

**CUBA: THE INTELLECTUAL DEBATE
OR
THE LITTLE WAR OF EMAILS
THE “C”s (by first name of author, alphabetically)**

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Carlos Celdrán

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredo

Since I heard about Pavón's appearance on TV and read the reactions it caused, I have been wanting to write you. If my opinion and the little I have done in theater are worth anything to stop and clarify such a grievance, you have my support and my solidarity. Those of us who do theater in Cuba know how dangerous the situation is. We have a responsibility.

Carlos Celdrán

Carlos Espinosa

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Censorship, are you there? (I)

During the period during when I lived in Madrid, I once received a visit from a friend on the Island. Unable to resist curiosity, he began snooping through the bookshelves (a custom, I have to confess, that I don't like). When he reached a shelf where the cassettes were arranged, he gave me a slightly mocking smile at how surprised he was to find names like Raphael, Los Brincos, Formula V, Massiel, Cristina y los Stops, Charles Aznavour, Los Bravos. I explained to him that it was simply the music that was a fundamental part of my sentimental education, in the years when I was a high school student and, later, pre-university.

Then, the only way to listen to those songs in Cuba, or at least in the country town where I lived, was the radio. Tape recorders and stereos were things you couldn't even dream of, and there was the added problem of how to get the cassettes and tapes. I remember that one of the friends with whom I used to go out and meet had a sister in Havana who was married to a Greek sailor. Thanks to that, she got a tape recorder that she took to the parties that we sometimes organized. It was a hulk as big as it was heavy and was carried like a suitcase—one of those antiques that today can only be found in thrift stores, those second-hand stores that are so abundant in the United States.

Many years later, when I had the opportunity for the first time to buy the cassettes (CDs would still take a long time to appear) with those old songs, I wanted to give a belated gift to that boy I once was who could never have them. Listening to them again outside the Island must have been a way of surrendering myself to the intoxication of nostalgia ("This bread has the taste of a memory," says Humberto Saba in a verse). But it also led me to find things that I didn't expect. I pride myself on having an excellent memory, and I could repeat the lyrics of the songs while they were playing on the stereo. In some cases, however, there were verses that I was sure I hadn't heard before. In *Ding, Dong, the Things of Love*, one of the many numbers that the Argentine Leonardo Favio popularized in Latin America, was this: "She is fragile, tender and sweet / Lucky me that I found her / I am thinking and smiling / for me there is God." I noticed something similar in *When you Come Back*, by the Spanish group Los Mitos. In the version that we got to know through the island's radio stations, it didn't appear: "At night I pray / and I ask the Lord for your love. / But I feel fear, / fear that I am going to lose you."

Both are examples of censorship, that first cousin of the medieval inquisition that is related to power, repression, and manipulation. In both cases, the censors' scissors were directed against religious ideas, one of the black beasts of Castroism during the sixties and part of the seventies. That same reason was the one that caused all the songs of Juan and Junior to be disseminated and popularized in Cuba, except one: *In San Juan*. The lyrics couldn't be more candid and naive, since it must not be forgotten that it was written under the also inflexible surveillance of another dictatorial regime. But in the anticlerical crusade unleashed in the new Cuba, things like: "The portico in the church of San Juan / and the wooden saint in front of you / they became my friends / and they

were my witnesses / the day our love was born. / The saint smiled good-naturedly / and I looked at you a little embarrassed / saying few things / simple and loving. / One day we wanted to get married / in San Juan.”

From those operations of amputation of inconvenient contents, the Happy Heart, of the Argentine Palito Ortega, was able to escape. As it came to us through the version of the Spanish Marisol, we were able to hear and hum “and I ask God that I never miss you.” It would have been a bit difficult to explain to Comrade Antonio Gades, the singer’s husband at the time, why such an ideologically innocuous phrase would be censored for Cubans, while in Franco’s Spain, on the other hand, Joan Manuel Serrat could deal with themes of social criticism in his songs and record a complete album with the poems of Miguel Hernández, who died in prison, and Massiel and Fernando Fernán Gómez were allowed to represent a show with songs by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill.

These are just a few examples that illustrate the censorship that was applied to music. To these I want to add one more: on the island’s radio stations the song “When I Left Cuba” by Luis Aguilé was never allowed. Although it is not explicitly said, it can be interpreted that whoever is singing had to leave his homeland for very serious reasons: “When I left Cuba / I left my life, I left my love. / When I left Cuba / I left my heart buried.” But so far I have referred to censorship of specific lyrics and songs. At other times, the attack by the guard dogs targeted performers and groups. For example, at one point the recordings of Raphael, Julio Iglesias, Santana, and José Feliciano, among others, stopped being scheduled. Regarding the reasons why the latter was banned, I remember hearing this explanation: he had publicly declared that he would rather be blind in Puerto Rico than be able to see, if he had to live in Cuba. I am convinced that the anecdote is apocryphal, but will not deny that it is very credible. But both in the case of Feliciano and in the case of other artists, what we mentioned was no more than pure speculation, gossip. As Roberto Madrigal points out in his novel *Zona congelada* [*Frozen Zone*], the list of those who were censored was only known by word of mouth, never in written form, “because good censorship is like that; it doesn’t clarify its purposes so that uncertainty is added to terror.”

