

TOTALITARIANISM IN THE TROPICS: CUBA'S "PADILLA CASE" REVISITED¹

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Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Duanel Díaz Infante, Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, Jocelyn Evans, Gerardo González Núñez, Carlos Alberto Montaner, Julio Shiling, and Raymond Souza for their comments and encouragement. Thanks, as well, to Jennifer Fudala and Erica Evans for their assistance.

Introduction

This is an essay on the seemingly endless struggle between literature and power. It is anchored in Cuba's "Padilla Case," the arrest, trial, and public confession of the poet Heberto Padilla. The case had far-reaching repercussions, breaking up the love affair between "the Cuban Revolution," i.e., Fidel Castro and his regime, and literary figures of international renown who, up to that point, had lent it valuable intellectual and moral support. Drawing on Richard Overly's *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's*

¹ The original version of this essay was prepared for presentation at the 2012 meeting of the American Political Science Association, New Orleans, September 1. As it happened, the meeting was canceled on account of Hurricane Isaac. A subsequent version was published as an article in *Cuban Affairs*. This is the latest iteration of what, at least for now, is a plan to revise and update the paper periodically.

As well as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who labeled Castro's Cuba "Siberia in the Tropics" (*Mea Cuba*, Editorial Vuelta, S.A., 1993, 127), several other authors herein cited—Heberto Padilla, Jorge Edwards, Roberto Ampuero, Reinaldo Arenas, Carlos Franqui—all make reference to the heat, the vegetation, and other characteristics of the tropics—hence the title.

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Russia,³ the analysis highlights parallels between the efforts of these giants of tyranny to control what was written, published, and read in their countries with those exerted by their Caribbean counterpart, and offers an explanation for why totalitarian regimes like that of Castro and his ilk find poets and writers so threatening.⁴

Controlling the Culture: Hitler and Stalin

In *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia*, Richard Overy conceptualizes a totalitarian party-state not as one that achieves complete control over the lives of its subjects, something that is clearly impossible, but as one that is “concerned with the ‘totality’ of the societies in which they worked. In this narrower sense, both movements did have totalitarian aspirations and never were simple parliamentary parties. There were few areas of public life that did not come under party review, or had to be coordinated with the party, or eliminated. The public was subjected, willingly or unwillingly, to permanent party surveillance. . . .”⁵

One of those “areas of public life” over which Hitler and Stalin sought to exert complete control is culture—that is, art, film, music, theater and literature. Both set themselves, either personally or through their representatives, as final judges of what

³ Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004).

⁴ In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates proposes that “the first thing” to do is “establish a censorship of the writers of fiction, and let the censors receive any tale of fiction which is good, and reject the bad; and we will desire mothers and nurses to tell their children the authorized ones only. Let them fashion the mind with such tales, even more fondly than they mold the body with their hands; but most of those which are now in use must be discarded.” (*The Republic*, by Plato. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. It is available on line at guutenberg.org. But that edition lacks page numbers. The passage is found on p. 132 of a KayeDreams edition, dated 2009 available, at googlebooks. Spelling has been corrected for modern usage.)

⁵ Overy, *The Dictators*, 173.

could be produced or made public in all forms of artistic creation. The only style that was acceptable under them was what in Stalin's Russia Maxim Gorky called "socialist realism" and what in Hitler's Germany Overy labels "nationalist realism."⁶ Neither style was "realistic," as this term is generally understood. Neither socialist nor nationalist art was descriptive of the actual conditions in which people lived, worked, or fought. Rather, it was "idealistic" or "romantic," depicting the utopian mirages of the regime. As Overy puts it:

Official art was not entirely blind to aesthetic achievement, but the principal purpose of art was to express approved social values and political ideals in ways that could be appreciated by the ordinary public rather than the narrower world of art critics and patrons. All culture under the dictatorship was intended to be democratic⁷ rather than self-indulgently elitist.⁸

Under both regimes, artists and writers were instructed to abide by the "principles of simplicity and accessibility." Hitler spoke not only for himself but, unwittingly perhaps, for Stalin, too, when he advocated "'art that people can comprehend, because only art that the simple man can understand is true art'."⁹ "Popular culture," that is, one supposedly emanating from ordinary workers and peasants that echoed official themes and would erase the difference between high and

⁶ Ibid, 356.

⁷ Overy should have put inverted commas around the word "democratic." By "democratic," I take it he means that Hitler and Stalin decreed that art should be simple and its party-approved meaning easily grasped by the mass of the population. Maybe "popular" or "mass" culture would be a more appropriate term.

⁸ Overy, *The Dictators*, 352.

⁹ Ibid, 355.

low culture, was favored against “decadent,” “elitist,” or “bourgeois” culture. In the early years of the Bolshevik regime, “a popular movement of authentic proletarian culture, known by the acronym ‘Proletkult,’ recruited thousands of workers to be trained as revolutionary writers and artists to take the place of bourgeois artists and end the divide between high art and popular culture. The regime disliked the democratic and autonomous character of the movement and it declined sharply after 1921. . . .”¹⁰ Nevertheless, if those organizational means were discarded, the goal of promoting “popular culture” over “elite culture” remained alive.

To encourage the production of art-cum-party-propaganda, the regimes employed a combination of positive and negative incentives. Depictions of heroism in labor or war, of individual sacrifice for the collective, were honored, their creators showered with prizes and other symbolic rewards as well as with material goods. Odes to the leader, genuinely or opportunistically conceived, could bring recognition. By contrast, no expression of ambivalence, doubt, criticism or challenge to the regime’s interpretation was allowed, and “any attempt to defy the new cultural norms was suppressed through a combination of official censorship, exclusion and terror.”¹¹ In both regimes, contemporary as well as past literature was censored. Lists of proscribed books were drawn up; those blacklisted were stored away or destroyed. In Stalin’s Russia, “In 1938-9 alone 16,453 titles were withdrawn from circulation and over 24 million copies pulped.”¹² Within a little over a year of Hitler assuming the

¹⁰ Ibid, 357.

¹¹ Ibid, 362.

¹² Ibid, 368.

chancellorship, “1,000 newspapers had been closed down, and 350 voluntarily wound up.”¹³ “Minister of Propaganda and Enlightenment” Joseph Goebbels banned “all artistic criticism. The press was allowed only to print ‘art reports’ or ‘the contemplation of art.’ The critical evaluation of artistic output was permitted only to those who were judged to display Nationalist Socialist ‘purity of heart and outlook,’ and would say what the regime wanted.”¹⁴

To control the writers, the Soviet Union organized a “Union of Writers”; the equivalent body in Hitler’s Germany was known as a “chamber,” a subordinate entity within the “Reich Chamber of Culture,” itself “under the auspices” of Goebbels’ “ministry.”¹⁵ To belong to the union or chamber meant opportunities for publication, eligibility to attend conferences or retreats, permission to travel abroad, preferential access to better housing and other material goods, “and the prospect for the fortunate few of real fame.”¹⁶ Under this regime, opportunists abounded. Those who refused to abide by the regime’s strictures were denied admission or expelled from the “union” or “chamber” and sentenced to a sort of artistic death—officially, as writers they simply ceased to exist. Overy quotes Mikhail Bulgakov’s lament, “‘To be known . . . To be known!’.”¹⁷

¹³ Ibid, 370.

¹⁴ Ibid, 371.

¹⁵ Ibid, 361.

¹⁶ Ibid, 363.

¹⁷ Ibid, 373

Recalcitrant or non-conformist writers faced a range of unpleasant choices. One was exile, emigrating or escaping to another country where they could create freely, but at the cost of having to adjust to a new environment while becoming “non-persons” or objects of continuous vilification at home. This had to be particularly hard for writers, whose readership was drastically reduced unless they could become adept at another language. Another was a sort of internal exile, withdrawal into a solitary existence, writing privately, practically in hiding, without hope of publication. There was self-censorship, avoiding dangerous topics or simply suppressing the creative impulse or channeling it into translating the work of authors of other languages, the option that Boris Pasternak took.¹⁸ A riskier route was going underground, meeting clandestinely with a few other trusted writers in informal—and illegal—literary circles, exchanging or distributing forbidden or unsanctioned manuscripts, always under the threat of being discovered or betrayed to the political police by an informant within the group. Discovery entailed harsh consequences—official campaigns of vilification, psychological pressures, material deprivation, arrest, beatings, imprisonment, being sentenced to forced labor or even execution, as in the case of the Soviet writer Isaak Babel.¹⁹ Suicide was the final option, although according to Overy very few took this step. One such case was that of the futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovski, who “shot himself,” “leaving a brief

¹⁸ Ibid, 375.

¹⁹ Ibid, 372.

suicide note with the laconic conclusion: ‘Seriously, there is nothing to be done. Goodbye’.”²⁰

Castro’s “Cultural Revolution”

In Cuba, Fidel Castro’s totalitarian party-state duplicated some of the principal policies and structures devised by Hitler and Stalin to control society and culture. These encompassed “science and technology, education and culture, sports, the media . . .”²¹ In this paper, I focus almost all attention on one aspect: his war on writers who would not toe the line, those who refused to play their assigned role within “the Revolution.” The signal event in this war was what became known as “The Padilla Case.” In the words of César Leante,

This affair caused a radical turn in Cuban literature and art, and also significantly altered the relations between foreign intellectuals and the revolution.²² It may be affirmed that culturally there was a before and after the Padilla case. Nothing was ever again as it had been. The precarious understanding or compromise between creation and politics was undone by it. Henceforth, either the artists

²⁰ Ibid, 357. His suicide unleashed a torrent of abuse in the Soviet press. It ended abruptly when Stalin praised him in a letter to Nikolai Yeshov, chief of the NKVD (political police).

²¹ Alberto F. Alvarez García and Gerardo González Núñez, *¿Intelectuales vs. Revolución?: El Caso del Centro de Estudios Sobre América*, CEA (Montreal, Ediciones Arte D.T, 2001), 60.

²² See the two open letters that European and Latin American intellectuals addressed to Fidel Castro, reprinted in Lourdes Casal (Ed.), *El Caso Padilla. Literatura y Revolución en Cuba* (New York, N.Y., Ediciones Nueva Atlántida, n.d.), 74-75, 123-124, as well as in Heberto Padilla, *Fuera del Juego. Edición Conmemorativa, 1968-1998* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998), 123-124, 160-161.

saw clearly or the revolution displayed its true colors. . . . Art is liberty, the revolution requires submission.²³

Heberto Padilla was a poet and novelist.²⁴ In his memoir, *La Mala Memoria*,²⁵ he recounts a 1951 election campaign trip in the province of Matanzas, east of Havana, in which he along with several others, including the young Fidel Castro,²⁶ traveled from town to town giving speeches on behalf of a candidate of their party, “The Party of the Cuban People,” also known as “Ortodoxo.”²⁷ Conversing among themselves, he learned that Castro liked Curzio Malaparte’s *Kaputt* and *Coup D’etat: The Technique of Revolution*. One night, while resting in Varadero, Cuba’s most famous beach, Castro voiced contempt for democracy: “True political changes are made by a vanguard

²³ César Leante, *Revive, Historia. Anatomía del Castrismo* (Madrid: Editorial Biblioteca Nueva, 1999), 207. My (somewhat loose) translation. In this as in all other translations, I have tried to remain faithful to the thought even if, to avoid awkwardness of expression, I did not always strive for word-for-word or phrase-for-phrase equivalence. Henceforth, unless quoting from an English edition, all translations are mine, and all carried in the same spirit. If I have any doubt whether my translation reflects what the author intended, I will alert the reader in a footnote.

²⁴ He was born in January, 1932 to a family of modest circumstances in Pinar del Río, Cuba’s westernmost province. He died in September 2000 in Auburn, Alabama, where he was teaching Spanish at the eponymous university.

²⁵ Heberto Padilla, *La Mala Memoria* (Madrid: Plaza & Janés Editoriales, S.A., 1989). There is an English edition with a very different title, *Self-Portrait of the Other: A Memoir* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999). Again, as with other books that have been translated, I choose to work with the original Spanish.

²⁶ For a short political sketch of Fidel Castro, see my monograph *Is Fidel Castro a Machiavellian Prince?* (Miami: The Endowment of Cuban American Studies, 1999). <http://uwf.edu/govt/documents/Cuzan.castro-machiavelli.pdf>. There are, of course, longer studies, cited in the bibliography therein.

²⁷ For Cuba’s democratic period, see Charles D. Ameringer, *The Cuban Democratic Experience. The Auténtico Years, 1944-1952* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

Majority consent is always spurious. . . . New ideas are imposed with the fists.” When warned not to let Eduardo Chibás, the leader of the party, hear him, “Fidel burst out laughing. In Cuba a guffaw can cancel the most serious debate. I wish I could remember his exact words, especially the vehemence with which he expressed them; but I believe I have been faithful to them.”²⁸

Padilla remembers that one of Castro’s most prized books was a collection of Mussolini’s speeches and writings, and that *Mein Kampf* was one of his favorite reads. And he recalls something else: Castro’s photographic memory, which he put to political use, brazenly plagiarizing the words of others in his own speeches.

