The Other Tempest

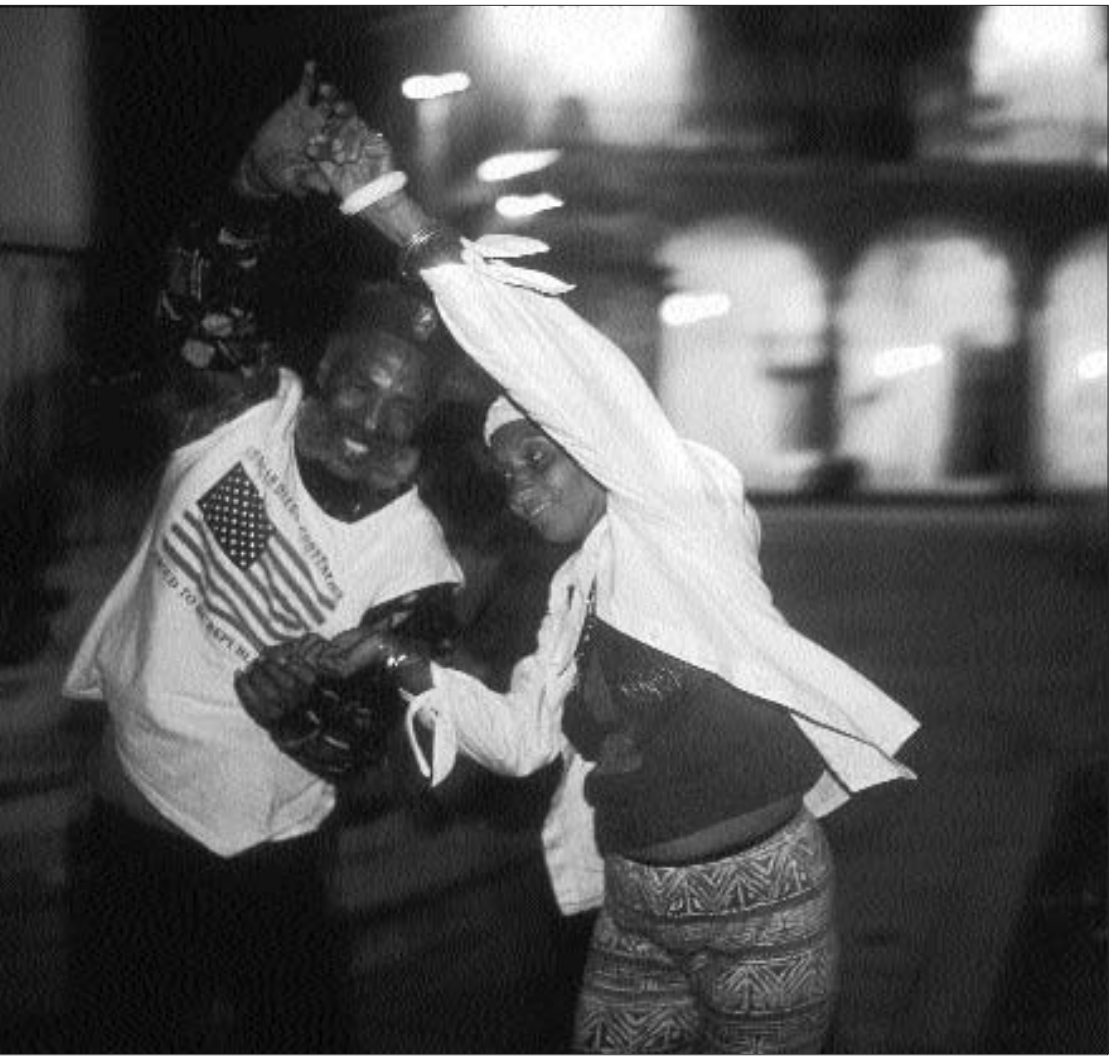
As they try to imagine a future without Fidel Castro, Cubans are enacting a drama far more significant than the saga of Elián González.