But before continuing, I think it’s pertinent to speak in a general way about this crime that, in general, is justified by invoking the notion of the collective good. The term censorship comes from the Latin *censura*, which means to estimate, assess, evaluate. How did it take on such a different meaning later? This is explained if it is remembered that in ancient Rome, the responsibility of the censor and that of the person in charge of the census were closely related. The censors were officials appointed to preside over the *census*, that is, the registry of citizens, with the purpose of determining the duties that corresponded to them within the community. The task of what today we would call the censor consisted of keeping control of the inhabitants; that of the censor, to classify and control the products that come out of people’s minds (books, ideas). Both census and censorship were (are) forms of surveillance. And in the specific case of the second, it represents a mechanism used to impose prohibitions or restrictions on people or ideas that can upset the established order.

Absolute Impunity to Censor (II)

Art and literature have had to grow up on more than one occasion under despotic regimes. But as George Orwell has often pointed out, the despotism of other eras was not as severe as the totalitarianism that various countries suffered during the 20th century. This is because in the former, the repressive system was always inefficient, and the classes that ran the control and regulation apparatuses were usually corrupt, apathetic, and even half-liberal. This has nothing to do with the high level of perversion and efficiency with which the censoring institutions of totalitarian regimes, particularly the communists, functioned. A simple fact can give a remote idea of the proportions that this machinery reached: in the former Soviet Union, 70,000 bureaucrats supervised the activity of 7,000 writers. In other words, each author was assigned ten proofreaders.

In those countries, censorship also enjoyed absolute impunity. As the prescriptive and restrictive controls were concentrated in the hands of the State, the intervention of the censors didn't need to be justified or declared, as it was part of the practical and operational routine. Publishing houses, art galleries, museums, newspapers and magazines, television channels, radio stations, theaters, printing houses, and film studios also belonged to the State. That guaranteed, for example, that when the original of a book was disapproved, its publication was impossible. In this sense, it should also be noted that only the act of writing or creating a work that, for some reason (it didn't matter if that reason was artistic or political, since the aesthetic and the ideological were not separated), didn't please the commissars, it constituted a crime for which one could be convicted or punished.

In 1974, the Cuban writer and playwright René Ariza (Havana, 1940-California, 1994) was sentenced to eight years in prison, of which he served five. Unpublished stories, plays, and poems of his were discovered by the police in the luggage of a young Spaniard, and that was enough for him to be taken to court for "writing enemy propaganda." And I draw attention to that detail: just by writing it. That is, in his case, like that of other authors who were sentenced to prison or expelled from the university (Carlos Victoria, Rafael E. Saumell, Manuel Ballagas, Leandro Eduardo Campa, Esteban Luis Cárdenas, Daniel Fernández, are some names that come to mind), the penalty was based not on the crime, but on the intention. The punishment was applied, therefore, *a priori*, before the works could cause the alleged damages that were attributed to them.

I keep a copy of Rectoral Resolution 89/73, which has the signature of Hermes Hernández Herrera, then Rector of the University of Havana, stamped at the end. It refers to the disciplinary file followed by Daniel Iglesias Kennedy, a student at the School of Modern Languages of the Faculty of Humanities. As stated in the document, the Investigative Commission created to analyze his case (it was made up of two professors and a student representing the Union of Young Communists) requested a copy of the novel *Esta tarde se pone el sol* [*This Afternoon the Sun Sets*], which Iglesias Kennedy had presented for the Casa de las Américas Award that year (1973).

The opinion was that said work "is, by itself, proof of the ideological weaknesses of its author and of his participation in antisocial activities carried out by dissolute elements in collusion with foreign agents, since this novel includes autobiographical aspects that reflect participation in such actions, and it can be concluded that the aforementioned

novel is in contradiction with the principles established by the Congress of Education and Culture and with Communist morality.” As an aggravating circumstance, Iglesias Kennedy “has maintained an unacceptable social behavior to graduate from the career he is studying at said Faculty, and although he has obtained satisfactory academic results, his relationships with other students, in the sphere of social and political tasks, have not been equally satisfactory.” All this leads the Rector to declare Iglesias Kennedy “guilty of the acts charged against him” and to punish him “with the measure of indefinite separation as a student.”