Recently I listened to old recordings of Mussolini attacking ‘British imperialism’ and I had the impression that I was listening to Fidel Castro attacking ‘Yankee imperialism’ to the noisy approval of his fevered followers. His admiration for Mussolini has not abated all these years: ‘*Venceremos*’ [we will be victorious], the pet phrase with which Castro ends all his speeches, was

²⁸ Ibid, 18, 24. In 1951, Chibás concluded one of his radio shows by shooting himself in the stomach. He died a few days later. He was laid in repose at the University of Havana, where some two hundred thousand people came to pay their respects. José Pardo Llada, who ranked second in the party and was in charge of the funeral, recalls that Castro wanted him to redirect the funeral procession from the cemetery to the presidential palace. They would take advantage of the multitude of mourners that would follow them to the executive mansion, at which time, “You proclaim yourself president and I chief of the armed forces. We will give Chibás the satisfaction of sweeping away the Prío government. I swear, if we take [the cadaver] to the palace, [President Carlos] Prío will flee from Cuba. He must be terribly frightened.” Pardo Llada felt revulsion at Castro’s “sinister plan,” dismissing it as the work of a madman. Years later, he learned that Castro’s insight was correct: Prío, who had been freely elected three years earlier, would have abandoned the presidency (as he did a year later when Batista staged a coup) rather than order his police and military to employ force to defend the Constitution. In other words, he would have been something of a Kerensky to Castro’s Lenin. José Pardo Llada, *Fidel y el “Che”* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés Editores, S.A., 1989, 70-73). There is no English edition of this book.

Mussolini's motto. The imitation of Hitler is the most dramatic: At his trial for the Moncada assault, Fidel concluded his defense with the same phrase that Hitler used before the Munich tribunal: 'Condemn me . . . History will absolve me.'²⁹ The impudence with which he mocks historical memory is one of the most constant traits of his personality."³⁰

The Moncada garrison was Cuba's second-largest military base, located in Santiago de Cuba, in Oriente Province, at the easternmost end of the Island. On July 26, 1953, Castro led around 150 poorly armed and equipped men on a suicidal attack against it, nearby government installations, and a Rural Guards barracks in Bayamo,³¹ about 60 miles northwest of Santiago. A year earlier, Fulgencio Batista, former dictator and president of Cuba, had seized the government in a coup against the elected president, Carlos Prío.³² It was a carnival weekend in Santiago, and Castro had hoped to find the soldiery drunk or asleep. The assault was a failure, repulsed with many casualties; after surrendering, many of the attackers were murdered in cold blood.

²⁹ Actually, according to a meticulous study of the Moncada assault by historian Dr. Antonio Rafael de la Cova, neither Castro nor Hitler uttered those exact words at their trials, although what they actually said "bears a strong resemblance." Castro's peroration appeared in a pamphlet published later. Antonio Rafael de la Cova, *The Moncada Attack. Birth of the Cuban Revolution* (Columbia, S.C.: The University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 231.

³⁰ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 15.

³¹ Bayamo was the birthplace of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, one of the founders of Cuba's independence movement. The first line of Cuba's national anthem says "¡Al combate, corred, Bayameses!" ["To combat, people of Bayamo!"]

³² Ameringer, *Cuban Democratic Experience*, Ch. 10. On Fulgencio Batista, see Frank Argote-Freyre, *Fulgencio Batista. From Revolutionary to Strongman* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press) and Luis E. Aguilar, *Cuba 1933. Prologue to Revolution* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1972), Chs. 9-17.

Castro escaped but was captured, tried, and sentenced to 15 years in prison, of which he served fewer than two.³³ Shortly after being freed, Castro left for Mexico, where he raised funds and recruited men for an “invasion” of the Island. He landed in Oriente in December 1956. The landing, too, was a fiasco, but he and a few others made their way to the *Sierra Maestra*, Cuba’s largest mountain chain, from which they waged a two-year guerrilla war and, more importantly, a propaganda campaign against Batista’s dictatorship.³⁴

Fulgencio Batista’s flight from Cuba³⁵ on January 1, 1959 and Fidel Castro’s triumphal entry into Havana a few days later (which as a child I watched on television) found Padilla in New York City, where he taught Spanish at a Berlitz school. That spring he hurried down to Cuba, anxious to participate in the “splendid political

³³ Though military failures, both Hitler’s Munich’s Beer Hall Putsch and Castro’s Moncada assault yielded handsome political dividends. Both men were treated leniently by the courts, which allowed them to use the trials as propaganda platforms, were granted all sorts of privileges in prison, and served only a fraction of their sentences. De la Cova, *Moncada Attack*, 252-253.

³⁴ Reinaldo Arenas, son of peasants—and avowed homosexual—who as a teenager had joined the rebels in the mountains, notes that “The war was rather one of words.” Reinaldo Arenas, *Antes que Anochezca* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, S.A., 1992), 67. Carlos Franqui concurs in this assessment. See *Cuba, la revolución: ¿mito o realidad? Memorias de un fantasma socialista* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2006), 213, 219. Hugh Thomas estimates that no more 2,000 Cubans died between 1952 and 1958. See Hugh Thomas, *Cuba. The Pursuit of Freedom* (Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), p. 1044. On the role that *New York Times* reporter Herbert Matthews played in Castro’s propaganda war, see Anthony de Palma, *The Man Who Invented Fidel: Castro, Cuba, and Herbert L. Matthews of The New York Times* (Public Affairs, 2007).

³⁵ In *El Gran Culpable. Como 12 guerrilleros aniquilaron a 45.000 soldados?* (Caracas, 1963), José Suárez Núñez blames Batista for Castro’s victory. Among other things, he charges that Batista neglected the armed forces and promoted incompetent cronies, thereby undermining morale and discipline in the military, which was riddled with conspiracies against him; also, although ignorant of military tactics and the country’s geography, more than once he overrode sound plans for defeating Castro’s forces.

transformation in the direction of decency” that had been launched. “What was needed was to raze what was bad and begin anew.”³⁶ He worked for *Prensa Latina*, both in Cuba and in London. Also, he contributed to a literary supplement edited by Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Lunes de Revolución*. Carlos Franqui directed the parent newspaper,³⁷ which initially took over the plant of *Alerta*, one of the newspapers seized from Batista supporters before moving into the building confiscated from *Prensa Libre*, the last independent newspaper to fall before the Castroite’s onslaught against the free press (see below). Previously, during the struggle against Batista, Franqui had edited

³⁶ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 31-32. This desire to “raze what is bad and begin anew” is typical of someone infected with what Franqui calls the “revolutionary virus.” The problem, of course, is that someone or some organization has to decide what is good and what is bad, what “razing” the latter would entail, and what would be built in its stead. In “the Cuban ‘Revolution’,” that meant Fidel Castro, and according to Franqui, for Castro “Nothing that existed before him should remain as it was, it didn’t matter if it was good or bad, change had to be continuous, total and permanent, change would be his very life, he was and is a change-everything, except himself.” He had to change everything—men, culture, customs, institutions, history, life itself. Carlos Franqui, *Cuba, la revolución: ¿mito o realidad? Memorias de un fantasma socialista* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2006), 438-439. Incidentally, the virus of revolution also found a receptive host in as reputable an economist as Rufo López-Fresquet. In *My 14 months with Castro* (Cleveland and New York : The World Publishing Company, p. 133), he wrote that “Cuba’s ills were not caused by a sanguinary dictator’s occasional seizure of power, by a demagogic and corrupt politician’s tenure of office, or by the presence of dishonest persons in the personnel of public administration. These phenomena were merely symptoms of a structural malady that had to be torn up by the very roots. It was the whole structure that demanded change. . . .” That Cuba rated comparatively high in social and economic indicators and enjoyed a rich cultural life was, apparently, of no consequence; it carried no weight with those infected with the virus.

³⁷ All three—Franqui, Cabrera Infante, and Padilla eventually ended up in exile, targets of vilification campaigns on the part of the Castro regime. Others have suffered similar fate. See *El Otro Paredón. Asesinatos de la Reputación en Cuba, 2da Edición Ampliada* (Miami, FL: Eriginal Books LLC, 2012).

Revolución clandestinely and had been in charge of *Radio Rebelde*, which broadcast from Castro's mountain hideout.

Padilla allows that the exodus of people during the first two years of Castro's regime "lacked importance for us. It was made up of established interests that took for granted that they would be back soon."³⁸ One may be forgiven for so characterizing those that fled during the first few months of 1959, but by the end of the year the number of exiles was growing rapidly. Thereafter, the exodus swelled like a tidal wave: the middle class fled by the hundreds of thousands. Among those who escaped were just about all the former owners and editors of the independent media, including Miguel Angel Quevedo, editor of *Bohemia*, Cuba's most important magazine, who had propagandized for Fidel Castro even during Batista's dictatorship.³⁹ In fact, the seeds of what was to become the case that bears Padilla's name were sown as early as the first year of Castro's regime. No sooner had Castro begun his trek from the *Sierra* to Havana that summary trials and murders of former adherents to the previous regime were carried out. Hundreds were shot before hastily arranged firing squads.⁴⁰ Show trials of alleged Batista henchmen were televised. Multitudes gathered in a "plaza of the revolution," to be harangued by Fidel Castro for hours. Whipped into a frenzy, they

³⁸ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 54.

³⁹ In 1969, in exile in Venezuela, Quevedo, before taking his own life, purportedly wrote a letter to a friend in which he assumed partial responsibility for paving the way for Castro's seizure of power. He repudiated the "invention" of "the 20,000 dead" that had been attributed to Batista, a lie that his magazine had propagated. (*Contacto Magazine*, <http://www.contactomagazine.com/quevedo100.htm>).

⁴⁰ Almost 500 men had been executed in less than three months. See J. A. Sierra, "Timetable History of Cuba. After the Revolution." <http://www.historyofcuba.com/history/time/timetbl4.htm>.

would demand “*paredón, paredón*” (“to the wall, to the wall,” i.e., to the firing squad) for “counter-revolutionaries” and “traitors.” In the next few years and for decades thereafter, members of Castro’s own “July 26th Movement,” fellow guerrilla fighters, members of the old Popular Socialist Party (communist), high-ranking members of his regime, even a highly decorated member of his “Revolutionary Armed Forces” would eventually end up exiled, sentenced to long prison terms, executed, or dead by suicide.

If the early “bloodbath” (as Wayne Morse, United States Senator from Oregon characterized it)⁴¹ was not enough to alarm Padilla, something closer to a man devoted to the written word should have: Castro’s silencing of the “bourgeois” press, that is, of all media that was independent of him. First to fall were the newspapers that were tarred as belonging to or that had unconditionally served Batista. Without any judicial procedure of any kind, they were simply seized, their plant and equipment shifted to publications and publishers controlled by Castro’s followers, including *Revolución* (whose turn, as well as that of the communist newspaper *Hoy*, ironically would come in time). Next, Castro charged against the satirical weekly *Zig-Zag*, a magazine that had been critical of the previous regime, on account of a caricature that depicted him as climbing a mountain followed by a train of unprincipled opportunists. The newspaper guilds, of journalists, printers, graphic arts, etc., like other labor unions, were taken over by members or associates of the communist, Moscow-aligned *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP). Then, one newspaper after another, one radio and television station after another, fell like dominoes, their editors having come under attack as “traitors”

⁴¹ Quoted in [executedtoday.com](http://www.executedtoday.com). “1959: 71 after the Cuban Revolution.” January 12, 2010. <http://www.executedtoday.com/2010/01/12/1959-cuban-revolution-santiago-de-cuba-enrique-despaigne/>

and “counterrevolutionaries” (“crimes” punishable by a prison term and even death by firing squad), vilifications that found echo in the pages of *Hoy* and *Revolución*, for calling for an end to the show trials, the summary executions, the restoration of the Constitution of 1940 and the holding of free elections, promises that Castro had made during his propaganda war against Batista. Pursuing a policy of economic strangulation, enterprises confiscated by the regime did not advertise with them, and those that remained in private hands were pressured to follow suit. In the case of the print media, their distributors were terrorized. As if borrowing a page from the Nazi brown shirts or Mussolini’s black shirts, a mob would assemble in front of the offices of the offending media organs to shout insults and threats against the lives of their owners and editors while other groups would symbolically bury them. Inside a newspaper, a group of employees, usually a minority, some wearing militia uniforms and carrying weapons, would demand the right to insert “corrections” to editorials critical of the regime. If the editors balked, the employees would forcibly occupy the plant. The same fate befell the offices of international press agencies. Most owners and editors of the expropriated media sought asylum in embassies and escaped abroad. Publishing houses and printing presses, too, fell under the control of the party-state. By May 1960, that is, in a little over a year, about the same time that it took Hitler to bring to heel the German press, just about every media organ not under the control of “the Revolution,” i.e., the regime, that is, of Fidel Castro, had disappeared.⁴² Thus, concludes Leante, “in

⁴² See Humberto Medrano, “Como fue suprimida en Cuba la libertad de prensa,” in Humberto Medrano, *Sin Patria Pero Sin Amo* (Miami: Service Offset Printers, 1963), 432-455. See also José Ignacio Rivero, *Contra Viento y Marea. Periodismo y Mucho Más. 1920-2004* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2004), 141-233. Medrano was assistant director of *Prensa Libre* and Rivero was director of *Diario La Marina*. These were, respectively, the largest circulation daily and the oldest newspaper in pre-Castro Cuba.

the name of the abstract, indefinable but omnipresent ‘revolution’ was thought and expression that was not common or vulgar strangled.”⁴³

At the time these outrages were taking place, however, Leante, like Padilla, was oblivious to their import.⁴⁴ Leante blames his own “complicity” on having been ensnared into an “ideological trap” with the use of adjectives: “there was a free ‘bourgeois’ press and a free ‘revolutionary’ press. The former is that for which all the newspapers were clamoring, except *Revolución* and *Hoy* that embodied ‘revolutionary’ free expression. . . . We fell into that Manichaeism, into that lying dichotomy, into that pedestrian division.” That “dichotomy,” he continues, was “consolidated” with the support of no less a figure than Jean Paul Sartre.⁴⁵ He visited Cuba in the spring of

Medrano and Rivero, besieged from within and without their newspapers, under continuous verbal assault, not excluding veiled threats of imprisonment and death (the latter was arrested but released within 24 hours), waged a courageous, if ultimately unsuccessful defense of the right of a free press in Cuba that ended in the military occupation of their enterprises, asylum in an embassy, and exile.