by Bob Shacochis

In April, as the tempo of the Elián González custody dispute accelerated toward its predawn climax in Miami, across the Florida Straits in Havana, news of Elián was temporarily eclipsed by less sensational, if no less predictable, headlines: Fidel Castro's pro forma denunciation of the global market economy at the Group of 77 South Summit (the underdeveloped nations' version of the Group of 7), and traffic-snarling demonstrations at the Czech Embassy protesting that republic's UN resolution condemning, for the second year in a row, human rights violations in Cuba. The bitter divisions within the Cuban family, free-market systems, civil liberties—these aging issues, intermittently masquerading behind new faces, obscure the fact that for the past decade, Cuba has successfully transformed itself from Potemkin village to Investment City. It is institutionalizing economic arrangements (if not top-to-bottom reforms) that for all intents and purposes will one day undermine both the mundane and the mythic pillars of Castro's "unfinished" revolution.

What might remain, or by any reasonable standard should remain, of Cuba's revolution in the uncertain years ahead is the question of the day. Will the assembled heirs, the generation of young, intelligent leaders well positioned to carry on the affairs of the Cuban state, remain, in whatever fashion or degree, ideologically betrothed to the revolutionary past and its ghostscape of glories, even as they improvise on Castro's stubborn politics of contradiction (which amount to a risky prescribed burn of capitalism through Cuba's debris-strewn socialist wilderness)?

Whatever the case, the Cuba of today is not the bleak, starving, demoralized Cuba of 10 years ago, or five years ago; in fact, the re-energized streets of Havana resonate most evocatively with a Cuba that hasn't existed for more than 40 years. Significant changes have already affected the contours of Cuban society, perhaps irreversibly, and today a widespread acceptance that



In Old Havana, a Cuban couple dances in the street outside a tourist club they are not allowed to enter.

changes even more profound are just around the historical corner has settled into the Cuban psyche. What most interested me, when I traveled to the island this spring, was determining how concerned the Cubans themselves were about their future *as Cubans*, as a patriotic people invested emotionally and morally in their country and its destiny, even as an afterchill of the expired Cold War continues to numb and restrict their movement toward freedoms taken for granted throughout Western culture (of which Latin American culture is no small part). Pathetically, Cuba is still at war these days, mostly with Jesse Helms and a relentless battalion of its own hate-inspired Miami relatives, but the ideological tide of the conflict has ebbed with history, stranding both sets of scarred antagonists on opposite shores of ego, paranoia, and passionate delusion.

Not surprisingly, whomever I spoke with—tobacco workers and cab drivers and families at the beach, housewives and artists and hitchhikers—readily expressed interest in preserving the revolution's trio of hard-earned accomplishments: the educational system that has endowed Cuba with the highest literacy rate in the world, a universal health care system internationally acknowledged for the

expertise of its doctors and the ingenuity of its research and pharmacological entities, and social security programs that provide pensions, housing benefits, and food subsidies to most of the population. Indeed, any post-Castro, or post-revolutionary, government would be guilty of negligence, a careless disregard for the (re)established social standard of life, however modest, for the average Cuban, if it allowed the status quo in these areas of society to erode, as happened in the early '90s. Save education and health care and the roofs over our heads, people on the street seemed to be saying, and the rest can go, for all we care.

But to guarantee a place for the revolution in the country's future won't be as simple as all that, and in my conversations with Cuban writers at the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC)—the organization within the Ministry of Culture that oversees the arts—in a once-elegant mansion in Havana's Vedado district, I was exposed to a far more complex and revealing perspective on the revolution's potential legacy.

"For me," said Francisco Sacha, the president of UNEAC's Writers' Association, "the first thing that must survive from the revolution is the culture. If we save the culture, we will have saved the nation. A way of life, expression, communication. Popular traditions. And art, literature. The first thing. Where the revolution is strongest, where the deepest roots are, is in the life of the people. The other things will modify: the economy, the politics, the social situation, the legal system. But it stays and it grows, the Cuban culture. That's the foundation.

"Certain capitalist spirits and prejudices can endanger future social development. Specifically, economic changes. The capitalist culture is antithetical to Cuban culture, which is an ethical culture," Sacha insisted. "Our culture is not a business."