There are times when it is very difficult to understand the reasons that lead censors to ban a work. In 1956, the British Board of Film Censors banned a film by Jean Cocteau. Their argument was: “The film is apparently meaningless, but if it has any meaning, then it is undoubtedly reprehensible.” In that category of the absurd, a case that is recorded in the annals of human rights has a perfect place.

In 1983, the People’s Court of Diez de Octubre¹ and the Court of Crimes against State Security of the People’s Court of Havana sentenced Mario Gastón Hernández to three years in prison. His “crime” was translating a book on Nostradamus’ prophecies, which was considered an attempt to try to spread enemy propaganda. The authoritative opinion of members of the UNEAC was requested, who ruled that the text in question was “diversionist, anti-communist, and anti-Soviet.” A German representative of the United Nations Human Rights Commission called the sentence unusual and stated that Nostradamus had lived in the 16th century. But it is already known that sensible or logical explanations are not valid with the sentinels of society. Paraphrasing Pascal, censorship has its reasons that reason doesn’t understand.

The writers and artists who have suffered the misfortune of living and creating under such dictatorial regimes could well adopt as their motto these words that Beaumarchais expressed through one of the characters in *The Marriage of Figaro*: “As long as I don’t speak in my writings from authority, religion, politics, morals, nor from local people, corporations, opera or other shows, nor from anyone who holds a position, I can write freely what I want, under the inspection of two or three censors.”

Author’s Note: The idea for this work, the first in a series that will continue in the coming weeks, began to take shape in late September and took shape in the following months. Several friends of mine can attest to it, because during this time I have written emails or called them by phone to ask for information, suggestions, data. The output of this first article coincides with the angry and just reactions aroused on the island with the vindication of a sinister commissar made in a television program. The fact that both events now concur is, as is often made clear in the movies, pure coincidence.

It is not, therefore, opportunism on my part, not even a journalistic sense of opportunity. For the rest, for many of the signatories of the protests, the fact that such an execrable character received that media tribute means an attempt to resurrect an ancient story, as *compañero* Fernández Retamar (their *compañero*, I mean, not mine,

¹ One of the 15 municipalities in Havana City.

God forbid!). For me, on the contrary, it constitutes a problem that, like Monterroso's dinosaur,² was and continues to be, there. So the title of these pages should be taken for what it is, a rhetorical question.

Carlos Espinosa
United States

² Augusto Monterroso was a Guatemalan short story writer, editor, and diplomat. "The Dinosaur" is composed of one line: "When he awoke, the dinosaur was still there."

Carlos Repilado

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredo

I have read some of the documents about the presence of Luis Pavón Tamayo on our TV, and without really thoroughly analyzing each one of them, just by principle I adhere to the feeling of repulsion by the presence of such a character on our television. Out of a minimum of dignity and shame, if he ever had it, he should have refused to show us his despicable image and thought that only manage to offend us and bring us memories that it will always be better to forget. To forget now only after a rectification of a big mistake.

Carlos Repilado

Carlos Sotomayor

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Orlando Hernández, receive my greetings.

First let me tell you that we don't know each other but chance caused some emails to reach me discussing the subject of Pavón, and I ask you to excuse my daring in writing to you (your address was in the last message read).

I am just a simple worker of culture, a computer scientist for more details, who wishes in some way to let you know my solidarity with what has been written by you and other colleagues in this regard. As I feel that your feeling is my own, I want to tell you that the issue of the "Pavón case" is already being analyzed or at least discussed among the workers in some of our centers. But what strikes me is that the approach to the matter in question is directed only to appeal to this so-called "email crisis" and not to the conditions that caused it, which would thereby guarantee the continuity of the "work" and "legacy" of Pavón, company, and successors.

In my humble opinion, the firefighters have already left the barracks and the siren will continue to blare for a long time, long after this crackling has been turned off. I say this because until now it has always been like that since I had use of a little conscience. They always make us throw the sofa out the window³ and end the matter. Why not keep the sofa, sit on it, and have a dialogue to try to treat these and other multiple problems pending at least one remedy? Without an approach to the problem we'll never have an even moderately satisfactory way out.

I hope that one day the sofa will be justly appreciated and that this will allow us all to live and work under the ideals that gave birth to this revolution.

