

SIDE EFFECTS:
Cubanology and Its Critics*

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- CUBA: DILEMMAS OF A REVOLUTION.* By JUAN M. DEL AGUILA. (Boulder, Colo., and London: Westview Press, 1984. Pp. 193. \$30.00.)
- DALL' INSURREZIONE AL REGIME.* By ANTONIO ANNINO. (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1984. Pp. 334.)
- REVOLUTIONARY CUBA: THE CHALLENGE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH WITH EQUITY.* By CLAES BRUNDENIUS. (Boulder, Colo., and London: Westview Press, 1984. Pp. 224. \$22.00.)
- FIDEL CASTRO SPEECHES, VOLUME 2.* By FIDEL CASTRO. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1983. Pp. 367. \$30.00 cloth, \$7.95 paper.)
- THE WORLD ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CRISIS.* By FIDEL CASTRO. (Havana: Oficina del Consejo de Estado, 1983. Pp. 224.)
- CUBAN STUDIES PROJECT: PROBLEMS OF SUCCESSION IN CUBA.* (Miami: North-South Center for the Institute of Inter-American Studies, University of Miami, 1985. Pp. 105. \$8.95.)
- JOSE ANTONIO ECHEVERRÍA: LA LUCHA ESTUDIANTIL CONTRA BATISTA.* By JULIO A. GARCIA OLIVERAS. (Havana: Editora Política, 1979. Pp. 373.)
- CUBA: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF REVOLUTION, 1959–1984.* Edited by SANDOR HALEBSKY and JOHN M. KIRK. (New York: Praeger, 1985. Pp. 446. \$43.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.)
- CUBAN COMMUNISM.* 5th ed. Edited by IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ. (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Transaction Books, 1984. Pp. 805. \$19.95 paper.)
- CUBA AND THE REVOLUTIONARY MYTH: THE POLITICAL EDUCATION OF THE CUBAN REBEL ARMY, 1953–1963.* By C. FRED JUDSON. (Boulder, Colo., and London: Westview Press, 1984. Pp. 294. \$22.50.)
- CUBA, CASTRO, AND THE CARIBBEAN.* By CARLOS ALBERTO MONTANER. (New Brunswick, N.J., and Oxford: Transaction, 1985. Pp. 114. \$19.95.)
- WOMEN AND THE CUBAN REVOLUTION.* Edited by ELIZABETH STONE. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1981. Pp. 156. \$15.00 cloth, \$3.95 paper.)

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION, TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER. By HUGH S. THOMAS, GEORGES A. FAURIOL, and JUAN CARLOS WEISS. (Boulder, Colo., and London: Westview Press, 1984. Pp. 69. \$12.95.)

The study of politics must ultimately deal with fundamental questions. In a recent essay, Luis Sánchez Agesta reduced these issues to five: Are politics and power natural necessities or human inventions? Is human nature basically peaceful and cooperative or aggressive and conflictual? Is political action basically rational or emotional? Is coercion more effective than persuasion in preserving the state? What are the bases of political criticism?¹

Side Effects

Revolutions challenge the political scientist in two interrelated ways: first with the opportunity to study radical attempts to change human nature, then with the temptation to escape from disciplinary strictures in the name of a higher good. The first challenge poses the danger of becoming irrelevant as a result of obsessive concern with method and specificity. The second challenge is more insidious in fostering a tendency to replace analysis with a description of how the absolute memories of the possible may yet come to pass, despite the ominous signs of the present. Both challenges entail high costs.

The Name of the Rose

Two basic styles of discourse are found in the literature on revolutionary Cuba. These perspectives are epitomized by the discussions between William of Baskerville and Jorge of Burgos in Umberto Eco's Cluniac abbey. Jorge and William argue about laughter and, implicitly, about criticism. At bottom, their polemic concerns "permissible knowledge" and the right of princes and shepherds to determine what the simple may know and what the learned may be able to teach them.² It is a polemic about whether "intellectual pride"—and by implication, artistic and scholarly standards—may be allowed to operate unhindered.

Notwithstanding their profound differences, most Cubanologists would agree with the fundamental premises of William's argument. These translate into two key operational principles: first, all knowledge about Cuba is permissible, and second, disciplinary standards must prevail in studying the topic and judging the merit of different contributions. Increasingly, as the contradictions of the Cuban formula of political domination become less justifiable and "as the revolution increasingly becomes not an agent for criticism, but one for devout, un-

critical acceptance of stale doctrine" (González Echevarría in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 172), the predominant style of analysis has become more critical. But notable differences emerge in terms of the focus of criticism and the conclusions derived from it.

One group of Cubanologists ground their criticism in the pursuit of the politics of absolute memory and its consequences. One finds no invective against "evil men" here, only terms carefully chosen to describe the regime accurately. Juan del Aguila defines the Cuban regime as a "mobilizational regime anchored by a personalist dictatorship" (1984, 79). Hugh Thomas, Georges Fauriol, and Juan Carlos Weiss describe the Cuban regime as a totalitarian garrison and Communist state (1984, 13, 17–19, 53). Irving Louis Horowitz, in the fifth edition of his now-classic anthology, *Cuban Communism*, writes about the routinization of militarism and Stalinism in Cuba (1984, 2, 636–50).