And yet that is exactly the paradoxical effect of Castro's reinvention of Cuba as a tourist destination: It has gradually turned Cuban culture into an enterprise, and created a parallel economy within the socialist state, comfortably inhabited by multinational corporations—real estate conglomerates, banks, car rental agencies, resort companies—that fueled economic growth of more than six percent in 1999. An expanding sector of the population devotes itself to constructing, operating, and servicing this world of pleasure and luxury superimposed on, and yet increasingly a part of, the texture of Cuban life, if not culture per se, since Cubans themselves are forbidden access to this world and its temptations except as employees. But what does it mean that tourist revenues—$1.7 billion last year—and remittances (*remesas*)—about $800 million annually—from Cubans overseas, mostly in the United States, are solely responsible for the relative vitality of the economy? Perhaps it means that Cuban economic viability has grown dependent on two sources—foreign investors and exiles—that are anathema to its revolution and bewildering to its national identity, which is to say, its culture.

This contradiction, this dichotomy and its dizzying balancing act, is at the heart of the current Zeitgeist in Cuban society. "Within the revolution, everything; outside the revolution, nothing," Castro proclaimed 39 years ago, a truth severely tested throughout the "special period" of the '90s, and never so relevant as it is today. Clearly, at the moment in Cuba, anything is possible *within the revolution*—two economies, two cultures, a population of *haves* (Cubans with dollars) and *have-nots* (Cubans with pesos)—even a dual morality (*la doble moral*), the epidemic blend of massive (albeit petty) corruption and revolutionary fidelity that is the product of two intertwining survival tactics practiced by the population: loyalty to the state, and stealing from the state.

What then is the revolution, suddenly so porous and mutable, so strained by paradox? Castro's ability to beach Cuban culture securely on the rocks

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A familiar slogan adorns a construction site wall at the Varadero beach resort: "Socialism or Death."

of the future may be all that's really left of the once potent journey. His undiminished domestic power, supplemented by whatever moral nostalgia he can summon (in contrast to the enormous moral credibility the 26-year-old Castro commanded so brilliantly during his "History Will Absolve Me" defense against the Batista regime in 1953), presents him with that opportunity, if little else. Yet one must wonder if Castro, the tireless navigator, has already lost control of the culture, by doing what Gorbachev could not, or would not, do to hold together the Soviet Union—slowly sipping the "poison" of capitalism in an attempt to immunize the revolution against a free fall into the contagion of democracy, and thus preserve the authority of the centralized state.

Ironically, with the exception of the humble Lada automobile, 30 years of intense interaction between the Soviets and the Cubans left no trace of Soviet culture on the island, a testimony to both the strength of Cuban culture and the incompatibility of Soviet culture with anything but itself, especially Afro-Caribbean sensibilities. On the other hand, as Francisco Sacha lamented during our conversation, no culture is immune to American culture. "When I first went to Cuba," said Jean-Paul Sartre in 1974, "I remember that one of the Cubans' chief concerns was to resuscitate their old culture . . . to guard against the absorbing influence of the United States."

"Every part of the postmodern aesthetic," said Sacha, recognizing that the problem for Cubans has only magnified in the passing years, "is to take the subculture and assimilate it into the mainstream culture. That's the core of our fear. If we're not able to achieve a more authentic culture, we're in danger of losing. And that's the fight of Cuban culture today. The world doesn't need another Miami—it needs a real, authentic Havana.

"There are laws for cultural protection, so that the great predator of tourism does not destroy the culture, which happens so often in developing countries. We've argued about [tourist apartheid]. Every ministry in Cuba connected with tourism has set up a list of accords to confront these problems. As a base for these accords, they're using rules established by UNEAC to guide architects. We don't want this to be

another Cancún. We're trying to humanize Varadero [a huge new beach resort]—they don't have an urbanization plan. This is part of the spirit of the writer."

The word "authentic" is, of course, problematic, though it also seems true that a quality loosely defined as "authenticity," or timelessness, has been nurtured in Cuba's culture, thanks to the decades-long insularity of the U.S. embargo. Any objective visitor to Cuba senses this immediately: Cuban popular culture (the music, the sensuality, the spirit of the people) is as strong and rich as its coffee, although increasingly less pure (but no less seductive) as it drags in the world. One wishes the writers good luck in their attempt to dilute the artificiality of Varadero, which was filled with sullen, bored Europeans during my last visit to Cuba. The island hosted 1.5 million tourists in 1999. Add an estimated 50,000 *yanqui* vacationers a month into the mix once the embargo is lifted, and theme parks can't be far behind: Ché vying with Mickey Mouse for brand-name recognition.

