

P R E F A C E

Although social scientists, historians, and journalists have published many studies on the Cuban Revolution, relatively little has been written about its literature. Considering the unique and world-wide significance of the Revolution, it is nothing short of amazing that its literature should be so neglected. A study of the prose fiction in particular provides the emotional ingredient that is indispensable for a total understanding of history. Although I could draw upon quotes from several well-known authors to support this point of view, it is perhaps more appropriate to cite the words of one of the Revolution's more interesting (albeit little known outside Cuba) novelists and short-story writers, Ezequiel Vieta (1922):

History does not move nor does it horrify the reader; it addresses itself to the mind, not to the emotions. Particularly that kind of history which, in order to be objective, adheres to a given method and uses it to arrange data objectively. But, and perhaps herein lies the need for art, the human being's vital experiences are not exclusively intellectual: they contain an intense emotional ingredient, which is complementary and at times even becomes a determining force. In other words, nothing can give us a total picture of life if it does not take into account or is not specifically based on experience. Art provides us with this emotion . . . and, therefore, it is an indispensable element for the true understanding of history. When art delights us, whether with a painting or through music, or in a novel or a short story, or in the movies—as Fidel has graphically demonstrated—it is bringing to us the emotional ingredient that, when added to the rational exposition of History, brings us closer to a live contact with reality.¹

¹ Ezequiel Vieta, *Vivir en Candonga*, p. 151.

The three main purposes of this book are:

1. To provide additional insights for an understanding of the complexities of the Cuban Revolution.
2. To record for posterity the over two hundred volumes of novels and short stories published since January 1959 in Cuba and elsewhere that are related in varying degrees to the Revolution and thus rescue them from the oblivion to which, with few exceptions, they have been condemned by the isolation of Cuba from the United States and the rest of Latin America. The question arises as to the value of preserving a certain number of those works that by aesthetic standards hardly merit being read. The answer is that inferior works of art are often quite important in illuminating national characteristics and trends, and that their sheer number attests to the vitality of a movement. Furthermore, all novels and short stories, regardless of their quality, help recreate the social history of the period with which they deal.
3. To establish for this large corpus of material some coherent pattern.

Because of the intrinsic differences between the novel and the short story and because of the disparity in their growth in prerevolutionary Cuba, I have chosen to treat them separately and somewhat differently. Almost one-half of the book is devoted to the Cuban novel of the Revolution divided into four chronological periods: 1959–1960, 1961–1965, 1966–1970, 1971–. This classification transcends generational as well as aesthetic considerations. The fact that we are dealing with only a fifteen-year period in which at least some members of each of four distinct literary generations participate greatly diminishes the usefulness of a generational classification. Nonetheless, significant generational differences will be discussed within each of the chronological periods. Although a limited number of novelists—Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and Severo Sarduy—have achieved continental and indeed world renown, an overly preferential treatment for their works would result in a distorted picture of Cuba's total novelistic production and would necessarily involve some paraphrasing of what other critics have already said about *El siglo de las luces*, *Paradiso*, *Tres tristes tigres*, and *De donde son los cantantes*. Moreover, since the vast majority of the other authors have

published only two or three novels and may still continue to produce, it is somewhat premature to establish a well-defined hierarchy based on artistic values.

Whereas almost each and every one of the seventy some novels will be studied individually and will be woven into the chronological pattern, I have relied to some extent on the anthologies to determine which are the most significant of the short stories. The anthological survey will, however, be supplemented by a more detailed study of the complete volumes of the six short-story writers who have clearly surpassed their colleagues: Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Calvert Casey, Humberto Arenal, Antonio Benítez, Jesús Díaz Rodríguez, and Norberto Fuentes.

Because the narrative has been responsive to changes in government policy, the second part of the book will trace the relationship between the artist in general and the revolutionary government, with greater emphasis on what has actually happened than on the theoretical aspects. Certain parallelisms will also be established between Cuba and other revolutionary societies. This part follows rather than precedes the discussion of the Cuban novel because the chronological groupings were derived from a reading of the novels themselves and only later were the Revolution's policy changes toward the arts seen as contributing factors.

The fast-growing number of novels and short stories written by Cuban exiles provide, of course, a very different interpretation of the Revolution and merit consideration despite their overall poor quality. The fact that this book is titled "Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution" rather than "Cuban Prose Fiction of the Revolution" will permit me to devote part five to twenty-two novels, one volume of short stories, and one other short story written by non-Cubans about the Revolution.

Given the recent emphasis on literary theory and criticism, it is incumbent upon me to state which critical approach I intend to apply to the works under consideration. If I beg the question by proclaiming myself an eclectic, it is because no single approach to literature is equally applicable to all works. While I share with the New Critics the belief that each work of art should be analyzed intrinsically with em-

phasis on structural unity and other formalistic features, I accept wholeheartedly the historical and sociological critics' insistence upon relating the work of art to the society in which it is created. As far as relating the work to the author's life, the lack of adequate biographical data would make this approach fruitless. Some pertinent information will be provided at times, but I shall not systematically include the minimal facts that are readily available in the anthologies and in Lourdes Casal's sociological article.² Archetypal criticism may be extremely valuable in explicating certain works—those of Alejo Carpentier are prime examples—but it is of rather limited use in the interpretation of most of the Cuban narratives. Although the general notions of structuralist criticism have affected my critical attitude, they are much more appropriate for an in-depth study of one author than for a synthetic study of the works of close to 150 authors. Casting myself in the role of the literary historian, I shall attempt to focus on the basic components of each work and relate it to both the literary and political environments inside as well as outside Cuba. That I shall do so with the greatest objectivity possible goes without saying. That perfect objectivity is unattainable is also quite apparent. With this in mind, I have preferred to express my biases clearly through the epigraphs by Ernesto Sábato, Octavio Paz, and Mario Vargas Llosa.

Because of the difficulty in obtaining Cuban books in the United States and Latin America, this study would have been impossible without the splendid cooperation of the staff of the *Handbook of Latin American Studies* and the Hispanic Foundation of the Library of Congress. I am also deeply indebted to Rosa Abella, bibliographer of the University of Miami Library, to Professor Julio Sánchez of McGill University, to Professor Roberto González Echevarría of Cornell University, to Julio Ortega, to Juan Mejía Baca, and to Dorothy Graham, Jacqueline Doyle, and Marion Buzzard of the University of California, Irvine, Library for supplying bibliographical information and for helping me locate many of the works. A vote of thanks is also due to Suzanne Bolliger, Victoria Groskreutz, Lorna Rocha, Margaret Ryan,

² Lourdes Casal, "La novela en Cuba, 1959-1967: Una introducción," *Exilio*, Fall-Winter 1969-Spring 1970, pp. 184-217.

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Prose Fiction of the Cuban Revolution

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