Regards, Carlos Sotomayor

Carlos Sotomayor to Orlando Hernández

Dear Orlando Hernández:

I'm grateful for your prompt and unexpected—but timely—reply. I don't have time to spare either, but I think all this exchange and support is useful and necessary. First of all, I wanted to inform you that there is no problem in making this exchange public because there is nothing private about it; nor do I harbor the slightest fear of possible reprisals, after *Guatepeor*⁴ there is no town except Colón, but for that we all have

³ Giving the problem a false solution. The saying comes from a popular Cuban joke. A conversation at the bar between two friends: "Yesterday I got home before the usual time and, what do you think I found? Well, my wife making love to another man on the living room sofa!" "How horrible! And What did you do?" "Don't worry, I gave the matter a drastic solution: I threw the sofa out the window!"

reservations. The concern that I mentioned to you is based on a specific fact and what was raised there; of course, my appreciation may be subjective, but what I showed you was what seemed to me to be happening and was going to happen in other places according to what I could see. Several meetings have already been held to solve the matter in question, and different answers have also come out in this regard, but I still think that how things are going or how it is being treated officially leads to the same thing as last year and much more of the same. And I'm not the one shaking my rattle, so if the sofa is not in free fall at the moment, then at least it's already suspended in the air. I believe that the Pavón effect should be analyzed in depth and not remain up in the air: a well-deserved apology, and that's it.

The UEAC Declaration was published in *Granma*, and what it says is in Persian or Chinese for many people. Even workers in the field of culture are oblivious to what happens right under their noses, and why is that? The "Pavón effect" has many facets and is still deeply rooted in our society today. I wonder how things like those that occurred in the so-called "gray five-year period" could have happened, and I see that these are not things of the past: they are still there, latent. I fully share your comments, and that is why I reaffirm that for me the flame will not go out. We must raise high "the torch that gracefully illuminates our ideals" and honor the March of July 26 and the statement, "History will Absolve me." At some point the ideals of this revolution were twisted, and I believe that we must all contribute to making them take their true course. If you want to read the full text of the lyrics of the March of the 26th, then click on this link, <http://www.radiohc.cu/moncada/letracancion26.htm>.

Well, I was telling you that I was a simple worker of culture because it is simply what I am and what I consider myself. I think that my opinion should not be annulled by others for this reason, nor that others make decisions for me as you say, but that is how it happens today. And my modesty is due to the fact of recognizing in you and many other colleagues the virtue that is achieved with a lot of work to express clearly and coherently the ideas that many fail to put together to make themselves understood, and people like that are always necessary to understand each other and find consensus. And this is natural and healthy in any fairly "civilized" society. So we also have the opposite, the artificial and catastrophic, which is when someone with that gift and virtue (although the opposite has been seen many times) manages to move above the rest, ignoring criteria, wills, everything, and imposes his own law; and this resulting character would be what I would call a big *pavón*.⁵ So, let's say NO to the Pavón effect.

On Tuesday the 30th I will be present at the conference unless the sea reaches Batabano.

Regards, Carlos
January 20, 2007

⁴ *Guatepeor* is a play on words: Leaving Guate-mala (Guate-bad) to fall into *Guate-peor* (Guate-worse). The meaning is to make a problem worse by trying to find a solution, or "The remedy is worse than the disease." "Colón" is the main cemetery in the city of Havana.

⁵ This is a play on words, since a *pavón* is a peacock, meaning someone who shows off and struts around.

César Leal

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

César Leal to Waldo Leyva

Friend Waldo:

Was it perhaps in the 1970s, when the Constitution of the Republic of Cuba contained a clear reference to the “unbreakable” friendship with the former USSR and there was no UNITY within the Cuban nation? I think that after more than eleven years in power, it would be naive to infer that the revolutionary leadership did not yet have a cultural strategy. Later, even, from the Congress of Education and Culture held in those years, and where the “Gallego” Fernández⁶ was the spokesman for the simplistic idea that the culture generated in the capitalist countries was corrupt and flawed and had nothing to contribute to the contemporary intellectual thought.

Therefore, those who were his *epigonos*⁷ would have nothing to do here: It would be interesting to investigate who “Gallego” Fernández was the spokesperson for! I remember that it cost my friend and teacher Servando Cabrera Moreno his first heart attack; also, that José Llanusa⁸ and Pavón were the visible tip of the iceberg of a cultural policy consciously instrumented to “control”—excuse the euphemism—the development of Cuban culture during that so-called “Gray Period,” during which, incidentally, artists and writers also stood out—at least formally—who disagreed (a dangerous word!) with the Socialist Realism that it was trying to impose.

I believe that a broader review of that artistic period is required, in all senses, to know the causes and justifications for figures like Pavón to be placed in the highest position in the “direction” of the development—or involution—of Cuban culture. This resulted in many artists and writers, whether homosexual or not, having to opt for exile abroad, while others were ostracized.

It was a shame that Pavón was redeemed and exalted on Cuban television, but he has not been nor will he be the only one: the ghost of the '70s has been haunting the country for a long time; seeing is believing, brother! But let's think positively and hope that the nonsense doesn't repeat itself.

César Leal Jiménez
Independent artist

⁶ José Ramón Fernández Álvarez (1923-2019) was Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, a deputy in the Cuban National Assembly from 1976, and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.