Listening to Francisco Sacha discuss the polarity between culture and business, I was reminded of a similar conversation I'd had 11 years earlier, as a debt-ridden "revolutionary" Mexico sought economic salvation in mass tourism. At the time, I took a walk on an unpaved coastal road on Mexico's southwestern coast with Dr. Ricardo Ferré, the regional director of Fonatur, the National Trust Fund for Tourism Development, the federal agency given oversight of the Banco de Mexico's 30-year plan to construct five megaresorts that would serve as economic detonators at the nucleus of a moribund economy. Cancún, begun in 1970, was the first of these resorts; Hualtulco, in the destitute state of Oaxaca, was the last, and Ferré was the helmsman for its nascent metamorphosis from virtually uninhabited malarial coastline to a thriving tourist mecca with a projected permanent population of 600,000.

Ferré, who described himself whimsically as a "soul engineer," told me of an experience he'd had earlier in the day, out on his morning constitutional through the still-untamed countryside. In the misty light he crested a hill and saw, there in the road, horses, wild horses, "savage horses," as he called them. They stampeded and, electrified by the sound of their hooves, Ferré had the fantastic feeling he was in prehistoric times, clutching a stone in his hands. I suggested to him that such an experience could be placed on the endangered list: Five years hence, his revelatory moment couldn't possibly exist in Hualtulco unless he fabricated it himself.

"Exactly," Ferré agreed. "But this is a laboratory of what happened many years ago in different parts of the world, a laboratory for what happens when society shifts from a neolithic peasant pattern into a society that is an urban society. It's the new city coming into reality. What I want to prove are the limits of Utopia. If possible."

I inquired about his plans to manufacture cultural ambiance in Hualtulco, since he had, in the process of raising his city, already destroyed what little indigenous culture existed there before his arrival. Would he have to ship Mexico's traditional culture in from the mountains for the tourists? "Yes," he admitted. "That's engineering, social engineering. I will take many ideas from Mao's Cultural Revolution," he laughed. One of Ferré's pet projects was to remake the local subsistence fishermen who lived on the beach (but were now being forcibly relocated) into "businessmen with big, big boats." (The difference between Fidel and Ferré, of course, is that Ferré would let the boatmen keep their profits, minus federal taxes. Fidel's fishermen would be entitled only to their paychecks from the state: about $8 a month, the average wage in Cuba.)

The decision for Ferré was without angst, without ambivalence. Hualtulco's transactions would employ hundreds of thousands; its opportunities would provide a catalyst for democratization and upward mobility. What was the value of traditional culture, "authentic" culture, a culture of poverty and sacrifice, compared with that? That a hard-scrabble but spiritually rich way of life might be transformed into a homogenized global culture stamped with a Mexican impri-

matur seemed irrelevant to him, so long as the money flowed and Mexico prospered. Its revolution atrophied by corruption, Mexico would become a commodity, its culture a benign theme piped into resorts by the government. Foreign currency would drizzle down like democratic rain on the peasants. Presumably, life would be better for everyone.

In my meditation on Cuban culture, what strikes me now is the underlying symbolism of Ferré's rapturous epiphany with the wild horses. The horses prompted him to momentarily forget who he was, who he had become in the service of his post-revolutionary nation, and to remember who he had been—Caliban, the New World barbarian, clutching a rock in his hand.

Dramaturgy quietly thrives in Havana, and recent productions such as Albert Camus's original *Caligula* and *La Otra Tempestá*, a Cubanization of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, customarily fill the theaters with intellectuals, university students, foreign journalists, and members of the Communist Party elite. In the Havana staging of Camus's anti-fascist allegory, the emperor Caligula stands atop a carpet of *Granma*, Cuba's official, government-run newspaper, reading his tax reports. At one point in the play, the audience is required to come on stage to pay tribute to Caligula. The actors deliver their lines in classical Spanish, except for a single startling sentence spoken in the rapid, slurring inflections of Cubano during a scene when a group of conspirators plot to overthrow the dictator. One of the actors turns to the audience and says, in an aside, "*Oye, compañero, eso no está fácil!*" "Hey, comrade, that won't be easy!" In its unexpectedly intimate directness, the line stuns audiences for several moments before their silence is broken by nervous laughter. The message isn't subtle, but the target is ambiguous, and even the most astute observers exit the theater unable to decide whether the play was about the defeat of Batista or the intrigues in present-day Cuba.