⁴³ Leante, *Anatomía*, 188.

⁴⁴ In fact, it took a decade longer than Padilla for the scales to fall off Leante’s eyes. His disillusion with “the Revolution” did not take effect until the end of the 1970s. What broke the proverbial camel’s back was the flight of 10,000 Cubans to the Peruvian embassy in 1980 and the “pogroms” (his word) carried out against the tens of thousands more that sought to escape via the Mariel boatlift. He sought asylum in Spain the following year. Like Padilla, Leante paid dearly for his “defection” or “treason”: he had to wait seven years before his wife and children could join him, and only after a long and frustrating campaign that he waged, first discreetly, and later publicly. See, in its entirety, César Leante, *Volviendo la Mirada* (Miami, Ediciones Universal, 2002).

⁴⁵ In one of Juan Arcocha’s novels, the protagonist, employed as press attaché in the Cuban embassy in Paris in the mid-1960s (Arcocha served there as cultural attaché), says this about Western intellectuals enamored of “the Cuban Revolution,” as Sartre clearly was for a while (see Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 101): “For European intellectuals in general, in particular the French ones, the Cuban Revolution was like one of those old Spanish country-style inns where the traveler ate what he brought in his knapsack. Thus in Cuba our visitors could verify their theories of what Socialism ought to be. The only thing needed was smiling Cubans. The Varadero sun and the Cuban *pachanga* [rowdy

1960, in the wake of the fall of “the last bastion of the independent press of Cuba, the daily with the emblematic title *Prensa Libre* (‘Free Press’).”⁴⁶ One night, at a meeting in the offices of *Revolución*, Sartre asked those assembled “if there was freedom of the press in Cuba.” Panic ensued. “How to answer him when, only a few days earlier, the last remaining non-government newspaper had been ‘confiscated?’” Noting the embarrassment, Sartre clarified: “What he wanted to know was whether revolutionaries could express themselves, whether there was freedom of the press for them. A sigh of relief. Oh yes, of course, naturally. Everyone who was a revolutionary could say whatever he wanted, there was no limit to that liberty. . . .”⁴⁷

A little over a year later, on June 30, 1961, Fidel Castro made this point in a typically long speech closing the “First Congress of Cuban Writers and Artists” that was held in the National Library over three consecutive Fridays. The background to the meeting was a dispute between the collaborators of *Lunes*, on the one hand and, on the other, members of the PSP, in particular Edith García Buchaca, effectively in charge of the National Cultural Council (CNC), and Alfredo Guevara, head of the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinema (ICAIC), over the suppression by the latter of an independently

partying] would do the rest. . . .” Juan Arcocha, *La Bala Perdida* (Barcelona: Letras del Exilio, 1984. Originally published in 1973), 143. Compare this observation with the fantasies about “the Cuban Revolution” that young Swedish women, sunning themselves half-naked on a Cuban beach, say to the protagonist of Roberto Ampuero’s autobiographical novel, *Nuestros Años Verde Olivo* (Bogotá: Grupo Editorial Norma, 2010), 376-379.

⁴⁶ Elsewhere he notes that *Prensa Libre* was, “after *Revolución*, the most popular and most widely read newspaper in those days, one that in no way could be tarred as *Batistiano* or accused of having received money from the dictatorship” (Leante, *Anatomía*, 184).

⁴⁷ Leante, *Anatomía*, 34-35. A claim, of course, that events proved to be illusory.

produced documentary, *PM (Post Meridiem)* on the grounds that it was “counter-revolutionary.”⁴⁸ The documentary, co-directed by Cabrera Infante’s brother, Sabá, and Orlando Jiménez-Leal,⁴⁹ and supported in part by *Lunes*, consisted in a fourteen minute, free-cinema style “short” that unobtrusively recorded images of night life in around the port of Havana and the beach of Marianao. Working-class revelers of both sexes and all shades of skin color, crowded in small locales, are shown in various stages of inebriation, dancing to music by anonymous bands, drinking and smoking, arguing or

⁴⁸ As late as 1995, Fidel Castro was still anathemizing films as “counter-revolutionary.” Such was the case of “Guantanamo,” the last production of the director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea. See Joan del Alcázar Garrido and Sergio López Rivero, *De Compañero a Contrarevolucionario. La Revolución Cubana y el Cine de Tomás Gutiérrez Alea* (Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2009), 121.

⁴⁹ Years later, now in exile, Jiménez-Leal and Néstor Almendros, who at the time ardently defended *PM* against charges that it was “counter-revolutionary,” a stand that cost him his job as film critic, co-directed “Improper Conduct.” This documentary is about the infamous forced labor camps to which several categories of “anti-social” elements, including dissident writers and artists, Catholic seminarians, Jehovah’s witnesses, hippies, long-haired youths, etc., among whom homosexuals received the greatest international attention, were sent starting in the mid-1960s. For a collection of essays on the *PM* affair, including Almendros’ original defense of the film in *Bohemia*, as well as another by Jiménez Leal himself, see Orlando Jiménez Leal and Manuel Zayas (Eds.), *El Caso PM. Cine, poder, y censura* (Madrid: Editorial Colibrí, 2012). Also, a summary and analysis of the communist party assault on *PM* and *Lunes* is included in William Luis, *Lunes de Revolución. Literatura y Cultura en los Primeros Años de la Revolución Cubana* (Madrid: Editoriales Verbum, 2003), 37-52. For a less romanticized, critical view of *Lunes*, and the role it played, along with its parent, *Revolución*, and its director, Carlos Franqui, in the suppression of free expression in Cuba, see Roger Alan Reed, *The Cultural Revolution in Cuba* (Latin American Roundtable, University of Geneva Press, 1991), 61-65. See, as well, Duanel Díaz, *Palabras del Trasfondo, Intelectuales, literatura e ideología en la Revolución Cubana* (Madrid : Editorial Colibrí, 2009), 45-48, 66, 68-69. Professor Díaz cuts through the cant of the regime’s scribes and apologists with admirable skill.

simply passing the time.⁵⁰ Needless to say, there were no images of heroic workers and peasants, rifles in hand, raising their fists in defiance of “Yankee imperialism.”⁵¹

More than 200 intellectuals signed a letter protesting the censorship, after which *PM* was shown to an overflow crowd at the *Casa de las Américas*. But detractors of the documentary, principally Alfredo Guevara, appealed to Fidel Castro. At the congress, there was a wide-ranging discussion about the role of writers and artists under the new dispensation, the autonomy of art, and aesthetic merit independent of political content. Padilla jostled with Carlos Rafael Rodríguez, a PSP “leader” who had once served on Batista’s cabinet and who eventually would act as “vice-president” under Castro, over the “fascist” T. S. Elliott, apparently getting the better of the communist, who was out of

⁵⁰ The film is available on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKvbUeqPYlo>. Also available is a similar short by Néstor Almendros “Gente en la Playa,” which was likewise banned: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDKbVULpkHg>.

⁵¹ Among the reasons given for suppressing the documentary, “the cultural censors of ICAI averred, among other things, the following: ‘The Commission on the Study and Classification of Films, meeting in a regular session, after studying the aforementioned film, decided to prohibit its showing on account of its presenting a partial picture of Havana’s nightlife that impoverishes, disfigures, and discredits the posture that the Cuban people maintains against the artful attacks on the counterrevolution at the orders of Yankee imperialism.’” Quoted in Gerardo Muñoz, “La Política de los gestos: la actualidad de *PM*,” in Leal and Zayas, *El Caso PM*. Incidentally, Tomás Gutierrez Alea, who later directed films that subtly satirized or criticized the regime from “within the Revolution,” resigned his seat on the ICAIC Board in protest over the suppression of *PM*.

his league.⁵² Also at the congress, the poet and playwright Virgilio Piñera ⁵³ expressed fear that freedom of expression was under threat.

In his closing speech, later transcribed under the title, “Words to the Intellectuals,”⁵⁴ Castro elevated what he called “the right of the Revolution to exist” over any other right, including that of free expression. A revolutionary, he added, knows this; that is why he “puts something above even his creative spirit. He puts the Revolution above everything else, and the most revolutionary artist will be that one who is prepared to sacrifice even his own artistic vocation for the Revolution.”

⁵² Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 128. Cabrera Infante also describes the controversy over the documentary, the first “cultural congress” and the subsequent disappearance of *Lunes* in *Mea Cuba*, 74-77, 97-105. Also, see Medrano, “Como fue suprimida en Cuba la libertad de prensa.”

⁵³ In 1979, a few months before Piñera’s death, agents of State Security broke into his apartment, humiliated him, confiscated his writings and warned him that he “would pay dearly” if he continued to associate with foreigners or attend literary circles in certain houses. He died “in complete silence,” the UNEAC postponing the announcement of his death until only a few hours before his burial, as if they had wanted to prevent his many friends and admirers from attending the funeral. When his literary executors, including the playwright Antón Arrufat, went to his apartment, they found it sealed by State Security. All his unpublished works ended up in their hands. (Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 248-252.) As was the case with Lezama Lima, Piñera was denied permission to leave the country, and at his burial, too, agents of State Security were deployed in the cemetery. (Arenas, *Antes que Añochezca*, 292-295.) However, apparently in partial rehabilitation mode, in the year 2012 the regime celebrated the centenary of Piñera’s birth. According to Arrufat, the regime’s publishing houses will put out “an almost complete edition of his texts.” (“Homenaje a Virgilio Piñera es la ‘reparación y el saldo de una deuda’, dice Antón Arrufat,” *cubaencuentro.com*, January 9, 2012.) For a cogent critique of the meaning and limits of the slow-melting cultural “thaw” during which the works of Piñera and Lezama Lima have been “rescued” from official oblivion, see Díaz, *Palabras del Trasfondo*, 165ff.

⁵⁴ Fidel Castro, “Speech to the Intellectuals.” FBIS Report, June 30, 1961. (Their translation.) Latin American Network Information Center. Downloaded August 17, 2012. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610630.html>. Typically, of all that was said at these meetings, Castro’s “words” were the only ones published by the regime.

What about those “honest” writers and artists who, without being “revolutionary” themselves, nevertheless wish to help “the Revolution,” he asked?

The Revolution must . . . act in such a way that the entire sector of artists and intellectuals who are not genuinely revolutionary find a place to work and to create within the Revolution, and so that their creative spirit will have an opportunity and freedom for expression within the Revolution, even though they are not revolutionary writers or artists. This means that within the Revolution, everything goes; against the Revolution, nothing. Nothing against the Revolution, because the Revolution has its rights also, and the first right of the Revolution is the right to exist, and no one can stand against the right of the Revolution to be and to exist. No one can rightfully claim a right against the Revolution. Since it takes in the interests of the people and signifies the interests of the entire nation. I believe that this is quite clear. What are the rights of revolutionary or non-revolutionary writers and artists? *Within the Revolution, everything, against the Revolution, no rights at all.*⁵⁵

Echoing the strictures laid down by Hitler and Stalin about the promotion of a “popular culture” for and by the people, he instructed the artists and writers assembled that

Efforts must be made to reach the people in all manifestations, but everything that is within our soon [sic] must also be done in turn so that the people will be

⁵⁵ My emphasis. Castro’s slogan was adapted from an earlier one coined by one of his models, Mussolini: “‘All within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state.’ Speech to the Chamber of Deputies (9 December 1928), quoted in *Propaganda and Dictatorship* (2007) by Marx Fritz Morstein, 48.” In “Benito Mussolini,” *Wikiquotes*, http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Benito_Mussolini.

able to understand ever more and ever better. I do not believe that this principle contradicts the aspirations of any artist, and much less so if one takes into account the fact that men should create for their contemporaries.

.....

Some experiments which have been carried out prove the ability of the peasant and the man of the people to assimilate artistic matters, to assimilate culture, and to set himself immediately to producing. There are comrades in certain cooperatives who have already succeeded in forming theatrical groups. In addition, the interest which the peasant⁵⁶ has in all these matters was proven recently with the performances given in various parts of the Republic and the artistic work which the men and women of the people did. Think, then, what it will mean when we have instructors of theater, of music, and of the dance in every cooperative and at every people's farms.

Furthermore, he dismissed the concern that the cultural agencies established to date by the regime, namely the National Cultural Council and the Cuban Institute of Art and Cinema (ICAIC), to “stimulate, encourage, develop, and orient—yes , orient—that creative spirit” would abuse their authority.⁵⁷ He claimed that no one could seriously dispute the right of the latter to censor films, to decide what films could be shown to the public. Implicitly, of course, he was claiming analogous “rights” for every other agency

⁵⁶ Ironically, among those very peasants emerged one of the most talented (and most vilified) critics of Fidel Castro and his regime. See Reinaldo Arenas, *Antes que Anochezca. Autobiography* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, S.A., 1992).

