban writers for the past ten years is referred to as "socialist realism" the stultifying interpretation of culture and the results are the same.

Token exceptions are occasionally permitted to appear in print, but on the whole, Cuban literature has been forced into this mold. Novels, plays, and poetry alike praise the builders of socialism and describe the process of overcoming bourgeois prejudices. Or they satirize the *mogollón*, the antisocial character who is uninspired by revolutionary shibboleths, complains of shortages and sacrifice, misses work, and fails to meet his goals. In sharp contrast with these wooden figures are the familiar and equally flat *personajes positivos* (positive heroes), whose attitudes and deeds the reader is encouraged to emulate. The language is always simple and straightforward, preferably colloquial, even in verse, so that the masses can easily assimilate the message and better identify with the characters.

This is particularly so in writing intended to popularize and draw support for the latest government program. During the campaign to eradicate illiteracy, UNEAC gave one of its 1962 awards to such a novel: *Maestra voluntaria*, by Daura Olema García. Since then similar tendentious works have often been favored in literary contests and by the editorial committees of the state publishing houses. At the time of the drive to produce a ten-million-ton sugar cane harvest, *Casa de las Américas* honored Miguel Cossío Woodward for *Sachario*, the story of a heroic, Stakhanovite cane cutter who renounced everything, even his wife, in order to carry out his work. More recently, when the government sought a *rapprochement* with the exile community, prizes went to *Contra viento y marea*, by Grupo Areíto, and *De la patria y el exilio*, by Jesús Díaz, books which praised Cubans in exile who support the Castro regime. *Etiopía: la revolución desconocida*, a volume of essays by Raúl Valdés Vivó, and the short story collection *La sangre regresada*, by Arnaldo Tauler, about the campaign in Angola, were among the works accorded special commendation when the government was seeking mass support for intervention in Africa.

With the publication of *Enigma para un domingo*, by Ignacio Cárdenas Acuña, in 1971, a new kind of detective novel became very

fashionable in Cuba. The critics have classified it as "socialist and revolutionary" and are intent on pointing out that it is devoid of "the sickly sensationalism and the cult of violence, sex, and individualism" that characterize the genre in capitalist cultures. This socialist version of the mystery emphasizes the efficiency and honesty of the State Security police and related agencies and the cooperation given them by the people. The plot typically revolves around struggles against spies and infiltrators from the CIA, counterrevolutionary elements abroad, and delinquents on the island.

The Ministry of the Interior has been promoting these socialist thrillers through a competition for the best such story of the year. According to the official guidelines, the winning entry must "have a didactic character and be a stimulus for prevention of and vigilance against all acts that are antisocial or against the people's power." In 1979 the award went to the novel *Aquí las arenas son más limpias*, by Luis A. Betancourt. As ludicrously described on the book jacket, it is

a story about a Cuban State Security agent's infiltration of the counter-revolutionary organization Alpha 66, which conducts acts of aggression against Cuba from Miami, in strict collaboration with the CIA. The author enters into the complex microcosm of anti-Cuban terrorism to reveal the titanic work of this agent—work that can only be successful when a just ideology rules the conscience of man—and to reiterate the tireless efforts of the U.S. secret service agencies against our country. The pages of this book are a true testimony of the work that is accomplished day after day by the men of our security forces in their open struggle against the imperialist enemy.

The genre has become so popular among the censors and contest judges that it has recently been introduced to the theatre.

While these forms have developed in response to the party line on the function of literature, others have become popular as safe harbors for those who wish to avoid conflict with the censors. Anthologies of Cuban classics and biographies, for example, as well as collections of documents and historical essays have for this reason attracted some writers.

However, literary criticism has since 1970 been the handmaiden of official policy on culture. The function of criticism has been reduced to spotting books that will serve as tools for mass-indoctrination and to presenting them in a favorable light with the

appropriate sprinkling of remarks on style or aesthetic achievement, real or imagined, even though such considerations are lip service to values that no longer really matter in Cuban literature. Thus, prefaces and reviews are little more than a series of clichés adapted to suit the genre and work in question. If it is prose fiction, the critic may stress the author's "socialist, scientific and revolutionary consciousness" and his "devotion to the people" in presenting an "epic of the vanguard's revolutionary zeal in the face of the new socialist duties and objectives." In discussing poetry, drama, and essays, the critics tend to dwell on the presence of "revolutionary signs," the writer's "testimony of personal and emotional involvement in the struggle," "the simplicity and directness of the language" with which the work succeeds in moving readers and spectators.