In *La Otra Tempestá* ("The Other Tempest") Prospero and his followers, intent on building a utopia, inhabit a tropical island controlled by Santería gods, but everything goes wrong, and the quest for an ideal society ends in a bloodbath. What's worth noting here is that for the past 150 years, Latin American, Caribbean, and European intellectuals, scholars, and artists

The critically acclaimed Buena Vista Social Club *(1999), a film about the life and art of a group of forgotten Cuban musicians, provided the wider world a glimpse of Cuban culture.*

have seized upon Shakespeare's final play and its cast of characters tossed together on a New World tropical island (much like Cuba) as a grand metaphor to express the dialectical tensions—colonial, postcolonial, neocolonial, according to the period—between "civilization" and "barbarism," white exploiters and the multiracial exploited, oppressors and the oppressed, bourgeois culture and revolutionary culture. Between Prospero, the master of the kingdom, and Caliban, the deformed, enslaved brute who exists on the margins of civilized society. Between, in a nutshell, the United States and Cuba.

Since 1900, when, immediately after the U.S. intervention in Cuba, the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó wrote and published *Ariel*, which identified North America as the greatest enemy of Latin American culture in his time, Shakespeare's *Tempest* has been used to construct a type of geopolitical road map, or manifesto, for Latin American and Caribbean writers, both for and against revolution, struggling to shape their own identity in the shadows cast by history, Eurocentrism, and the colossus to the north. More specifically, with the publication of Cuban poet and essayist Roberto Fernández Retamar's *Caliban* in 1971, Caliban himself became the primary symbol of Cuban culture, his unruly presence demanding a realignment of the role of the intellectual and artist in revolutionary society. "What is our history, what is our culture, if not the history and culture of Caliban?" wrote Fernández Retamar.

At the end of World War II, according to Fernández Retamar, when the United Nations invented the term "economically underdeveloped area" for what had until then been called "colonial area" or "backward area," Caliban appeared on the cultural and political doorstep of Latin America as "the suffering masses, Ariel [as] the genius of the air without any ties to life," and both in the service of an imperial, metropolitan Prospero. Thus was constructed one of the central myths of the Cuban revolution: Caliban's birthright placed him in natural opposition to Prospero, the foreign magician who taught Caliban language so that he could make himself understood, only to be cursed by the aboriginal slave. Ariel, the intellectual, now must choose between serving Prospero and "allying himself with Caliban in his struggle for true freedom."

"We are Caliban," the president of the Writers' Association said emphatically during our discussion at UNEAC. "We respect Ariel, but Caliban must develop his personality to fight and resist Prospero."

The metaphor did not escape El Commandante's attention. Fidel on the 10th anniversary in 1971 of the Bay of Pigs (Playa Girón): "For the imperialists, we are nothing more than despised and despicable peoples. At least that was what we were. Since Girón they have begun to change their thinking. Racial contempt—to be a Creole, to be a mestizo, to be black, to be, simply, a Latin American, is for them contemptible." Fidel's "Words to the Intellectuals," addressing the value of literature and the arts, again in 1971: "We, a revolutionary people, value cultural and artistic creations in proportion to what they offer mankind, in proportion to the revindication of man, the liberation of man, the happiness of man. . . . Our evaluation is political. There can be no aesthetic value in opposition to man. Aesthetic value cannot exist in opposition to justice, in opposition to welfare or in opposition to the happiness of man. It cannot exist!"

Thus was Caliban embraced, and Ariel warned, by the revolution. Freedom of speech, never very high on the menu of rights available to the Cuban people, either in Havana or Miami (where dissidents fear for their lives), became synonymous with counterrevolutionary activities. The same year, writers and artists, most notoriously the poet Herberto Padilla, began to be arrested and detained with what would become alarming regularity.