⁷ Less distinguished followers or imitators.

⁸ José Llanusa Globel (1925-2007) was the first director of the National Institute of Sports and Physical Education, Commissioner of Havana, Minister of Education, Vice President of the Council of Ministers, and Deputy to the National Assembly of People's Power.

César Leal to Jorge de Mello

Brother Jorge:

I met Orlando Hernández for the first time when we were on our humble vacation at Villa Coral, remember, right?

I am glad that he has taken sides, despite the apathy and pessimism of which he speaks. What is difficult for all of us to admit is that censorship and suspicion against intellectual thought has always been a model followed by known extinct socialist systems, which denotes an inexcusable fear of the search for another truth that is not the one that they hold. As you know, in capitalist countries there is also censorship and self-censorship,= but because all the mass media are not in state hands and they have more democratic constitutions that do not exclude anyone, at least in the text, there is greater freedom of expression.

This is a truism, which I point out perhaps in a very direct and pithy way, but it has been what reality has shown. The problem comes when men try to play the role of gods on earth. They proclaim that they don't make mistakes, and if they do, they argue that they did it with the best intentions. And we already know what the road to hell is paved with! That has been the problem of Marxism-Leninism; as Jean Paul Sartre said, it claims to be "open" to all phenomena and explains everything, but in truth it is closed within its system of conceiving and explaining the world and the relationships between men. That is why I believe in God Jehovah—although I am not a Witness of—and I do not believe in false messiahs and wolves dressed as lambs. The Bible, with all the contradictions that unbelievers attribute to it (for that God gave us free will) is very clear in its content on this matter.

Well, colleague and friend, this little rant is just to tell you that I received the message from Orlando that you sent me, and that I really liked it, because it was sensible, intelligent, and well written.

Another hug and blessings for all of you.
César Leal

Another Message from César Leal

Let's also remember that José Llanusa and Pavón were the visible tip of the iceberg of a cultural policy consciously orchestrated to "control"—excuse the euphemism—the development of Cuban culture during that so-called "Gray Period" during which, incidentally, artists and writers also stood out who—at least formally—disagreed (a dangerous word!) with the socialist realism that it was trying to impose. I believe that a broader review of that artistic period is needed, in all senses, to know the causes and justifications for figures like Pavón to be placed in the highest position in the "direction" of the development—or involution—of Cuban culture. This resulted in many artists and writers, homosexual or not, having to opt for exile abroad, while others were ostracized. It was a shame that Pavón was redeemed and exalted on Cuban television, but he has

not been and will not be the only one: The ghost of the '70s has been haunting the country for a long time; seeing is believing, brother! But let's have a positive mind, and let's hope that the nonsense does not repeat itself.

César López

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

In moments of rage in which I was almost foaming at the mouth and perhaps the rest of the nine orifices of the human body, after the occasional telephone conversation with colleagues who were equally irritated, angry, bewildered, and full of shame at the media nonsense, may it be just that and so on! I received your profound and courageous reflection as a state of cultural, historical, ethical, and certainly political warning. Thank you, friend, for thinking and acting. Count on me and my glimpses of thought in a firm attitude and ready to undo the mess that seems to advance dangerously, but I communicate to you, with José Martí, that “I am honest and I am afraid.”

Hugs of recognition and alertness.
César López

Words at the inauguration of the XVI International Book Fair

Dear Friends:

As the afternoon leans to the west, memory leads to some Argentine verses by Rafael Obligado, and to overcome the sorrowful shadow over the Pampa, the country has been summoned as a guest of honor; precisely, the Argentine Republic.

Now, the fact that two Cuban intellectuals share the dedication does not mean that this book festival is limited to them.

The invitation to the word leads to general culture, to all its manifestations, to the place where the Book rules without exclusions of any kind. And since Poetry is creation and creation is fundamentally Poetry, I allow myself to affirm that this Fair is dedicated to all Cuban creators, because Cuba, Island or poetic Archipelago, begins its consolidation from the territory to become a Nation and finally reach the high category of Homeland with Poetry. “And all night they heard birds passing by,” says the Admiral⁹ in his journal and affirms it, not to discover us, but to find a world and at the same time find himself in the area where, as now, the afternoon is leaning. Sweetly to the west. And it does not stop being its own world and ours.

We said that this creative totality, of the word, inserted in time, found its space in Cuba. With *Espejo de Paciencia* [*Mirror of Patience*]¹⁰, and without ignoring the discovery of the poem *Florida*¹¹, the poets have sustained our nation, homeland, verb, waters, lands.

⁹ Christopher Columbus, in his Journal, 1492.