⁵⁷ This is how he described the purpose of the National Cultural Council. There is no reason to doubt that the same goals, with the emphasis on “orientation,” informed all other cultural agencies.

put in charge of some aspect of culture, including the National Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC), formed that very summer, to decide what books could be published, prizes awarded, and so on.

As Leante later came to understand, the terms “revolutionary” and “counter-revolutionary,” though repeated ad nauseam by the “maximum leader,” were left undefined. What was or should have been obvious from the start was that they had nothing to do with truth-telling and everything to do with toeing the official line of the moment. Enforcement was left to the very agencies Castro had established to “guide” cultural output. “Their multiple and subjective interpretations were transferred to government functionaries, the cultural bureaucrats, and, naturally, over the years it became evident that anything that did not fit the orthodoxy, that did not conform to the Marxist-Leninist canon, and in practice, any expression that was critical of the system, even if only in part, was ‘against the revolution’.”⁵⁸ Or, as Padilla was to put it in *Mala Memoria*: “The *comandante* was the sole arbiter of what was to be accepted or rejected.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Leante, *Anatomía*, 131-132. The ambiguity of the term “revolutionary,” and the vesting of arbitrary power in the cultural or party bureaucracy to interpret and apply it enables apparatchiki “for whom Marxism is equivalent to applauding Fidel Castro and mechanically repeating his words” to control the work—censoring the words and even attempting to do so with the *thoughts*—of people far more intelligent and knowledgeable than they. See Maurizio Giuliano, *El Caso CEA. Intelectuales e Inquisidores en Cuba. ¿Perestroika en la isla?* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998), 96. See, also, the report by two former members of the Center: Alvarez García and González Núñez, *¿Intelectuales vs. Revolución?* That applauding Fidel Castro became the mark of a Marxist in good standing brings to mind a similar characteristic in Stalin’s Russia, where “[h]is pronouncements were treated as Holy Writ, and ideological discussion reduced itself to parroting his latest sentences.” Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1958), p. 12.

⁵⁹ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 62. For an instance—almost comical, if it were not so serious—of the confusion and incoherence that the *comandante*’s prerogative to decide

At the time, however, Padilla did not take these issues seriously, even as the poet Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko, who was visiting Cuba and attended the meeting, sounded the alarm. “I am worried about these debates in the National Library even if no one has been ordered to the firing squad,” Yevtushenko said. He warned Padilla to be prudent. “To safeguard one’s head was the most important thing in a revolution. In my country, during the Stalin era, you would have been sent to a labor camp for less. Lezama Lima⁶⁰ would have been the first to go’.”⁶¹ Padilla had been given similar warnings by others, including friends among PSP members who were already feeling nervous about the designs of the “maximum leader.”⁶²

Shortly after the congress at which Castro had addressed the intellectuals, *Lunes de Revolución* was buried. Cabrera Infante was sent to Belgium as cultural attaché.⁶³

what is and what is not “revolutionary” can cause among the party bureaucrats, see the exchange between the economist Julio Carranza and the inquisitors investigating the CEA in Giuliano, *El Caso CEA*, 79-80.

⁶⁰ Cuba’s legendary “dean” of letters, who would end up marginalized. See below.

⁶¹ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 64.

⁶² Their purges would come that very decade, in two waves several years apart, the latter in the form of a trial of a “micro-faction” in which the accused were charged with a series of counter-revolutionary activities. See Lillian Martínez Pérez, *Los Hijos de Saturno. Intelectuales y Revolución en Cuba* (México: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Sede México, 2006), 43-44.

⁶³ He served the Foreign Ministry in that capacity until 1965. When he learned that his mother was at death’s door, he flew back to Havana for what he thought would be a couple of weeks. The stay stretched into five months of uncertainty and fear, relieved only by the company of friends and the love of a woman. For the Kafkaesque story, see Guillermo Cabrera-Infante, *Mapa dibujado por un espía* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, S.L., 2011). A fuller treatment of the writer’s life, published while the author was still alive, and with interesting comments on choice portions of his *oeuvre*, is Raymond D. Souza’s *Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Two Islands, Many Worlds* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

Franqui, too, went abroad; as roving reporter for *Revolución*, he interviewed heads of states and cultural figures of note until it, too, was closed. For his part, Padilla left for Moscow to work for *Novedades de Moscú*. Subsequently, he represented the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Commerce in communist-ruled Europe and in Scandinavia. These positions afforded him ample opportunities to travel and meet important members of the literary world. In his memoir, he recounts many pleasant soirees in several European capitals, many conversations about politics and poetry fueled with vodka and incensed with the smoke of Cuban cigars, of which he kept Ilya Ehrenburg⁶⁴ well supplied.

But as he learned more about “real socialism” in the Soviet Union and its East European satellites—“the lack of liberty, the omnipresence and high-handedness of the political police, the sacrosanct hierarchs of the bureaucracy, the omnipotent hegemony of the Party, the stagnation of literature, the constant presence of the censor and the cynicism of a large part of the writers,”⁶⁵ together with alarming reports about developments back home—the purges and the ever-growing list of executions—he came

⁶⁴ According to Overy, Ehrenburg had been an anti-Bolshevik who “left Russia for Paris in 1921 with the help of Bukharin, had once worked briefly with Trotsky, returned to Moscow in 1940 after the fall of France, and ended up as the leading propagandist and poet of the Soviet war effort” (*Dictators*, 372).

⁶⁵ This is the bill of particulars against the Soviet Union that, in Yevtushenko’s telling, had contributed to Padilla’s feeling “defrauded” in Moscow (*Mala Memoria*, 121). Yet, Yevtushenko remained hopeful that Khrushchev’s “thaw” would result in a fundamental change in the regime. That had to wait another three decades, and four Communist Party General Secretaries later. One cannot help but wonder, though, why Padilla, a man of letters who presumably had read about the political and cultural history of Russia and the Soviet Union, needed to spend several years there to realize what “real socialism” was all about.

to doubt that “the Revolution” would live up to its original promises.⁶⁶ Reflecting on the attitude of his foreign friends, Padilla observed, not without a sense of self-pity:

They could support or deny their support for the revolution without changing their world; not I. My support sanctioned each and every step in the process, and my rejection was equivalent to turning my back on the most ambitious act of defiance in the history of my country. In-between was the concrete practice. To accept it meant having to swallow live toads in full awareness that we were doing it, to borrow words from the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz. It is a repugnant image for anyone; but a poignant one all the same. Those of us who one day had to swallow those live toads will live the rest of our lives without ever being able to

⁶⁶ I do not wish to be too hard on Padilla, for he paid a heavy price for his delayed awakening to the realities of “the Revolution,” but it bears noting that at most within a year of Castro’s triumphant entry into Havana, anyone with a minimum of political perspicacity could have divined where he was headed. Already, I have mentioned the “bloodbath” of the first few months of 1959. In February, José Miró Cardona, the “prime minister” resigned and Castro, who never took off his military uniform or the pistol strapped to his belt, promptly replaced him. In July, Castro carried out what has been called a “coup by television,” driving the “president,” Manuel Urrutia, to seek asylum, replacing him with the pliant Osvaldo Dorticós, “an ex-member of the Unión Revolucionaria Comunista (the 1939-1945 name of the Cuban Communist Party).” Andrés Suárez, *Cuba: Castroism and Communism, 1959-1966* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), 69; López-Freschet, *My 14 months with Castro*, pp. 123-126. In time, Dorticós, too, would be displaced by Castro, and ended his life via suicide.

In October, Castro, having denounced him publicly, served as *de facto* prosecutor and chief witness at the trial for “treason” of Huber Matos, one of his commanders in the *Sierra*. Matos had had the temerity to resign his post as military governor of Camaguey province over communist infiltration in the government. Castro sentenced him to 20 years in prison. See Huber Matos, *Como llegó la noche. Memorias* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, S.A., 2002), Ch. 33. By the end of the second year of “the Revolution,” all the media, publishing houses, labor unions, schools and universities had been brought under party-state control. The sum total of these events should have disabused every “democratic socialist” of all illusions that the political dynamics operating in “the Revolution” would lead to something other than a totalitarian dictatorship.

shake the sense of revulsion. Revulsion, especially with illusions, is the worst of all vices, because the latter pervert the true essence of hope.⁶⁷

In 1967, having returned to Cuba for good, Padilla found that in Havana “reserve and fear” were pervasive. State Security stalked the halls of the UNEAC which, along with every other “revolutionary organization,” including the new Communist Party of Cuba into which the purged remnants of the 26th of July Movement and the old communist party, the PSP, had been folded, were under constant surveillance. Homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, disaffected youth, “above all, students and artists had had no crime for which they could be prosecuted,” were being sent to the Military Units in Assistance of Production (UMAP). The UMAP camps constituted “one of the cruelest institutions that the system invented.” This was the epoch that initiated Castro’s version of “Heil Hitler” in the slogan, “Commander in Chief: Wherever, whenever, and for whatever, give us the order!”⁶⁸

It was in this political and cultural atmosphere that Padilla was invited to review for *El Caimán Barbudo* “an insignificant little novel by Lisandro Otero,” who had been appointed advisor to the National Council on Culture. Padilla complied. He compared Otero’s novel, *Pasión de Urbino*, unfavorably with *Tres Tristes Tigres*, by the exiled Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the former editor of the defunct *Lunes de Revolución*, that was being read clandestinely.⁶⁹ Upon publication of the critical essay, Padilla came

⁶⁷ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 108.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 145, 146.

⁶⁹ Concurring with Padilla’s judgment of the relative merits of the two novels, Juan Goytisolo describes *Tres Tristes Tigres* by Cabrera Infante as one of the three “most important Cuban novels” published at that time while Lisandro Otero’s *Pasión de Urbino* as a “justly forgotten novel by the then vice-president of the National Council on

under attack by the regime's cultural commissars.⁷⁰ Thereafter, he was subjected to “the most absolute marginalization.” His ostracism was complete when, in order to evade the sentinels of State Security, he waited until only minutes before the deadline and then, with the help of a friend, surreptitiously entered his book of poems, *Fuera del Juego* (“Out of the Game”), into a National Literature Contest sponsored by the UNEAC. He had composed the poems in foreign capitals over several years, giving them the finishing touches after returning to Cuba.

The book⁷¹ opens with a poem titled “In Difficult Times.” It is about a man who was asked successively to give of his time, his hands, his eyes, his lips, his legs, his chest,

Culture.” Juan Goytisolo, *Memorias: Coto Vedado; En los Reinos de Taifa* (Barcelona: Atalaya, 2002), 480.

⁷⁰ In an exchange of letters with Margaret Randall over his essay, “Literary Life in Cuba,” David Gallagher reports that Padilla “was sacked from his job with the official party newspaper, *Granma*, for defending *Tres tristes tigres*. Since the publication of his ‘long letter’ in *El Caimán Barbudo* Padilla has (a) had his passport confiscated while attempting to visit Italy on the invitation of his Italian publishers, Feltrinelli; (b) been sacked from his last remaining job and forced to live off his wife and friends; (c) been the subject of what almost amounts to a special ‘kick Padilla’ number of *El Caimán Barbudo* (No. 21) sinisterly introduced by the editors as marking the ‘end of the bout.’ It includes a vicious, slanderous attack on Padilla (in heavyweight boxer’s prose) by Lisandro Otero that reads like a bad parody of Sholokhov on Sinyavsky or Solzhenitsyn.” Also, as a result of this episode, the *Caimán Barbudo* editors were sacked. *The New York Review of Books*, November 7, 1968.
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1968/nov/07/literary-life-in-cuba/?pagination=false>.

See, also, Martínez Pérez, *Los Hijos de Saturno*, which is almost entirely devoted to the purge of the founders of *El Caimán Barbudo* and, later, *Pensamiento Crítico* and the philosophy department at the University of Havana. Critical intellectuals, no matter how “revolutionary” they professed themselves to be, suffered a sort of “political destruction,” subject to professional and personal attacks that took a heavy psychological and emotional toll (*Hijos*, footnote 611, 350).

⁷¹ Díaz says that *Fuera del Juego* “broke with the cantos by which the apologists of the regime applied maquillage to its horror.” *Palabras del Trasfondo*, 66.

his heart, his shoulders, and then his tongue, “because in difficult times there is nothing as useful to hinder hatred or the lie.” Finally, “they begged him, please, to get going, because, in difficult times, this is, without a doubt, the decisive proof.” “The Old Bards Say” reminds the poet that “anywhere and at any time” that he “make or suffer History, a dangerous poem will always be lying in wait.” The eponymous poem, perhaps defensively and disingenuously dedicated to the leftist poet “Yiannis Ritsos in jail in Greece,” spoke of the poet as a character that has no place in a play or “the game.” He lacks enthusiasm, does not believe in miracles, spends all day in thought, and always finds something to criticize; no one can make him smile at the sight of clowns; he is not a yes man, he won’t dance like everyone else—so dismiss him, he has nothing to do here.⁷² The panel of judges that included the patriarch of Cuban letters, the eminent writer and poet José Lezama Lima,⁷³ courageously resisted political pressures to disqualify Padilla’s entry, and unanimously voted to award him the prize.⁷⁴ It consisted in “a trip to the Soviet Union and one thousand pesos in cash.” He never received it, the

⁷² Heberto Padilla, *Fuera del Juego, Edición Conmemorativa 1968-1998* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998), 13-14, 24, and 43-44. Leante characterizes the book as “profoundly, radically, fundamentally counterrevolutionary. . . . Therein lay its great value. . . . It was *objectively* dangerous. . . .” (*Anatomía*, 223-224).