"What about dissident writers?" I felt obliged to ask Francisco Sacha, though I knew the answer, and I regard dissidents as a type of warrior, fully aware of the consequence of their actions, worthy of the highest respect and empathy, but not pity. Certainly, as an independent writer living in a repressive society, I wouldn't last very long.

"You don't get into any trouble if you make literature," he replied. "Nobody decides [what's politically correct or not]. What's published depends on the natural relationship between the editor and the writer." On the other hand, "Raul Rivera is a traditional, old-fashioned poet without politics in his work, but because of what he says in the press, he's a political dissident."

That's been the story all along—which is not to say that the boundaries haven't shifted radically for writers and artists in Cuba today.

About the same time Hualtulco was being platted by surveyors in the late '80s, Fidel Castro, his economy imploding with the collapse of the Eastern bloc, made a similar decision, in his words, to "exploit the sun." We know that the decadence of Batista's Havana—its casinos, prostitutes, and narcotics luring a vulgar class of tourists and criminals from around the world—fed the rationale of Castro's mobilization against the status quo. A year before the insurrection, the island had attracted 350,000 tourists; in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, the industry ceased to exist. Like Jesus driving the Pharisees from the temple, Castro kicked out the hedonists, dismantled the playground, and began a laborious process of institutionalizing a more virtuous, egalitarian, and—as of 1961—Marxist-Leninist culture. Literacy programs and art schools proliferated throughout Cuban society. The first books published by the revolution were Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer*.

Inevitably, the culture and its institutionalization became inseparable, and the massification of Cuban culture sucked in a large number of party functionaries who couldn't tell a sonnet from a soliloquy, and who looked upon the life of the intellectual imagination—in other words, Ariel—with incomprehension and, finally, suspicion. An internecine cultural war erupted, revolving around *Mundo Nuevo*, a journal of Latin American intellectual thought, published in Paris with CIA funding. "A Literary Bay of Pigs," the *Sunday Times* called the affair, and Fernández Retamar admitted that "among all sorts of people [of good faith] [the magazine] sowed seeds of possible distrust" toward the Cuban revolution. Rifts developed throughout the arts, aesthetics clashed with ideology, creativity became embalmed in bureaucracy, professional jealousies were suddenly politicized—as in the case of Padilla, whose 1968 literary prize awarded by UNEAC was the subject of a three-year-long cat fight among the literati, culminating in a jail term for the poet and a highly transparent "confession"—and artists began defecting into exile. Even as he chastised Cuban novelists for the timid nature of their work, and criticized the Latin boom (Gabriel García Márquez et al.) as a phenomenon of *yanqui* political and business interests, Fernández Retamar, the Cuban revolution's primary cultural and literary voice, argued ever more strenuously for the "functional instrumentality" of Cuban literature, asking that it abandon purist notions of literary aesthetics in favor of "heroic creations" that would "service and influence society." Identifying and publishing works that merited broad circulation was not a theoretical or critical process, Fernández Retamar declared, "but a political task proper to cultural politics."

It would take another generation of writers and artists to figure out that the strategy of "functional instrumentality" was in fact dysfunctional. Whether harsh or gentle in tone, remedial or reactive in intent, the literature of political experience, the literature of human awakening, is ultimately subversive of any system of authority, democratic as much as totalitarian, given that all governments are imperfect, some vastly more so than others. Human nature would not have it otherwise. The poetic word, as Octavio Paz understood, "could never be revolution's servant," although I think the truth remains that, in the most heartfelt of circumstances, it can be, as Pablo Neruda would have it, its ally, or, as Paz would have it, its nemesis. Again—Ariel, Caliban, are on stage.

Until recently, acknowledged the writer Roger Avila as we spoke in an austere office at UNEAC, "people who were trying to direct and organize the culture were not best

suited to do it. But through all the hardest times, the culture survived."

"The new generation"—personified by the novelist Abel Prieto (a towering Stephen King look-alike), former head of UNEAC and now minister of culture—"is changing all the rules," said Francisco Sacha. "It began exactly in 1990, like a clock."