¹⁰ *Espejo de Paciencia* is a poem written in 1608 by Silvestre de Balboa, clerk of the town hall of Santa María del Puerto del Príncipe. It is considered the first Cuban literary work. The poem tells how the residents of the town of Bayamo faced the attack of the French privateer Gilberto Girón in 1604, defeated and killed him. The work exalts the faithful and courageous character of its Cuban settlers.

¹¹ *La Florida*, an epic poem by Alonso Gregorio de Escobedo, about the early Spanish presence in the U.S.

And when we say poets, we include storytellers, thinkers, historians, economists, musicians, dancers, painters, and sculptors. Men and women of good will who have built our home, the house, the city, the country for us. That is why the expansion, which more than generous has to be historic, wants to include all Cubans so that this Sixteenth Book Fair is total and ecumenical and thus overcomes any limitation that our culture may have shown, endured, and suffered over the years.

An admiring arc that starts in José María Heredia (and does not stop taking into account precursors such as Silvestre de Balboa, Alfonso de Escobedo, Manuel de Zequeira, Manuel Justo de Rubalcaba, and Manuel María Pérez Ramírez) and reaches Raúl Hernández Novás and Angel Escobar, and it would not ignore the great poets of the 19th and 20th centuries with full and finished work and life. And to the thinkers, novelists, playwrights, firmly situated in Cuban culture, where the same would be Cirilo Villaverde and Ramón Meza as Ezequiel Vieta and Alejo Carpentier. On this bridge are the names that hardly have to be enumerated, but some buzz in my ear: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Joaquín Lorenzo Luaces, José Jacinto Milanés, Plácido, El Cucalambé, Manzano, Luisa Pérez de Zambrana, Julia Pérez Montes de Oca, Mercedes Matamoros, Juana Borrero, Julián del Casal, Mendive, and the high summit of José Martí.

Throughout the twentieth century the poets insist: Boti, Poveda, Agustín Acosta. Emilio Ballagas, Mariano Brull, Eugenio Florit, Nicolás Guillén, Dulce María Loynaz, Regino Pedroso, Samuel Feijóo, Dora Alonso, José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, Gastón Baquero, Eliseo Diego, Jesús Orta Ruiz, and others and others and others. Rolando Escardó, Roberto Branly, Baragaño, Fayad Jamís, Heberto Padilla, Luis Suardíaz. We must not apologize for insistence! And Hernández Catá, Carlos Montenegro, Lino Novás Calvo, Lydia Cabrera, Enrique Serpa, Félix Pita Rodríguez, Enrique Labrador Ruiz? How José Soler Puig accompanies us! And Fernando Ortiz, Mañach, Moreno, Friginals. Among our letters are Antonio Benítez Rojo, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Calvert Casey, Reynaldo Arenas, Severo Sarduy, Miguel Collazo, Jorge Luis Hernández and Jesús Díaz.

The book is the bearer of the word; it reaches the verse and thus ascends again and as always to Poetry. Word and Poetry that as reality and symbol force us to look, vigilant, with open eyes, at History. And as an inescapable reference I remember, we all remember, Juan Clemente Zenea, so close in his place. We are looking at him. Victors in time. Here in his space. In the time. Alert on his path. The poem. The Word and Poetry. “And you were repaired where your mother was raped.”¹² Saint John of the Cross points at us, whispers, and shouts. To make us aware that this warlike and disgraceful place where the poet, Poetry, was humiliated, with this party that would have seemed impossible in another era, remains clean and must be kept that way forever.

And in the same way that those creators gave themselves to the Word and sometimes had to die for it, now, as an ethical and aesthetic obligation, we raise the libertarian mandate of knowledge and honor through books. The Sixteenth Book Fair that could be

¹² Quote from the *Cántico Espiritual*, the poetic version of the Song of Songs, by Saint John of the Cross (1542-1591), mystical poet of the Spanish Counter-Reformation, canonized by the Catholic Church.

dedicated to so many authors and books that were, are, and will be in our lives. Listing their names would not be overwhelming, but discretion imposes a certain modesty. The centuries are repeated from the seventeenth to the twenty-first in which we live. Let this Fair and those to come be dedicated to those creatures, women and men, who support the Homeland at all times, through joys and troubles, successes and mistakes, and insist on remaining in what unites us beyond artificial, mechanical, and exploited borders.

And if the amplified extension of the honor at the Fair for Cuban writers is affirmed, wouldn't it be necessary to proclaim something similar and equivalent with respect to the Countries? It is a joyous honor that Argentina is the guest country, but this does not make us forget the sister republics of our America. Martí illuminates and dictates perpetual lessons. And this, Our America, proudly shows its origins and its constant History. From José Hernández and his Martín Fierro y Sarmiento and his Facundo to Julio Cortázar, the country gives rise to the broad culture that will be and is now present at this Fair, breathing the air of America as a whole and open to the world, to the Universe, to achieve what some still consider unachievable. The possible for the impossible. Knowing that the perfect does not exist, but there is constant perfectibility.