⁷³ Today the *Casa de las Américas* awards the Lezama Lima prize for poetry. But according to Cabrera Infante, as a result of the “Padilla Case” Lezama Lima was “practically under house arrest, forbidden to talk to foreigners.” (Jorge Nieto, “Cabrera Infante Habla de su Obra,” *Razón y Fábula*, Issue 33/34, 1973, 80). Also, the regime never granted him permission to leave the Island to receive awards in Spain and Italy, something that filled him with sadness and “precipitated his death.” At his burial, those present did not fail to notice the deployment of agents of State Security in the cemetery (Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 188, 192-193).

⁷⁴ Manuel Díaz Martínez, “El Caso Padilla: Crimen y Castigo (Recuerdos de un condenado),” *Inti. Revista de literatura Hispánica*, No. 46-47, Otoño 1997-Primavera 1998, 158-162.

very UNEAC that sponsored the contest having denounced *Fuera del Juego* for ideological deviations.⁷⁵

Out of a job, Padilla appealed to Castro. Though he received no reply, apparently the *comandante* intervened, for he was offered a job at the University of Havana. Yet, worse was to come. His situation was aggravated by the arrival in Cuba of Jorge Edwards, the Chilean novelist and career diplomat sent to the Island as Chargé d'Affairs *ad interim*, tasked with reopening Chile's embassy in Havana by the new president, the Marxist Salvador Allende. Although not persuaded that he was the best fit for this assignment, Edwards looked forward to spending time with Cuban writers he had met in

⁷⁵ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 146, 147.

At the same literary contest to which Padilla submitted *Fuera del Juego*, another panel of judges picked Antón Arrufat's entry in the theater category, the play *Los Siete Contra Tebas*. But that decision, also, met with the emphatic repudiation of the UNEAC. Arrufat spent the next fourteen years as a non-person, "in the basement of a library," waiting for his "rehabilitation." Today Arrufat appears to be filling the role of "critic within the revolution," tolerated by the regime and accorded certain privileges, such as permission to travel abroad. After nearly four decades in deep freeze, his play was finally staged in Havana. While on a visit to Miami, he gave an interview to the *El Nuevo Herald* wherein he feigned ignorance of the "Ladies in White" and of dissidents who have died in prison while on hunger strikes. Of the former, he said that he "had never seen any of them walking about the city. Nor do I believe that the Cuban people have seen them.' He added that world opinion has never had much influence on what happens in Cuba." ("Miami reúne a dramaturgos cubanos," *elnuevoherald.com*, March 26, 2010; Carlos Espinosa Domínguez, "Advertencias del rehabilitado," *cubaencuentro.com*, April 27, 2012.)

The "Ladies in White" are a group of women who peacefully demonstrate for the release of their husbands or other relatives serving time as political prisoners. The regime has combatted them in a heavy-handed manner, with rough arrests and the insults of their "black shirts." ("Cuban police haul protesting 'Ladies in White' away," *reuters.com*, March 17, 2010; Amnesty International, "Cuba's 'Ladies in White' targeted with arbitrary arrest and intimidation," *amnesty.org*, August 22, 2011.) It is not credible that Arrufat knows nothing about the "Ladies in White," although it is no doubt true that few Cubans have "seen" them in the way people "see" so much today, i.e. on television. The state-controlled media would have seen to that.

1968, including Padilla. That year, while on unpaid leave from the Foreign Ministry, he had accepted an invitation to serve on a three-person panel of judges of a literary contest sponsored by the *Casa de las Américas*.⁷⁶ Unbeknownst to Edwards or, presumably, Allende himself, the regime harbored a grudge against him from that

⁷⁶ This is how Edwards describes this institution in a footnote to an abridged English-language edition of what is his most famous book: “The Casa de las Américas is itself a fascinating subject for a book: Especially during the first ten or so years of the Revolution, through the sixties, it was a sponsor of many kinds of cultural events as well as literary prizes [earlier in the paragraph, he characterizes these prizes as “the Cuban (or Caribbean, or even Latin American equivalent of the Booker or Pulitzer prizes)], and in many ways acted as a kind of Ministry of Culture. Through it, Cuba’s national and international cultural policies were channeled (and in a government whose policies were as centralized as Cuba’s, that meant its ties to Castro himself were very close); its director had virtual cabinet rank within the government. The importance of the Casa de las Américas as a patron of literature and the arts, especially early on, at a time when virtually all liberals (and therefore, almost by definition, virtually all poets, playwrights, writers, and other artists) were eager supporters of the Cuban experiment, can hardly be overestimated.” Jorge Edwards, *Persona non Grata. A Memoir of Disenchantment with the Cuban Revolution*. Translated by Andrew Hurley. (New York, Paragon House, 1993), 3.

Along with all-expenses-paid trips to attend various international gatherings (e.g., a “cultural congress”) and Potemkin-like tours of Cuba, one may surmise that the *Casa* was one of Castro’s principal ways of procuring the support of the international literary left-set during the early years of his regime. They served to promote what Sorokin, in a study that does not mention the Cuban case, yet is applicable to it, called “sweet conceptions” of revolution: “Their authors are Don Quixotes of revolution who do not want to see the real prosaic girl of Toboso or the barber’s basin, and see in them the beautiful Dulzinea (sic) or wonderful knight’s helmet. . . .” Pitrim A. Sorokin, *The Sociology of Revolution* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967), 7. But the *Casa*’s functions have not been limited to literary affairs: according to Brian Latell, a retired CIA analyst, it “has always been entwined with intelligence.” *Castro’s Secrets, The CIA and Cuba’s Intelligence Machine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 115.

Incidentally, the *Casa*’s long-time director, Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado, who had participated in the Moncada assault along with her boyfriend and brother, who died not in the fighting, but murdered afterwards, ended her tenure by taking her own life on the 27th anniversary of that bloody event. Curiously, the Spanish-language Wikipedia devotes a very short entry to her, and makes no mention of her suicide, let alone of its symbolism.

earlier visit. At that time, over the lengthy and stubborn objections of the Cuban member of the panel, he had joined an Argentinian judge in awarding a prize to Norberto Fuentes for *Condenados de Condado*, a collection of stories about the crushing of anti-Castro peasant guerrilla forces in the Escambray Mountains in Central Cuba during the mid-1960s. According to Edwards, the stories

inspired by one of my favorite story-tellers, Isaac Babel, a victim of the Stalinist terror in the 1930s, had a dangerousness that had escaped me . . . [they] rejected the Manichean division of characters into worms⁷⁷ and heroes. In effect, José Norberto's stories, like those of Babel, on the basis of direct experience showed that war corrupts both sides, even as one represents the vanguard of history and the other its rear. Undoubtedly, such approach, especially at that time, could not be to the liking of Cuba's revolutionary power.⁷⁸

Edwards' nightmarish experiences during the four months he spent in Cuba became the subject of *Persona Non Grata*. It is beyond the scope of this article to do justice to this book. No less a literary authority than the Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz characterized it as "one of the truly vibrant classics of Latin American literature."⁷⁹ Suffice to say here that Edwards spent a good deal of time with Padilla, along with other Cuban writers who had fallen in disgrace. His conversations with them, as well as those

⁷⁷ In Spanish, *gusanos*, one of many contemptuous terms of abuse that Castro inflicts on all those who oppose his rule.

⁷⁸ Jorge Edwards, *Persona Non Grata* (Barcelona: Barral Editores, 1974), 36. I wrote an essay on this book more than three decades ago. See "Revolutionary Fascism: A Review of *Persona Non Grata*, by Jorge Edwards," *Libertarian Forum*, XIII, 1, January-February, 1980, 4-6. <http://uwf.edu/govt/documents/Cuzan-1980-RevolutionaryFacism.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Octavio Paz, "Preface," in Edwards, *A Memoir of Disenchantment*, ix.

with others, including one outside of Cuba, in Mexico, hosted by Carlos Fuentes, were surreptitiously recorded and, in some cases, photographed by agents or informants for Castro's State Security apparatus.⁸⁰ The topics of these conversations ranged widely, from literature to politics, and included references to the reign of terror, marginalization, and penurious circumstances under which all writers that did not do the regime's bidding lived. As Edwards observed, this situation was driving Padilla out of his mind. Afraid that State Security would confiscate the draft of a novel he was writing, *En Mi Jardín Pastan Los Héroes* ("Heroes are Grazing in my Garden"), Padilla carried it under his arm wherever he went. Padilla himself acknowledges that whenever he wishes to remember "the desperate and self-destructive being I was then, I read one of those chapters" in Edwards' book "where I slip away like a burlesque character from whom the author cannot part."⁸¹

On the eve of Edwards' departure from Cuba, Padilla was arrested and taken to the dreaded "Villa Marista," once the property of a religious educational order, now one of the seats of State Security, akin to the Lubyanka. Charged with "attempting against

⁸⁰ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 150-152, 177-178.

⁸¹ Ibid, 148. In an epilogue titled "La Doble Censura" ("The Double Censure"), included in a recent, abridged edition of his book, Edwards notes that the Uruguayan "Emir Rodríguez Monegal . . . analyzed better than anyone else up to now the relation between the non-fictional reality and the narrative of my book. He indicated, in passing, that my creation or recreation, however you want to call it, of the figure Heberto Padilla, was a 'tropical Stavrogin,' that is, one of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's possessed characters lost along the Havana seawall." Jorge Edwards, *Persona non Grata* (Providencia, Santiago de Chile: Alfaguara, 2006), 369.

the power of the State,”⁸² he was told to strip naked and put on the uniform of a prisoner.

“You never thought we would arrest you, did you?,” he was taunted. “You thought you were untouchable, the rebellious and untouchable artist that spends his time accusing us of being fascists? That we were going to overlook all your counterrevolutionary mischief? That you could attempt against the security of the State without being placed at the disposition of the First Military Tribunal at *La Cabaña*? [A prison where thousands of “counter-revolutionaries” were confined in subhuman conditions, and many were executed by firing squad.] . . . With the poison you spread all around us, you could have your own small history of infamy.” When told that his wife, Belkis Cuza Malé, was also under arrest, his eyes welled up with tears. “Cry if you want, it’s manly; but before declaring war on us you should have asked yourself if you were afraid of bullets. You are intelligent, we have no problem recognizing that; but we had to put an end to the situation of intellectuals in Cuba unless we wanted to end up as in Czechoslovakia, where writers took up the fascist banner, like that friend of yours, Yevtushenko, who is anti-communist and anti-Soviet.”⁸³

For the next five weeks and two days Padilla was held in isolation in a narrow cell, usually lit at all times, repeatedly and aggressively interrogated after midnight, insulted, beaten, and drugged. He was left completely alone for five consecutive days in

⁸² For several weeks leading to Padilla’s arrest, the armed forces, through one of its organs, the magazine *Verde Olivo* (“Olive Green”), waged an aggressive campaign of intimidation against him, insinuating that he had participated in acts against the state. Leante, *Anatomía*, 208. See, also, Díaz Martínez, “El Caso Padilla,” 163-164.

⁸³ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 149-150, 158.

total darkness, after which he became delirious. In one especially ghastly session, a “macabre rite,” several muscular henchmen took turns reciting his verses as they pushed, punched, kicked and slammed him onto a wooden floor. “The head, the forehead, the legs, all my body became a hodgepodge of pain. The last thing I remember was a bump against my nose and temples. . . .”⁸⁴ He regained consciousness as a “fat and ruddy-faced doctor” forced him to submerge his head into a pan of icy cold water. Taken to the emergency room of a military hospital, he was drugged and began to hallucinate. He saw scenes from his past—from childhood, New York City, airports through which he had passed. Waking up in his cell, he cried in shame. “Oh God, nothing has happened to me,” he cried out. “Everything has been the effect of a transgression of what is real. True suffering is that of those who struggled on behalf of a liberty that was betrayed.”

He reflects:

Over the years, I have come to know that definitely I was privileged and to some extent an accomplice to horror. Conscious or unconscious of what was taking place, I made no inquiries to ascertain whether in Cuba people were tortured for insignificant reasons. Afterwards I have thought of Huber Matos, Gutiérrez Menoyo, Sorí Marín, Pedro Luis Boitel, in all those who had joined with Fidel Castro in the insurrectional struggle only to find themselves kicked, tortured and even executed with a form of sadism that is far more refined and monstrous than that of a typical tyranny.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid, 173.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 174.

At one time, during a stay of several days in a military hospital, Castro came to see him.