Another now-customary approach is to compare Cuban writing with the "reactionary nature" of works by "commercial artists" in capitalist countries. Without mentioning names, the critics take "bourgeois writers" to task for their immorality, escapism, irrationality, formalism, lack of social conscience, etc. When foreign works are analyzed, they are generally far removed from any controversial subject or written by authors sympathetic to the Castro regime. Others are excluded from the critics' view, just as they are from stores and libraries on the island.

Cuba has no *samizdat*. Because the punishment for unauthorized publication and even possession of unauthorized literature is severe, works not published by the state are not reproduced and circulated clandestinely except in the most intimate circles of friends. As a result, there are many young writers who have never seen their works in print and others whose writing was published during the early years of the revolution but who have effectively been silenced since.

Some find themselves cut off after an encounter with the censors. Among the more pitiful cases was that of Virgilio Piñera, the most highly acclaimed Cuban playwright of this century, who died in 1979. Piñera's misfortunes began with his dismissal from his post for failure to conform to the "parameters" for political culture established in 1971. Thereafter Piñera was prevented from accepting invitations to speak abroad, reduced to living in miserable conditions, and kept under surveillance for the rest of his days. Although unable to publish his works, he nevertheless continued to write and, judging from his letters to friends abroad seems to have left a substantial number of plays and poems. Unfortunately, all of the manuscripts

were confiscated upon Piñera's death, which itself was apparently seen as a potentially subversive act, for the State Security police sequestered his body until the moment of his perfunctory funeral.

Another case that illustrates the measures taken to prevent the development of *samizdat* in Cuba is that of Amaro Gómez Boix, a journalist for the Cuban Broadcasting Institute in Havana who was dismissed several years ago for disaffection with the regime. In leisure moments at home he wrote works criticizing the Communist system without, of course, thinking of publishing or circulating them or sending them abroad. But in Cuba neighbors are obliged to spy on each other and denounce any abnormal activity they observe. Fulfillment of this revolutionary obligation earns one merit points from the authorities. Thus someone may have reported frequent typing or a light burning late at night in Gómez Boix's home. In any event, for some undetermined reason the Department of State Security became suspicious of Gómez Boix and searched his home in late July 1978. Having found manuscripts of his poems and a novel, they kept him incommunicado at State Security headquarters for forty-five days. Thereafter Gómez Boix was sentenced to eight years in prison, the maximum penalty under the Cuban penal code for "possessing propaganda against the socialist order."

As a result of such repression, there is no real *samizdat* in Cuba. Those who have tried self-publishing have ended up in jail, where literature is clandestinely circulated among the prisoners because they feel there is little more they can lose. With the forms of dissidence common in other totalitarian states today foreclosed to Cuban writers, dissenters in Cuba find themselves in a situation reminiscent of that of writers in Stalinist Russia. Like them, Cuban dissidents have received little attention from the free world, which now serves as the protector of Soviet dissidents. Once Stalinism took definite hold on the island early in the seventies, impartial intellectuals and journalists were kept away. Those who have been in a position to denounce the plight of Cuban dissidents have generally shown indifference if not complicity with the Castro regime. Thus the Cuban dissenter has felt forgotten and isolated and has been easy prey for government persecution and abuse.

Watched over, threatened, forbidden to write, many authors have left the country in the past year. Some have sought asylum. Others have simply escaped. Among them are Heberto Padilla (winner of the UNEAC prize for poetry in 1968); Reinaldo Arenas,

author of the novel *Hallucinations* (1969), which was a best seller in Europe; Rogelio Llopis, whose short stories in *La guerra y los basiliscos* (1962) have been translated into English, German, Polish, and Hungarian and have been published in various anthologies; Edmundo Desnoes, author of *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), which was made into one of the best Cuban films produced since the revolution; Antonio Benítez Rojo, whose stories won a 1967 *Casa de las Américas* prize and a 1968 UNEAC prize and who, until he sought asylum in Paris in mid-1980, was the director of publications for *Casa de las Américas*; José Triana, recipient of a *Casa* award for his play *La noche de los asesinos* (1965), which has been highly acclaimed abroad. Other unknown young writers who have refused to compromise their art chose to escape during the mass exodus in 1980.

The only theoretical option for those who cannot escape is *tamizdat*, or publishing abroad. But because nothing alarms the Cuban authorities more, the measures taken to prevent it have been extreme and, as a result, largely successful. Few works by dissident Cuban writers have been printed abroad.

The poet Ernesto Díaz Rodríguez succeeded in sending the manuscript of his book *Un testimonio urgente* to the United States. When it appeared the police took him out of prison, where he was serving a sixty-year term, to interrogate him. In a letter sent through the underground he recounts the experience: "At midnight last April 4 [1978], I was unexpectedly removed from my cell and taken to the Department of State Security, where I was confined to the torture chambers for thirty days. During that period I was forced to present myself for numerous interrogations, all related to my literary work. Once again I have been threatened. 'Your continuing to develop a dissident cultural movement, especially abroad is intolerable, and we will try to prevent it by all the means at our disposal,' they assured me. For my part, I am not prepared to give in, and yes, to pay whatever price may be necessary. To confine a man, to mistreat him, destroy him for printing poems, is like destroying a gardener for the 'horrendous crime' of growing roses . . ."