Two works of fiction published in the 1990s exploded on the Cuban literary scene. *El Lobo, El Bosque, e El Hombre* (*The Wolf, the Forest, and the New Man*), by Senel Paz, which provided the story line for the movie *Strawberry and Chocolate*, received the Juan Rulfo Prize for Literature. This book, said Sacha, created "an inner rupture in subject matter." The second book, *Alguien Se Va Lamiendo Todo*, by Ricardo Arrieta and Ronaldo Menéndez, an avant-garde text linking performance art and short stories, introduced new choices of form into the Cuban narrative. Together, both works merged with "the marginal world, an intellectual and social world different than [my] generation [in the '80s]," Sacha explained.

"Intellectual and existential short stories went down in the late '50s. Violence, war, social commentaries, class struggle, provided the context for Cuban literature between the late '50s and the '90s. That's not the case in the '90s. These new writers want to seek and identify the problems that are taboo in Cuban society. It was once prostitution and homosexuality, and now it's the exiles, the exodus in Cuban society. The doubts about utopian society. Greater and greater weight to the role of sex in the lives of Cubans—even the establishment is concerned with sex today. These are the preoccupations, among other things, of course. Unlike in the '80s, [writers are] not attempting a reflection of the society, necessarily. More accurately, they are questioning. They're trying to free themselves from localism and turning toward more universal themes. They're assimilating the philosophical essay. Derrida, Foucault, Lacan. Everything comes in and is absorbed. Tournier, Kundera, others.

"In the '70s, literature was asleep. In the '70s and '80s, the literature was homogenous, a melting pot. But in the '90s, it is very awake, with many voices and many tendencies—the marginalized, the feminists, the gays, the French sense of writing. The new ones just pop up, like a wildflower: *I don't owe anything to anybody—here I am*.

"Literature changes certain ways of thinking in this society, the spirit in this society. Literature influences, but softly. It's not its mission to change one reality for another. The most important thing is that there's an awareness of what literature is, and this is what we have won back after many years. Always the great battle was between literature as a tool in the society and literature as an end to itself. This has been the great triumph.

"The *nuevos* are the iconoclasts. They're picking up from the late '50s what had been lost formally. They're leaping back to the '50s to get to the '90s. In my opinion, nothing's ever lost until the cycle is complete. That cycle was interrupted, and every cycle must be complete."

That's an extraordinary assertion: The changes that have suddenly surfaced in Cuban literature reveal a deep affinity with, even an intellectual obligation to, the 1950s, connecting contemporary Cuban writers with a pre-revolutionary world and thus "completing a cycle," reimagining a bridge between past and future, making history and memory whole again. Sustain the culture and its revolutionary energies by rewiring it aesthetically, even metaphysically, to a time before the bearded ones marched out of the Sierra Maestra mountains.

What's most striking about Sacha's analysis of Cuban literature is how accurately it mirrors what's taken place in the shape and arc of his nation—the evolution of revolutionary consciousness from naive idealism to rigid social realism to single-voiced internationalism to provincial existentialism (who am I and why am I all alone?) to folksy absurdism to, as the world sweeps back in, multivoiced postmodernism emerging from a bizarre juxtaposition of high-finance capitalism and low-gain socialism. Economically, if not politically, the revolution has learned to have its cake and eat it too, and that split personality is most evi-

Afro-Cuban rhythms propel Cuba's Trinidad Folkloric Ballet, which performs around the world.

dent, and most volatile, in the culture, which frankly cannot survive such hypocrisy. The cosmology of *The Tempest*, so essential to the Cuban sense of purpose and self-knowledge, has been scrambled. Ariel, dressed in drag, is having tea on the veranda of his grandmother's mansion in Miramar. Caliban has a night job as a *jinatero* (prostitute). By invitation, Prospero has returned to the isle, organizing trade and technology fairs, buying up condominiums. Again, the stage is set for a hurricane.

"In all revolutionary movements," wrote Octavio Paz, "the sacred time of myth is transformed inexorably into the profane time of history." Once Castro goes, any systemic weakening of authority will automatically trigger the mafiaization of the Cuban state, which would likely replace the current socialist government with a Russian-style oligarchy, a profane alliance between unpaid apparatchiks, already well trained in stealing from the state, and foreign businessmen (primarily Cuban American businessmen) who will divvy up the country's resources in an orgy of privatization. Centralized power will default to decentralized greed, the revolutionary impulse to the insider's deal. In its worst aspects, post-revolutionary Cuba may very well come to resemble pre-revolutionary Cuba, and more's the pity. Meanwhile, American policymakers have quite a dilemma on their hands. Only a strong, modern economy in Cuba, guided by uncompromising leaders, will preserve the two main policy goals of the United States more relevant than Washington's archaic obsession with communism and Castro—stopping drug transshipments and illegal immigration.