“Today I have plenty of time to talk with you, and I think you do, too; moreover, we have a lot to talk about,” said the *comandante*. Yes, undoubtedly we had time to talk, or rather for him to discourse to his heart’s content, to *shit* on all the world’s literature, “because to send revolutionaries to fight is not the same as to send writers to fight, who in this country have never done anything for the people, neither in the last century nor in this one; they are always climbing onto the car of History.” The imposing chief haughtily towered across the no less imposing adversary dressed in a faded uniform, with a scar still bleeding on his forehead, with his entire body bruised by the immortal kicks of History.⁸⁶

To escape his ordeal, Padilla agreed to recite from memory, before important members of the UNEAC, but excluding Lezama Lima, to whom State Security would pay a separate visit, a statement of self-criticism composed while in confinement in which he would confess his errors and that of fellow writers. The statement would serve as the basis of a letter of repentance that would justify official clemency. Padilla surmises that the regime thought that this maneuver would diffuse the storm of protest in international literary circles provoked by his arrest.

Half-way through Padilla’s detention, a collection of prominent European and Latin American intellectuals—including Jean Paul Sartre⁸⁷ and Simone de Beauvoir;

⁸⁶ Ibid, 164.

⁸⁷ For two decades afterward, Sartre’s “*oeuvre* was banned from the curriculum; a novel by Jaime Sarusky that in its 1961 and 1962 editions included an excerpt from *La náusea* was reprinted in 1982 without it” (Díaz, *Palabras del Trasfondo*, 202).

future Nobel Prize Laureates Octavio Paz and Mario Vargas Llosa⁸⁸; Carlos Fuentes, Carlos Franqui, plus some two dozen others—wrote an open letter to “*Comandante* Fidel Castro, Prime Minister of the Revolutionary Government.” Expressing their “concern” about the “imprisonment of the poet and writer Heberto Padilla,” they “asked” him to “reexamine the situation that this arrest has created.” They declared that they “feared the return of a sectarian tendency far more violent and dangerous” than one that Castro himself had denounced in 1962, and one that *Comandante* Ché Guevara “had alluded to in various occasions to denounce the repression of the right to criticize within the bosom of the Revolution.” They warned that “the use of repressive measures against intellectuals and writers who have exercised the right to criticize within the Revolution can only have extremely negative repercussions among anti-imperialist forces the world over and, very especially in Latin America, where the Cuban Revolution represents a symbol and a banner.” They concluded by “reaffirming our solidarity with the principles that inspired the struggle in the *Sierra Maestra* and that the Cuban revolutionary government has expressed so many times by means of the words and actions of its Prime Minister, *Comandante* Ché Guevara, and so many other revolutionary leaders.”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Another future laureate, Gabriel García Márquez, also figured in the list, but without his permission. An intimate friend, Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, had been unable to reach him and erroneously assumed that his fellow Colombian would have wanted to be included. See his explanation and follow-up conversation with “Gabo” in *La llama y el hielo* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1984), 135-137, 140-144.

⁸⁹ The letter was originally published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on April 9, 1971 and received “ample dissemination in the Western press.” See “Document No. 12. First Letter of European and Latin American Intellectuals to Fidel Castro,” in Casal, *El Caso Padilla*, 74-75.

For his part, Padilla had figured that “Against the thug, there is no weapon other than intelligence or astuteness.”⁹⁰ Indeed, although few recognized it at first,⁹¹ Padilla’s long speech before the UNEAC assembly reads like a parody of the ritual of auto da fé that Stalinist victims performed on the way to their executions.⁹²

The speech was permeated with protestations that he was sincere, that he was really telling the truth, that he was truly grateful to “the Revolution” for the generosity of granting his wish to speak to his fellow writers, that he would never tire of making it clear that it was he who had asked for it, knowing very well that writers are distrustful, because he thought that his experience would be instructive for them. He said that he had spent many days in reflection and in conversation—conversations, he repeated, not interrogations—with the true revolutionaries of State Security. His had been an “exemplary experience.” Although it was difficult at first, he had come to accept the truths about his personality, his opinions, his conduct. He had “committed very many errors, errors that are unforgivable, really censurable, really unspeakable.” These errors

⁹⁰ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 163.

⁹¹ For an excellent analysis of the speech by one who was present, see Leante, *Anatomía del Castrismo*, 207-225. See, also, Eduardo Lobo, “Heberto Padilla: el revés de la máscara.” 173-198 in Heberto Padilla, *Fuera del Juego. Edición Conmemorativa, 1968-1998* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998).

⁹² In 1989, General Arnaldo Ochoa, whom only four years earlier Fidel Castro had designated as “Hero of the Revolution,” was accused along with several others of “treason” and put through the same ritual of self-degradation before a “military tribunal.” He and three others were sentenced to death by firing squad. Footage from the trial were incorporated in “8-A,” a documentary film directed by Orlando Jiménez Leal, in Spanish, Connoisseur/Meridian, 1997. The prosecuting attorney’s browbeating of the defendants is reminiscent of the 1943 treatment meted out to Sophie Scholl and her White Rose fellows by the “National Socialist People’s Court President” Roland Freisler (without his histrionics) as portrayed by André Hennicke in *Sophie Scholl—The Final Days*, in German, directed by Marc Rothmund, X Verleih AG (Germany) and Zeitgeist Films (USA), 2005.

were the product of his self-importance, petulance, ingratitude. He was enamored of his image as the *enfant terrible* of “the Revolution.” He had been the first—a sorry priority, to be sure—the first to infuse his writing with “resentment, bitterness, and pessimism, synonyms all of counterrevolution in literature.” But he had learned from the *compañeros* in State Security, “from their humility, from the artlessness, sensibility, warmth with which they perform their humane and revolutionary task, the difference between a man who wants to serve the Revolution and a man that is a prisoner of his defects of character and his vanities.” In his writings, in his gossiping with colleagues, and in conversations with foreign visitors and interviews with reporters who were agents of the enemy, he had injured and defamed “the Revolution,” “a revolution made ninety miles from imperialism, something that however many times is reiterated does not lose its verisimilitude.” He has seen “a quantity of enemies that come to our country disguised as playwrights, sociologists, photographers, whatever. Why do they come? To admire the Revolution? No!” There are exceptions, of course, but “they come to obtain information for the enemy, and they search for it in the cultural zones” where they can easily find critics. But he had cared more about his international reputation than about “the Revolution.” He repudiated his prize-winning book of poems, *Fuera del Juego*. “That book is filled with bitterness, filled with pessimism. That book is based on readings of other books, it does not express the experience of life, does not internalize the Cuban experience. We have to admit that. That book expresses disenchantment, and whoever appreciates it is only projecting his own disenchantment.” He spurned his *Heroes Graze in My Garden*, a novel that is “an embarrassment—I say this sincerely—not only politically but from a moral point of view.” “Fortunately, it will never be published,” “because that novel displays my defects and stains of character, my

problems, including my psychological problems, grave problems that, moreover, I have discovered in my solitude in State Security.” “The Revolution,” he repeated, had been “generous” in allowing him to make this speech, instead of committing him to a military tribunal. Despite what skeptics may think, this speech was his own idea. So much the worse for those who refuse to believe that he is being sincere, that he is telling the truth. He wants his fellow writers to learn from his experience, because to understand what he is saying, they would have to go through what he has been through. “The jail that I suffered . . . was not a coat of arms that I could display as a sacrifice against tyranny, but a moral, just jail, because it punished an evil against the Revolution and against our Country.” State Security knows that most of his colleagues have shared his defeatist attitude, his feelings of disenchantment, and “the Revolution” can no longer tolerate “the venomous conspiracy of all the little groups of the discontented in the intellectual and artistic zones.” State Security knows all about their conversations. State Security can treat them all as he was treated. So when he singled out several of them by name,⁹³ he wasn’t saying anything new. They all should all come forward and make their own confessions of errors, and, like him, become a soldier of “the Revolution.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Incidentally, it appears that at least two of those Padilla singled out by name as those among his fellow writers who needed to renounce their “objectively” counter-revolutionary ways, Norberto Fuentes and David Buzzi, may have been agents of State Security, inserted into the UNEAC as informants and agents provocateurs. Leante, *Anatomía*, 218-219.

⁹⁴ “Intervención en la Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba el martes 27 de Abril de 1971.” In Padilla, *Fuera del Juego*, 125-152.

And several did come forward to make their own acts of self-repudiation,⁹⁵ starting with his own wife, the writer and artist Belkis Cuza Malé.

Far from closing it, Padilla's self-abasement at the UNEAC only widened the breach between Fidel Castro and many among the international literati. The number of signatures affixed to a second letter fired off to the "Prime Minister of the Cuban Government" approached twice the number as the first. Published in Paris on May 20, 1971 and in Madrid the following day, the signatories expressed their "shame and rage" at the spectacle. "The pathetic text of the confession signed by Heberto Padilla could only have been obtained with methods that are the negation of revolutionary justice. The content and form of such confession, with its absurd accusations and delirious affirmations, as well as the event held at UNEAC . . . bring to mind the most sordid moments of the Stalinist epoch, with its prefabricated trials and witch hunts." The letter went on to "exhort" Castro "with the same vehemence" with which they had supported "the Cuban Revolution," not to duplicate "the dogmatic obscurantism, the cultural xenophobia, and the repressive system that Stalinism imposed in socialist countries, flagrant manifestations of which were events similar to those that are taking place in Cuba." Deploring the "contempt for human dignity" that is involved "in forcing a man ridiculously to accuse himself of the worst betrayals and vile acts," not because he is a writer but because "any Cuban *compañero*" "may be victim of similar violence and

⁹⁵ Self-criticism is another ritual that the regime imposes on its subjects. A quarter of a century after the Padilla case, following an explicit attack by Raúl Castro, researchers at the "Centro de Estudios de América" were required to write a confession of errors, its members disbanded. See Giuliano, *El Caso CEA*.

humiliation,” the letter concluded with the wish that “the Cuban Revolution would be once again what in one moment we considered it to be, a model within socialism.”⁹⁶

But Castro was through with the intellectuals.⁹⁷ They had served their purpose. Once they “had constituted the propagandistic spearhead of Havana’s totalitarian regime in the rest of the world.”⁹⁸ But he no longer had any use for them. He had made

⁹⁶ “Documento No. 17. Segunda Carta de los Intelectuales europeos y latinoamericanos a Fidel Castro.” In Casal, *El Caso Padilla*, 123. Several signatories of the first letter did not join in the second one. The case of Julio Cortázar was pathetic. Repenting of having signed the first letter, he abjectly abased himself with, among other things, a self-critical poem, “Policrítica en la hora de los chacales,” which the *Casa de las Américas* published. (<http://www.ciudadseva.com/textos/teoria/opin/cortaz8.htm>). See, also, Apuleyo Mendoza, *La Llama y el Hielo*, 129-139.

⁹⁷ Reed observes that in the Padilla Case “Castro’s intolerance was put on full display, and the New Left intellectuals who had fawned over him discovered that they had been worshipping a petty tyrant instead of a new messiah. It was the end of the Romance” (Reed, *Cultural Revolution*, 100). Actually, Cabrera Infante suspects that the affair served as an excuse for many leftist intellectuals who already had become disenchanted with “the Cuban Revolution” to part company with it (*Mea Cuba*, 115-117).

The break was long overdue. It bears noting, however, that the Latin American Studies Association has yet to follow suit. See my “Dictatorships and Double Standards: The Latin American Studies Association on Cuba,” <http://uwf.edu/govt/facultyforums/documents/lasa1.pdf>. It appears that little has changed in the nearly two decades since I wrote the first version of that essay. It may even be the case that the Association knowingly has turned over the “Task Force on Scholarly Relations with Cuba” to agents of Castro’s State Security. See the comments by Ted Henken and Harold Dilla in Juan O. Tamayo, “Espías cubanos se infiltran en grupo académico en EEUU,” *El Nuevo Herald*, April 26, 2013, <http://www.elnuevoherald.com/2013/04/26/1462836/espias-cubanos-se-infiltran-en.html>. See, as well, Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, “Precisiones sobre un debate: LASA/Cuba,” *Cubaencuentro*, April 29, 2013, <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/opinion/articulos/precisiones-sobre-un-debate-lasa-cuba-283996>.

⁹⁸ Lobo, “El Revés de la Máscara,” 198. Many continued to do so, joining the regime in pelting their fellow writers and former friends in the literary world with insults and calumnies. See Goytisolo, *Memorias*, 500-509.

that clear in a speech on May 1, nearly three weeks earlier. What follow are choice excerpts that display Castro in full contempt mode.⁹⁹

Sometimes certain books have been published, the number does not matter. But as a matter of principle not a single book of such kind should be printed, not a single chapter, not a single page, not a single letter!

.....

If you read a liberal bourgeois newspaper in Europe--and in Europe, for them, the problems of this country are . . . the problems of two or three stray sheep which may have some problems with the revolution because they are not given the right to continue to sow poison, insidiousness, and intrigue in the revolution.

.....

Certain matters regarding intellectual gossip have not been published in our newspapers. Then, what a problem, what a crisis, what a mystery, that these things do not appear in the newspapers. The fact, liberal and bourgeois gentlemen, is that these matters are of too little importance—so

⁹⁹ Fidel Castro, “Speech [Closing the First National Congress of Education and Culture].” FBIS Report, May 3, 1971. (Their translation.) Latin American Network Information Center. Downloaded August 23, 2012. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1971/19710501.html>. For an insightful analysis of the speech, see Leante, *Anatomía*, 235-250.

Castro’s verbal assault on the intellectuals were mild compared to the venomous vilifications and calumnies that throughout his tenure in power he poured on anyone who opposed or criticized him. He had the gift of Goebbels. In fact, according to Florentino Aspillaga Lombard, “the most informed and highly decorated officer ever to defect from Cuban intelligence,” in a speech at a Cuban military base in Luanda, Angola, Castro boasted that he “could lead the multitudes better than Goebbels” (Brian Latell, *Castro’s Secrets*, 3, 5).

much trash to occupy the attention of our workers and the pages of our newspapers.