The Fair is ecumenical, comprehensive, humble, and superb at the same time. Its goal, or one of them, is to open the doors of delightful knowledge to every creature within our grasp. If reading is taught to overcome illiteracy, the immediate obligation of the peoples is to provide books so that those who can do it have elements for their culture and constant improvement and joy. For their lives. That's the reason for the Fair. As in the biblical quote, this feast of action and celebration fulfills a goal, mission, destiny: "Lift up your eyes and look at the regions, because they are ready for harvest."

And it is not about the exploitation of many for the benefit of a few, but about the full dignity of man. Of the human creature. Thank you all. Book Fair, the Fiesta has begun and is significant.

César Lopez, Havana
February 8, 2007

Cira Romero

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

What nonsense about Luis Pavón on TV. How many wounds open again before that deplorable image! When I saw the program I knew perfectly well that what is happening was going to happen. Voices must be raised in anger. There is no other alternative. I congratulate those who have done it publicly. Too bad none of that is published.

Cira Romero

Consenso Digital Magazine

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Consenso on The Intellectual Debate

“The state of exalted anger,” aroused by the television appearances of Armando Quesada, Jorge Serguera and Luis Pavón Tamayo, three officials linked to the anti-cultural policy applied in Cuba since 1971, has become a debate and reflection by a large group of intellectuals. This is no coincidence; the insults and overt reflections are based, in addition to the innumerable victims of the “parametrization,” on the words of Fidel Castro: “Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing” converted into cultural politics, as well as the absence of the authentic exercise of debates of ideas and the consequent lack of training in these matters. As an expression of a phenomenon of reflection and debate, the facts discussed in this extensive exchange of e-mails are part of the *raison d'être* of the *Consenso* Digital Magazine, for which reason we feel obliged to offer our own criteria in the heat of so many (and all) the issues that are exposed.

As was logical, the attack, which was initially directed against three cultural officials, took, in the political context of uncertainties that Cuba is experiencing and due to the long duration of these and many other silences, paths that reached even those most responsible for such a dismal policy. Regardless of one or other debaucheries, a reflection of the high accumulated pressure, the most reasonable pointed to the essence of the problem: the method known as *pavonato*, whose causes and consequences are still present, as evidenced, among others, by the case of Antonio José Ponce. However, once the passions have been unburdened, the debate must have as its central objective the good of the Nation, which is the good of all. Therefore, a measured and inclusive analysis is required that fosters an essential change in Cuban culture, which in turn implies a change in our society; a change in which everyone must participate without exclusion: victims and perpetrators, rulers and ruled, those from inside and outside the Island, witnesses and insiders. A shift that spans from the cultural elite to the deteriorating domestic economy.

We must all contribute arguments that build bridges of encounter. Therefore, any attempt to paralyze the debate, to pigeonhole it or to limit it, must be rejected. The debate, absent until now, is a manifestation of culture, and culture is an indispensable condition to keep abreast of the times, as Ortega y Gasset expressed. The essence of the issues that are being discussed these days in what some have called the “little war of e-mails” does not lie in the three television programs, but in root issues of the Cuban nation whose connotation is deeper than what it seems at first glance. That is why any attempt to stop the debate aims to reaffirm that harmful principle that holds that the repressive cultural policy is irreversible.

Today, the time to share indignations belongs to the past, because what it is about now is to demolish the possibility of maintaining the methods that affected and still affect Cuban culture and society in general. On the other hand, insisting at this point in the parametrized expressions about supposed intellectuals “in the service of the enemy” or

that the critical opinions of some of them respond to an “annexationist agenda” constitutes in itself an attempt to preserve the parametrization.

The problems that have affected and continue to affect intellectuals are the same ones that lacerate, affect, and limit the rest of society in one way or another. For this reason, in the processes of change, a place corresponds to all Cubans, intellectual or not, revolutionaries or not; because revolution and change are not synonymous: revolution supposes a violent and radical transformation that inevitably brings great damage to a significant part of those who voluntarily or involuntarily plunge into its spiral. Change, more generally, is a process inseparable from human dignity, love, solidarity, ethics, freedom, and reconciliation on the basis of the minimum that unites us, which is everyone’s business, although in the search for solutions, the intelligentsia has a determining role, because it constitutes the critical conscience of the nation. In this sense, “Emilio’s Way,”¹³ which a part of Cuban intellectuals have for the current exchange of ideas, shows that other means are forbidden to them and that therefore they must get to work to achieve something that is such a vital need for the health of Cuban society: the development of spaces that promote the free expression of plural thought.