This is the bedrock logic of an otherwise nonsensical embargo that serves the needs, and the public relations, of both Washington and Havana. "I love the embargo. It keeps the Miami mafia from returning," the novelist Pablo Armando Fernández said into the camera on state-run television in Havana. When he saw the news clip, Castro laughed and applauded.

It was Fernández who offered the most genuine answer when I asked him what I had been asking everybody else: What might remain, or what should remain, of Cuba's revolution? Education, health care, social security, sure, but who knows? The culture? Naturally, but the culture, with or without the revolution, is cutting a new

orbit. What do you want for Cubans, I asked Fernández, five years from now, 10 years from now? "I want," he said simply, "to maintain our dignity." This from a writer entangled in the Herberto Padilla scandal, ostracized by Cuban writers from the right as well as the left, and forced to spend 14 years in internal exile at his house in Miramar in Havana's western suburbs.

Twentieth-century revolutions have sought to liberate impoverished populations from a plethora of injustices, but mostly these revolutions have kidnapped the masses, holding them hostage to a range of dogmatic delusions and puerile, unworldly fantasies, often re-exposing them to oppressions that echo directly from the former regimes. Surely Cuba, like most of Latin America in the 1950s, needed changing. Surely, given the course of history, especially in the Western hemisphere, Cuba would have changed regardless of Castro's extravagantly messianic, aggressively exported, and ultimately paranoid revolution, and changed probably for the better, at a rate that would have advanced the nation more quickly into the modern envelope of social justice and democratic liberalism, however much it remained a satellite of American interests. Still, the people of Cuba must be allowed to inherit and refine, for a new age, their social and cultural accomplishments, the human rewards from the pain and sacrifice of their briefly noble but mostly illusory revolution. Anyone who claims to have the best interest of the Cuban people at heart would do well to consider that most Cubans are exemplary citizens in their loyalty to their homeland. Their sense of sovereignty is paramount, their patriotism a matter of pride and identity, and what they feel they most risk in the changes ahead is their capacity to retain their dignity, much abused in the so-called special period—what the Russians, to no one's benefit, have lost.

Caliban's wounded pride—to hurtle forward from slavery into power, and then to be betrayed by history and turned out onto the geopolitical streets a beggar—is today as much a leitmotif in the Cuban culture, in revolutionary self-image, as anything else. Vindication is a moot issue, as is revolutionary prestige, except for its sentimental value. Yet Castro squanders precious resources erecting, directly across the street from the U.S. Interest Section, the Plaza of Dignity of the Cuban People, where he stages Elián rallies.

The two-thirds of the population born after 1959 can't comprehend the Faulknerian notion, so dear, it seems, to Castro and the revolution, that the past is not dead—it isn't even past. As much as Castro has tried to win back his country's alienated youth to revolutionary values through the "Send Back Elián" campaign, Cuba's children care more about cyberspace than sugar quotas, and are deeply infatuated with American culture, American styles. At a mass demonstration for Elián, in which schoolchildren came forward to pay tribute to their classmate shipwrecked in Miami, one kid wanted to sing something by the Backstreet Boys.

I asked my friend Francisco Sacha, "Have you paid too much for too little?" He quoted Faulkner: "Love is worth the price you pay for it."

But the price is inflating at an astronomical rate. Maybe, subconsciously at least, Sacha understood that the myths of *The Tempest* weren't working any more, because he switched authors on me, and metaphors, and took up the story of Santiago in Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. A man, a country, can be conquered but not defeated, said Sacha. "We've had a terrible crisis, but we can survive and endure because Cuba has the spirit of Santiago. Santiago has to fight for days and days to keep the sharks away. And he brings back proof of what he's done—the skeleton of the fish. But in the metaphor, we, Cuba, wouldn't have brought back a skeleton. We would have brought home the fish."

No, my brother, that's pride speaking, not reality. The revolution did not land the magnificent fish you dreamed of, and its flyblown skeleton is for sale. ❑