. . . They want us by all means to give importance to such matters because they—these reactionary, bourgeois newspapers which are paid by imperialism, corrupt to the marrow and a billion [miles] distant from the problems of this revolution and from countries like ours—think such things are problems.

.

These matters have always been despised. I have referred to them only as an explanation to the liberal bourgeoisie. So they are at war with us, magnificent! They are going to be unmasked and left nude to the ankles. . . . the brazen pseudo-leftists who want to win laurels—living in Paris, London, and Rome. They are really brazen Latin Americans, who instead of being here in the trenches live in the bourgeois salons 10,000 miles from the problems and enjoy some of the renown that they won when they were initially able to express something of the Latin American problems.

As for Cuba, however, they will never be able to use Cuba again—never, not even to defend her. . . . With small lectures here to play the role of judges? No, to play the role of judges it is necessary to be a real revolutionary, a real intellectual, a true fighter.¹⁰⁰

In order to win a prize in a national or international competition, one must be a true revolutionary, a true intellectual, a real poet, a true revolutionary! That

¹⁰⁰ Recall Goebbel's decree that "critical evaluation of artistic output was permitted only to those who were judged to display a Nationalist Socialist 'purity of heart and outlook'" (Overy, *Dictators*, 371).

is clear, more clear than water, and the magazines and contests are not open to phonies. . . . There will only be a place for revolutionaries. So now you know, gentlemen bourgeois intellectuals and bourgeois liberals, and CIA agents of imperialism's intelligence and spy services--you cannot get into Cuba.

.

. . . How many times these gentlemen, these writers of trash, have won prizes. . . .

For a bourgeoisie, anything can have aesthetical value--anything that entertains him, that amuses him, that helps him to linger in his laziness and boredom as an unproductive bum and parasite. . . .

Following the Padilla Case, Cuba's literary and artistic world descended into a "dark age,"¹⁰¹ a time when "intellectuals qua intellectuals were suspect. . . . Contempt for independent judgment was institutionalized. All vestige of individual creativity was quashed. Meanness and denunciation were publicly rewarded, and taught to schoolchildren" ¹⁰² The works of the "witch doctors," foreign and domestic, were banned, the libraries purged of their books.¹⁰³ At the same time, crude specimens of

¹⁰¹ Reed, *Cultural Revolution*, "Chapter 3. The Dark Age (1968-1976)." This chapter includes a depressingly long list of novelists and poets who were expelled from the UNEAC and denied publication of their works. Some were arrested, charged with violating laws against "enemy propaganda," "clandestine printing" and other "counterrevolutionary" activities, and sentenced to prison or forced labor camps. A few writers even testified against their fellows at their "trials."

¹⁰² Juan Abreu, *A la sombra del mar. Jornadas cubanas con Reinaldo Arenas* (Barcelona: Editorial Casiopea, 1998), 20.

¹⁰³ Of those years, the protagonist in a recent Cuban novel recounts "the terrible bibliographic scarcity, of information and even of thought, that we suffered" on matters that were sensitive to the Soviet Union, such as the murder of Leon Trotsky. Leonardo Padura Fuentes, *El hombre que amaba a los perros* (Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2009, 318). Also, in Chapter 17 of Ampuero's *Nuestros Años Verde Olivo*, the narrator conspires with a friend who worked at a library to salvage books by Ortega y Gasset,

“socialist realism” were awarded prizes.¹⁰⁴ Henceforth, “vigilance and repression against the intellectual class was intensified like never before in Cuba; but its particulars would be unknown outside of Cuba. The number of non-persons grew substantially, with the implication that they, too, would be non-writing writers who, marginalized, could only opt for the strange method of ‘publication’ in the voluminous archives of State Security.”¹⁰⁵

But there is yet worse. As Jorge L. García Vázquez documents in his blog (www.stasi-minint.blogspot.com), following a 1974 speech by Raúl Castro denouncing “ideological diversionism,” the Ministry of Interior organized an exhibition that was reminiscent of Goebbels’ display of “degenerate art.” Included, *inter alia*, were a manuscript by Lezama Lima and fragments of a bomb that supposedly had exploded in a Cuban embassy. The work of one of Cuba’s most distinguished man of letters was thus

Octavio Paz, Arthur Koestler, Lezama Lima, Piñera, Padilla, Arrufat, Sarduy, Franqui, Cabrera Infante, and many others destined for warehousing or destruction.

Not only books were destroyed: Guignol’s puppets, the same ones “used in the representation of Lysistrata, were thrown into a bonfire: the spirit of comedy is one of the first victims of dogmatism. Hadn’t Aristophanes been condemned as ‘decadent’ in Stalin’s Soviet Union . . . ?” Díaz, *Palabras del Trasfondo*, 202.

¹⁰⁴ Díaz, *Palabras del Trasfondo*, 15-19, 127 ff.

¹⁰⁵ Reed, *Cultural Revolution*, 197. For how the protagonist of Padura’s novel, a writer, felt when turned into a “*nada*,” see *El Hombre*, 533-534.

Exemplifying the regime’s variety of “socialist realism” or “communist kitsch” was the sponsorship of peculiar adaptations of the police procedural and the spy novel by the Ministry of the Interior. In these romantic genres, as much at variance from actual reality as any of its counterparts in Stalin’s Russia or Hitler’s Germany, a vigilant people, in union with the *compañeros* of State Security and the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, always emerged triumphant in the war against the residues of the bourgeoisie, the counter-revolutionaries, and the CIA. The Mariel exodus put the lie to that story line. Díaz, *Palabras del Trasfondo*, 153 ff.

placed in the same company as a terrorist weapon. The message was clear. Literature was “something dangerous, a threat that had to be constantly repressed and returned to its proper place, which is no other than that of *el Mal* [kingdom of evil].”¹⁰⁶

As for Padilla, except for a short period when he was sent to the countryside to witness for himself the wonders that “the Revolution” was doing for the peasantry, for much of another decade he suffered ostracism and marginality, condemned to support himself by translating books.¹⁰⁷ Once, he approached Gabriel García Márquez when the latter was on one of his periodic visits to Cuba, asking that he intercede with Castro to allow him, his wife and young son to emigrate. García Márquez told him flat out that he would not do that, that Padilla could still do harm to “the Revolution.”¹⁰⁸

But despite this denial, García Márquez did intercede; that’s what Castro told Padilla in March, 1980, only days before his departure, when he was summoned to the presidential palace for one last conversation with the tyrant. In that meeting, Castro echoed what he had told his Orthodox Party colleagues in that campaign trip three decades earlier. “. . . In a revolution [State Security] is inevitable. In a revolution there may be enemies who are sincerely mistaken, but they are always dangerous. To establish a new society, a front of national unity is required. Marx and Lenin were

¹⁰⁶ Díaz, *Palabras del Trasfondo*, 149. A copy of the exhibition’s program is available at <http://elveraz.com/pdf/lezama.pdf>. See, also, José Antonio Ponte, “Lezama en los archivos de la Stasi,” *El Veraz*, <http://elveraz.com/articulo1152.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ In Ampuero’s story, Padilla comes across as a nervous wreck (something Padilla himself owns when describing a conversation with Alejo Capentier—see *Mala Memoria*, 232) who, in deadly fear of the political police that kept watch on him, had taken to drink. See, e.g., *Nuestros Años Verde Olivo*, 279-283.

¹⁰⁸ Padilla, *Mala Memoria*, 229.

prototypes of revolutionaries, and were implacable with their enemies.” Padilla recalls what Castro had written to his mistress while in the comfortable confinement that Batista had reserved for him after he was convicted for the Moncada assault:

“Robespierre was idealistic and honest until death. The revolution was in danger . . . it was necessary to be hard, inflexible, severe, to err on account of excess, never on the side of insufficiency when this can mean failure. Months of terror were necessary to put an end to a terror that had lasted centuries. What Cuba needs is many Robespierres.”¹⁰⁹

The next morning, at a meeting in the suite of Havana’s Riviera Hotel where he was staying, Padilla had a conversation with García Márquez in which the latter tells him

“. . . [I]t is embarrassing for me always to carry a list of names for whom to intercede before Fidel. One of these days he will get tired of it; but my question is this: Heberto, to what do you attribute that a country like Cuba has the same problems with writers as the Soviet Union?”

His question surprised me, as I thought he had answered it already in his intelligent reporting on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Noting my surprise, he added, “I assure you, whatever your answer may be, it won’t go any further, I am very discreet.”

“But Gabriel, those very words of yours are part of the answer.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 255-256, 257.

Still smiling, he told me: “It appears that this dilemma has no solution in any socialist country. The Soviet Union has not solved it in more than sixty years.”¹¹⁰

Discussion

The question García Márquez posed to Padilla is similar to one that Overy posited in *Dictators: Hitler’s Germany, Stalin’s Russia*. He explained the effort “to exclude any influence defined at the time as subversive, decadent or ambiguous” on the societies under their rule in the following way:

The decision stemmed first from the central utopian ideologies of the two systems, which deliberately constructed a particular version of reality for which there could not be an alternative. The result was a deliberate cultural autarky or self-sufficiency, sheltering both populations as far as possible from external cultural influences and encouraging the development of popular domestic art. Although the lives of many of those who lived through the dictatorships bore little relation to the stated reality, neither system was prepared to tolerate a single violation of the artistic or, by implication, the political norms. *The deep fear of exposure to reality* explains why the regulation was so thorough and absurd.

...¹¹¹

But did Hitler or Stalin, or Castro, for that matter, “fear” “exposure to reality”? Reality, after all, is what the population experiences in their daily lives. A case in point: For half a century ordinary Cubans endured dilapidated housing, shortages of consumer

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 262.

¹¹¹ Overy, *Dictators*, 390. My emphasis.

goods, shoddiness in those that are available and usually after queuing up sometimes for hours, assignments to dead-end jobs at low wages, inadequate transportation, long waits to see a physician, arbitrariness and pettiness by some bureaucrats and imperiousness on the part of others, intrusive meddlesome by neighborhood “defenders of the Revolution,” being excluded from stores, neighborhoods, and resorts reserved for foreigners and members of the ruling elite; having to enroll their children in Communist Party youth organizations if they wanted them admitted to the better schools or the university, to sacrifice some of the little leisure time they have to do “volunteer” labor on this or that project or campaign with nothing to show for it; to attend boring Communist Party or block meetings, recite mind-numbing slogans,¹¹² and listen for hours, either glued to the television or the radio or standing under a boiling sun at a mass rally, there to applaud “the interminable speeches and the infinite and ever more delirious insanities”¹¹³ of a seemingly eternal tyrant; suffered the loss of a relative or friend from death in one of Castro’s adventures abroad, or from imprisonment or exile; fear of punishment for laughing at the wrong joke or discussing taboo subjects; waste,¹¹⁴

¹¹² For a list of slogans as tiresome to read as must have been to parrot, see Eliseo Alberto, *Informe Contra Mí Mismo* (Mexico: Alfaguara, 1997), 35-38.

¹¹³ Abreu, *A la sombra del mar*, 20.

¹¹⁴ On the enormous waste of Castro’s harebrained schemes, see José Alvarez, *Fidel Castro’s Agricultural Follies. Absurdity, Waste, and Parasitism* (Wellington, FL: José Alvarez, 2014). On Cuba’s economy pre-Castro compared to today’s, see Marianne Ward and John Devereux, “The Road Not Taken: Pre-Revolutionary Cuban Living Standards in Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Economic History*, 72, 1, pp. 104-132. On Castro’s looting of Cuba to make himself a world figure, see Jorge A. Sanguinetti, “La Transfiguración de la Economía,” [“The Transfiguration of the Economy”], in Efrén Córdoba, Editor, *50 Años de Revolución en Cuba. El Legado de los Castro* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 2009), pp. 73-94. See, also, María Werlau, “[Fidel Castro, Inc.](#): A Global Conglomerate,” *Cuba in Transition*, 2014, Vol. 15, pp. 376-95.

corruption,¹¹⁵ scandalous inequalities, injustice, and so on and on. The contrast between the mirages portrayed by the regime and the reality experienced in everyday life cannot escape them. People do not need a novel, play, or film to make them aware of it all.

So what is it, then, that dictators in totalitarian regimes fear, if that is, in fact, the passion that motivates them to control the culture, to wage a war on writers and other members of the *intelligentsia* who will venture beyond the barbed wires of what the party-state will tolerate? What they fear is public negation of the *Lie*. These regimes are constructed on a mountain of lies, lies that their rulers not only propagate, but force the population to assent to, to pretend to believe.¹¹⁶ The principal lie, the lie of all lies that constitutes the keystone of the regime, is the claim that it is not a dictatorship at all, but a real, a true democracy where the people and the government are one, unanimous as they march arm in arm into a happy future that is reserved for them by “History.” How many Cubans could really believe Fidel Castro when he said, as he did in the “First

¹¹⁵ On corruption in Castro’s regime, from top to bottom, see Sergio Díaz-Briquets and Jorge Pérez López, *Corruption in Cuba. Castro and Beyond* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), Chapters 4 and 5. For a photographic display of how the Castro regime elite lives, see Michael Dweck, *Habana Libre* (Damiani, 2011). Also, see Hugo Araña, “El pobrecito ‘enfant’ de Castro,” *Cubaencuentro*, June 26, 2013, <http://www.cubaencuentro.com/cuba/articulos/el-pobrecito-enfant-de-castro-285312>.