The first condition of culture—the cultivation of the human in man, the way in which a society creates and recreates values to satisfy its material and spiritual needs—lies in freedom. When this is suppressed or limited, regardless of the reasons given for that, the lives of millions of people are affected, and, therefore, this constitutes a crime against culture. In Cuba, institutional and ethical deficiencies, restrictions on rights and freedoms, intolerance, exclusions, and physical and verbal violence determined a framework conducive to undermining human dignity. In the name of that tarnished dignity, it is imperative to democratize the culture, and the events that are occurring are symptoms that time of waiting for such an undertaking has run out.

For Cubans, the right to participate as subjects in the cultural, political, and economic processes of the country; to freely think, express, and disseminate ideas; to associate with our fellow human beings autonomously; to leave and enter the country without the need for permits; to decide and participate in the type of education we want for our children; to live decently on our wages; to freely access information and communication with the rest of the world are, among other things, important aspirations that await their materialization. The current debate that has arisen among Cuban intellectuals from all the “shores” indicates that these pending needs cannot continue on the waiting list.

The juridical-cultural setback represented by the limitations to political plurality and civil rights contained in the current Constitution—concisely declared irrevocable—must be reversed. The law against “ideological diversionism” must be abolished. Ethics, which in Cuba has historically been the conduct of minorities, requires its conversion into generalized conduct as a foundation for personal and social fulfillment. Therefore, an ethical rearmament is essential and should and must be present from politics to culture, from personal relations to public relations, from practical actions to civilized language,

¹³ *Emilio’s Way* is a movie about a father discovering his deceased son’s spiritual journey by following in his footsteps along the Santiago de Compostela trail in Spain.

and that is impossible without the free participation of the intellectuals and all the people.

Plurality, an expression of the diversity that characterizes us, is absent in the debate in Cuba today. Exclusion and ignorance of the different have reached the point of trying to carry out a social project—paraphrasing the singer-songwriter Pedro Luis Ferrer—“with a single truth and a single thought.” Cuba is plural by nature; recognizing it and facilitating its manifestation is the responsibility of the rulers and the duty of all. The discussion of intolerance of difference should, as one of the participants in the controversy stated, include the debate about the difference in political opinions. That’s how comprehensive a serious and responsible intellectual debate on culture must be. *Consenso* also regrets that, due to the omission of the official press, the Cuban people remain ignorant of this debate.

Taking into account the reasons expressed, the *Consenso* Digital Magazine, founded in December 2004 as an autonomous space for reflection and debate of Cuban progressive thought, to examine and discuss our reality, without fear of the truth or the consequences of saying it, calls on all those interested, even those who do not agree with us, to freely express their opinions on our page and to direct the current debate towards the basic questions: What country are we? What country do we want for ourselves and our children? What should we do to achieve it?

Editorial Board of *Consenso* Digital Magazine

Miriam Celaya González, Dimas Castellanos Martí, Marta Cortizas Jiménez, Rogelio Fabio Hurtado, Eugenio Leal García, José Prats Sariol, María Cristina Herrera, Byron Miguel.

Cubarte Criterios

Translated by Regina Anavy and Gustavo Loredó

Information from Cubarte at the request of the Centro Teórico Cultural Criterios in relation to its next Cycle of Conferences.

As we reported last Wednesday, in search of more space for the attending public, we decided to move the conference on “The Gray Quinquennium: Revisiting the Term” by Ambrosio Fornet, scheduled for next January 30, from the headquarters of the Center, with capacity for about 120 people, to the Che Guevara Room of the Casa de las Américas, with which we quadruple the capacity.

However, given the great interest in attending expressed by a growing number of people and institutions from various sectors, and in order to ensure that our writers, artists, and intellectuals in general can be present in the still-limited space, we have decided to reserve the entry, through invitations, for members of the UNEAC, the AHS, the UNHIC, and the UPEC; professors and students of the ISA, the Schools of Art and the Faculties of Arts and Letters and Social Communication of the UH; researchers from the CITMA Council of Social Sciences and the Martin Luther King Center, as well as specialists and cadres from the ICRT and the institutions of the Ministry of Culture.

The Criterios Center, as it is known, lacks personnel to make lists and distributions, for which we put the responsibility of the distribution in the hands of the UNEAC and other interested cultural institutions, which will take place in the next few days. Only 300 invitations have been sent to UNEAC.

The texts of the conferences by Ambrosio Fornet and other announced personalities will be disseminated by email immediately after each meeting and subsequently collected in a book.

People who are interested in receiving the texts by email should send a message to criterion@cubarte.cult.cu with the Subject as: CICLO.

Please excuse me if you receive this message more than once in more than one way. The disclosure of the same is appreciated.

January 25, 2007