Angel Cuadra is an internationally celebrated poet whose works have been translated into English, German, and Russian. He was arrested and charged with conduct "against the security of the State" after unsuccessfully seeking permission to emigrate from Cuba in 1967. Having served two-thirds of a fifteen-year sentence, he was paroled in 1976, but then an anthology of his elegiac, apolitical poetry entitled *Impromptus* was published in the United States and, as a result, his parole was revoked. From prison he wrote to the exiled

poet Juana Rosa Pita in May 1979, "there was no legal basis for this new reprisal against me. Only that I am a poet; that the world speaks my name; that I do not renounce my song. I do not put it on bended knees, nor do I use it for other, political or partisan ends, but only literary, universal, timeless ones." After participating in prison "rehabilitation programs," Cuadra was to be released again in July 1979. However, when the authorities learned that he had managed to smuggle out the manuscript of a new collection of his poetry which appeared in English translation under the title *A Correspondence of Poems*, they transferred him to Boniato prison instead of releasing him. In a letter dated Boniato, September 1979, he wrote to Mrs. Pita: "If the chances of seeing you soon are becoming increasingly more distant, it is because they are taking revenge, venting their anger and injustice against me under false pretenses." Under a constitutional provision giving retroactive effect to penal laws favoring prisoners, Cuadra is entitled to be set free; according to that constitutional norm, he has served his sentence. His attempts to secure a court order for his release have, however, failed.

One of the most pathetic cases of poets in prison in Cuba is that of Armando Valladares. A victim of polyneuritis, he has been confined to a wheelchair since 1974. The onset of his illness was produced by fifty days of deficient diet imposed on him as punishment. In 1979 a book of Valladares's poems entitled *Desde mi silla de ruedas* (From My Wheelchair) was translated into French (it was originally published in 1976 in the United States by his wife, Marta). Mistreatment of Valladares by the Castro regime has increased with recognition of his poetry abroad. Incapable of silencing him, Cuban authorities have resorted to intimidating his family by blocking their departure from the country. A letter sent by Valladares to the PEN American Center in New York in 1979 addresses his and his family's predicament:

A high official of the political police has notified me that my family's departure from the country is entirely in my hands; that for it to happen I have to draft a letter denying my friends among intellectuals and poets abroad; that I have to forbid everyone, including newspapers and organizations, to speak or write about me and my literary works or even mention my name; and that I must disavow and deny every truth they have spoken in defending my situation. To write that letter would be to commit moral and spiritual suicide. I shall never write it!

When Valladares became very ill at the beginning of 1980, frightened prison officials gave him the medical care they had been withholding, but when the government discovered that the manuscript of a second book of his poems was about to be published abroad, the authorities returned him to his prison cell without regard for the effects on his health. In a letter he was able to smuggle out of prison, dated October 17, 1980, and addressed to the journalist Humberto Medrano in Miami, Valladares indicated that his condition was bound to worsen: "They hope that at a critical moment complications will develop from which I will die in an apparently accidental manner. It is common knowledge that medical treatment is used in Communist countries for coercion or elimination of unwanted prisoners. My own is just one case among many. I am being held incommunicado. In addition to all this I have not seen the sun in six months. Conditions are such that it will be even more difficult to stay alive."

Conclusion

Analyzed in its totality, Cuban literature since the revolution reflects the ideological changes that have occurred in the government. If literature is understood as having permanent value, as an expression of the human soul, as a means to explore new paths and analyze the world, and not merely as an instrument of propaganda or instruction, Cuban literature has unquestionably grown and diminished with the increase and reduction of official tolerance for the creative act. Although some critics struggle to search for traditional artistic values in works authorized by the censors, it is evident that in Cuba the printed word is now judged as an ideological weapon to change society and alter the course of history, and that the writer is to be regarded as an engineer of the soul.

Like Mao during the Cultural Revolution, the leaders of Cuba appear to have reached the conclusion that not only writers but literature itself, in the broadest sense, is always guilty of some transgression because it is inherently subversive. Thus, their aim seems to be to reach a state (which Marx predicted would come with the attainment of a Communist society) in which the writer will disappear and there will only be men and women for whom writing is merely another function of daily life. Castro has decreed that literature has no rights outside the revolution. The most expedient way to assure that literature can never reclaim its rights has been to silence, imprison, exile, and destroy writers. And literature itself.

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