¹¹⁶ See Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (University of Chicago Press, 2007), Ch. 11, “The End of Truth.” Timur Kuran’s theory of revolution is based on the premise that under repressive regimes there is a large difference between private and public opinion, between what people actually believe and what they are willing to say or do in public for fear of retribution. He calls this phenomenon “preference falsification.” Only those with a low threshold for defying the regime, mostly people with an inordinately high expressive need, will refuse to live the lie expected of them. Their example encourages others to come out of the dissident closet (my phrase, not his), and if the regime fails to repress them in a timely fashion, their numbers will swell as people perceive that the risks of opposing the regime have fallen. See his *Private Truths, Public Lies. The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification* (Harvard University Press, 1995).

Congress of Education and Culture” (of which there was little of either), held only a few days after Padilla’s farcical self-degradation at the UNEAC assembly, where all “resolutions” were approved by unanimity, that “Various opinions were advanced with absolute frankness, with absolute freedom—such as is inconceivable in any other society except a socialist one”?¹¹⁷

People are forced to live a lie, to adopt a *doble moral*, as they say in Cuba, to wear a mask of obedience or even enthusiasm that shields feelings of indifference, apathy, weariness, disbelief, frustration, disgust, or anger.¹¹⁸ But because everyone wears a

¹¹⁷ Fidel Castro, “Speech [Closing the First National Congress of Education and Culture].” FBIS Report, May 3, 1971. (Their translation.) Latin American Network Information Center. Downloaded August 23, 2012. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1971/19710501.html>.

Fidel Castro’s boast is reminiscent of Stalin’s bluff about his 1937 “constitution”: “Never before in the world have there been such genuinely free and genuinely democratic elections, never! History know no other example [applause] . . . our elections are the only genuinely free and genuinely democratic elections in the whold world [loud applause]” Quote in Martin Amis, *Koba the Dread. Laughter and the Twenty Million* (Vintage International Edition, 2003, pp. 191-192).

Carlos Franqui writes that “Castro is a master in the art of the lie; he always lies, and in that manner maintains his power. . . .” Franqui, *Cuba, la revolución*, 314. On the eve of the Moncada assault, Castro brazenly lied to his men, assuring them that elements within the garrison and in the air force had agreed to join them in the fight. See de la Cova, *Moncada Attack*, 74-75.

¹¹⁸ A decade into “the Revolution,” Carlos Franqui, having fallen into disgrace and rendered vulnerable to his enemies inside the regime, still needed to believe in it. “The virus of revolution is horrible and dangerous; once it penetrates you, it infects you and imprisons you in its labyrinthine nets.” Although he had come to regard “the Revolution” as a worse injustice than the Batista regime that preceded it, he hesitated to “break definitively” with it. Wearing a “mask in part and only as an act of legitimate self-defense,” he “resisted supporting it any longer, denials that spared me from being a bureaucrat, a living dead, parroting slogans, an absolute cynic that said the opposite of what he believed and that obeyed blindly, no matter what madness, injustice or crime had to be committed against a best friend, an innocent colleague—no, not a bureaucrat, never.” *Cuba, la revolución*, 340-342.

mask, people cannot tell who is telling the truth and who is not, who is for real and who is not, who is a true believer, who an opportunist, and who is simply hiding behind a mask. Suspicion and distrust of one another keep most people isolated.¹¹⁹ Society is atomized. Under those conditions, freely combining with others for political or any other public purpose is very difficult. Nearly everyone is afraid¹²⁰ to protest or oppose the regime because, in the absence of others joining them in large numbers, the lone protestor faces the certainty of punishment. But if a novelist, poet or playwright, someone for whom almost by definition the expressive need is greater than most, works up the courage to deny or mock the Lie *and gets away with it*, the myths of representation at the core of the regime, of its self-image and self-justification, are debunked. Suddenly, the emperor is stripped of his clothing. As first a few and then more members of the general public read and talk about a poem or a novel that resonates with their perceptions of reality, they find their own voices and work up the courage to confront the subsidiary lies in their own particular spheres of life, in their neighborhoods, at work, at their children's school, etc. As they do so, like-minded others are emboldened to speak up, too. The masks start falling away. This can well trigger a snowballing or bandwagon effect.¹²¹ Groups assemble, and their combinations

¹¹⁹ Havana was a place “where anyone could be drafting a report, an evaluation of your political activities in the hope of earning a badge of revolutionary merit that would allow him, with a bit of luck, to obtain an electric fan made in China at the next workers’ assembly on the job. . . .” Abreu, *A la sombra del mar*, 20.

¹²⁰ On the pervasive fear that accosted so many in Castro’s Cuba, see Padura, *El Hombre*, 754.

¹²¹ In *Private Truths, Public Lies*, Timur Kuran argues that in deciding whether to voice his true opinions, an individual in a dictatorship weighs three things: his preferences for policy (or regime), his need to express these preferences, and the consequences in the form of ostracism or punishment. For a select few, the expressive need outweighs

multiply their impact. All it takes now is a small event that serves as a catalyst for demonstrations or even disorder, e.g., riots, and consequent loss of control.¹²²

History is recovered,¹²³ rescued from the commissars that had kept it under wraps, or had mangled, maimed, and disfigured it with distorted versions of the past.¹²⁴ And as truths replace lies in the forming of public opinion, it draws into itself minds up and down the social hierarchy, including those belonging to members of the regime,

the dread of the dungeon. In light of what I say in the text about the expressive need of writers and artists, it is interesting how many times Kuran cites the examples of Vaclav Havel, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and other dissident writers in his discussion of the collapse of communism in Europe.

¹²² Here is Cabrera Infante: “. . . There are tyrants who have ordered the execution of a poet because a sonnet or two did not rhyme. But sonnets, in a totalitarian regime, are an irritant that one day can metamorphose into the horsefly of political disturbances and even rhyme with street uprisings” (*Mea Cuba*, 363).

¹²³ For how this process was integral to the rebirth of an independent Estonia, see Rein Taagepera, *Estonia. Return to Independence* (Westview Press, 1993), pp. 130-139; Toivo Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians. Updated Second Edition* (Hoover Institution Press, 2001), pp. 236-239; Vello Pettai, *Elections in Estonia, 1990-1992: Transitional and Founding* (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 2012), pp. 40-41.

¹²⁴ As in Stalin’s Russia, in Castro’s Cuba the regime attempts to obliterate from history people and events with such Orwellian practices as altering photos and erasing names from official accounts of the past. Huber Matos, Carlos Franqui, José Pardo Llada, and Guillermo Cabrera Infante are only among the best known cases of those cast into the memory hole. Even Haydée Santamaría Cuadrado has received this treatment. As mentioned earlier, she took her own life on the 27th anniversary of the Moncada assault, something that could be interpreted as a symbolic act of protest against the regime. An issue of *Casa de las Américas*, the magazine she founded, dedicated to dead collaborators, did not even mention her. See Carlos Franqui, *Cuba, la revolución*, 267, 373. Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*, 281-283, and Cabrera Infante, “Un mes lleno de lunes,” in Luis, *Lunes de Revolución*, 141. See, also, Ricardo González Alfonso, “La Revolución Verde-Olvido (sic.). En un relevo de generaciones,” *Revista Hispano Cubana*, No. 44, Noviembre-Diciembre 2012, 66-70. The title is a play on words: The author substitutes “olvido,” which means forgotten, for “olivo,” which means olive. Olive-green is the color of the Castro regime’s armed forces uniform. Also, see how the protagonist of Padura’s novel reacts when Russia’s 20th century history is recovered beginning with Gorbachev’s *glasnost*. *El Hombre*, 546.

including at least some in the highest circles, demoralization among its cadres sets in, the result of shame at having been the instruments of the Lie.¹²⁵ The very foundations of the regime are shaken, the façade of unanimity cracks, the keystone tumbles, and the regime collapses. It did not take long for Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* to bring about these results in the once mighty empire of the Soviet Union.¹²⁶ For, as David Hume said, it is on opinion only

that government is founded; and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and most popular. The soldan of Egypt, or the emperor of Rome, might drive his harmless subjects, like brute beasts, against their sentiments and inclination. But he must, at least, have led his mamalukes or prætorian bands, like men, by their opinion.¹²⁷

Conclusion

Over the years, in Cuba as in Russia, a good number of opportunistic scribes and even a few talented writers climbed onto the “car of ‘History’,” ready to compromise artistic integrity for the privileges and security that were to be found “inside the

¹²⁵ For how this process eroded the foundations of the “German Democratic Republic,” see Manfred Wilke, “Wiesler’s Turn to Dissidence and the History behind the Film,” Chapter Two in Paul Cooke (Ed.), *“The Lives of Others” and Contemporary German Film. A Companion* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2013).

¹²⁶ Martin Amis sees it similarly: “. . . *Glasnost*, which was a euphemism for not lying, laughed the Bolsheviks off the stage. The poets had talked about the inhuman power of the lie—but there is an antithesis to that: the human power of the truth. Lying could no longer be enforced, and the regime fell. . . .” Amis, *Koba*, p. 48. See, also, Kuran, *Private Truths, Public Lies*, 261-275.

¹²⁷ David Hume, “On The First Principles of Government.” In *The Project Gutenberg EBook of Essays, by David Hume*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/36120/36120-h/36120-h.htm>

Revolution.”¹²⁸ Some, abjectly, composed the equivalent of odes to their lord and master. In the worst of cases, they excused or denied his crimes and barbarities, and even lent their pens for the purpose of character assassination or “repudiation” of heretics in the crosshairs of the regime. Still others, willingly or unwillingly but prudently, affixed their names to open letters rejecting criticism of the regime by exiled writers and artists, tarring them as propagandists for “the enemy.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Abreu reports that “The majority of our intellectuals, sad to say, submitted; abandoning their principles, they applauded frenetically, submissively accepting and in many cases justifying and with their reputations stamping a seal of respectability on the outrages visited on those who did not bow down.” Abreu, *A la sombra del mar*, 33. See, also, the comments of Orlando Jiménez Leal concerning the cineaste Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, in Zayas and Jiménez Leal, *El Caso PM*, 150-151, 157-158. Of course, one must allow for a number of honorable men and women who simply could not bring themselves to part with the country of their birth or undergo years of separation from their families, a price that a vengeful regime exacted on those who managed to “desert” “the Revolution,” i.e., escape to freedom. This may have been the case of the poet and novelist Dulce María Loynaz, awarded Spain’s prestigious Premio Miguel de Cervantes in 1992. For most of the time from 1959 until her death in 1997, she lived in a sort of internal exile. Incidentally, of the other two winners of this prize, one, Alejo Carpentier, remained “inside the Revolution,” but spent most of his time outside Cuba, representing the regime in international organizations and as cultural attaché in its embassy in Paris, where he died and is buried. Padilla recalls his last conversation with him, in which he (Carpentier) told him, “We cannot pick a fight with the Left, be it one-eyed, lame, or ugly. . . .” (*Mala Memoria*, 231-232). Juan Arcocha has a hilarious portrait of “the great writer,” as the protagonist of *La Bala Perdida* (pp. 64-68, 70-72, 118-119) calls Carpentier, mouthing platitudes on behalf of the Castro regime. The other winner, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, exiled in 1965, was one of Castro’s most eloquent and insightful critics. See his collection of essays, *Mea Cuba*, especially “Mordidas del caimán barbudo,” “Entre la historia y la nada,” “Prisioneros de la Isla del Diablo,” “Un retrato familiar,” and “Los poetas a su rincón.”

¹²⁹ The treatment was not limited to Cuban exiles: The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, too, received an insulting and calumnious letter signed by, *inter alia*, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Edmundo Desnoes, and Lisandro Otero (Oriol Puertas, “La huella divergente de Pablo Neruda,” *Encuentro en la red. Diaro independiente de asuntos cubanos*, September 28, 2004. <http://arch1.cubaencuentro.com/cultura/20040720/foa36a8a1645b3e8618ebf2fa872f8aa/1.html>

Nevertheless, a single great writer faithful to the truth is all it takes to deal delegitimizing blows against even the mightiest dictatorship. The impact may not be immediate, but it is sure and lasting. A Pasternak, a Solzhenitsyn, and yes, although not in the same league as these two, even a Padilla, Davids to the totalitarian Goliath, bear witness to this. They had to be repressed because, as Leante puts it in his analysis of the Padilla case, “a Revolution, an enormous lie erected as goddess of truth, cannot survive without imposing coercion and violence, annihilating all that can unmask her, for despite its apparently enormous size its feet are made of clay and is more fragile, vulnerable, and brittle than *Licenciado Vidriera* thought he was.”¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Leante, *Anatomía*, 225. A *licenciado* is a law school graduate. A *vidriera* is a glass window, case, or cover. The reference is to a character in a novel by Cervantes where a *licenciado* comes to believe that his body is made of glass. See *The Licentiate Vidriera; or Dr. Glass-Case*. Project Gutenberg, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/14420/14420-h/14420-h.htm#THE_LICENTIATE_VIDRIERA_OR_DOCTOR_GLASS_CASE.

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