A key assumption of this style of analysis is the idea that the configuration of the regime resulted from a series of conscious decisions, not from inexorable historical forces. In other words, there is no excuse for abuse of power. Del Aguila expresses this conviction well: "Cuba's totalitarianism is imposing and harsh, but the system has not yet lost all of its fidelista flavor. By the same token, the country's political evolution has been stunted by the failure to liberalize the polity and by the conscious suppression of individual freedoms. For that, as well as for the choices they continue to make, the leaders of the revolutionary generation must assume full responsibility" (Del Aguila 1984, 181–82).

Herein lies the cutting difference between this group and a second group of scholars who are not exactly blind to the obvious faults of the regime but who dull their criticism on the assumption that Cuba is somehow "different." Their exceptionalism goes beyond historical specificity to embrace such aspects as Cuba's attempt to achieve growth with equity, which must be viewed in a Latin American context to be appreciated fully (Brundenius 1982, 121), and the unremitting hostility of the United States, which tends to exacerbate the harshness of the regime (Smith in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 334–39). In essence, there is room for criticism within this style but it is tempered by the implicit assumption that the domestic and foreign circumstances of the Cuban revolutionary project justify analytical lenience.

Writing from this perspective, Alfred Padula and Lois Smith describe Cuban socialism as "macho-military and dependent" but somehow do not see Cuba's low birthrate (at its lowest since the war of 1895) as a symptom of failure, concluding instead that that this trend could be "one of the bittersweet realities of progress" (in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 90). Archibald Ritter questions the authenticity of participatory democracy in Cuba, given the dominant role played by the Communist

party in the *Organos de Poder Popular*. Yet Ritter concludes “tentatively” that at the local level, democracy—defined in terms of control over leadership selection—exists to some degree in Cuba (Ritter in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 287–88). Similarly, Judith Weiss admits that critical vigilance is exercised with varying degrees of rigidity through internal discussion and self-censorship, but she does not challenge the official view that the cultural policy of the revolution has been relatively open (Weiss in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 117, 130).

Within the labyrinth of Cubanology, one finds a second style of analysis based on a more “orthodox” approach to the revolution, which is viewed as one instance of socialist construction. These authors seek guidance from the Marxist tradition and profess solidarity with those inspired by the revolutionary myth. Their concern is with the authenticity of the process, not with its contradictions. Their travail is to fit different parts of the Cuban puzzle into a process of revolutionary change that generates its own coherence and is guided by an immutable logic. One finds many coincidences between this and the two versions of the first style, although the similarities do not prevent major differences in causal interpretations and analytical implications. Fred Judson expresses the orthodox approach: “In revolutionary Cuba the military is the center of power. . . . The Cuban military is the locus of revolutionary leadership. These truths are determined largely by the historical genesis of the anti-dictatorial, anti-colonial struggle during and immediately after the Batista regime of 1952–1959. The antagonistic relationship of the Cuban Revolution with imperialism also determines the continuing central political role of the military” (Judson 1984, 3–4).

But some express concern with the actual implementation of the model. “Notwithstanding the effectiveness of decree law 32, its enactment was politically disturbing. While the demoralizing impact of habitually undisciplined and unsanctioned individuals could not be underestimated, was the political solution to the problem the extension of full authority to management? Labor discipline was temporarily expedited, but the long-term political and social consequences were unforeseeable” (Pérez-Stable in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 303).

Others are concerned about Cuba’s economic relations with the USSR: “Cuba is vulnerable to Soviet influence because a withdrawal of favorable trade agreements and aid would be disastrous to the Cuban economy. Since 1970 the Cuban leadership appears to have accepted the reality that this economic dependence results from an inherited neocolonial economic structure whose contradictions allowed the revolution to come to power in 1959; that economic diversification to end dependence will require still more time; and that until this transformation is accomplished there is no alternative to dependence and conse-

quent vulnerability to Soviet influence" (Edelstein in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 191).

One also encounters less felicitous instances of this style. One example is the disingenuous exercise in apologetics: "In terms of its African roots, the revolution has been quite successful in expressing through practice the bonds of internationalist solidarity (with the notable exception of Eritrea where Cuba supported the efforts of a dictatorial military regime in Ethiopia to defeat a national liberation movement) . . ." (Petras and Morley in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 434). Another example is irresistibly lapsing into what one reviewer has termed *literal populism*.³ "The deepest and most lasting impression of my Cuban experience is that Cubans have the capacity to see the trees *and* the forest, the ability to continually evaluate progress and be frank about errors, giving people a solid participation in solutions, that they share with the world information about what went wrong from time to time, as well as the revolution's extraordinary achievements" (Randall in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 443). This kind of testimonial marks the boundaries, generously defined, of Cubanology.

Him with His Foot in His Mouth

Cubanology has been an inexact science and a controversial art from the outset. Louis Pérez suggests that "as the revolution radicalized, it polarized, and through the early years produced a literature that was largely polemical in format and policy-oriented in function. Sides were quickly chosen, and almost from the outset the Cuba literature became possessed of one of its most enduring qualities—engagement. Defenders and detractors participated in lengthy, often passionate, disputes over the virtues and vices of revolutionary development in Cuba" (Pérez in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 395–96) Despite this intensity, ad hominem attacks have been rare, and Cubanologists have maintained a civil tone.⁴ Relevance has found no justification in stridency, and passion has had more to do with learning and understanding than with trendiness.

The ultimate vindication of Cubanology's relevance has been proven by the fact that Cubanology has attracted the attention of the prince. But the prince and the learned seldom compete on equal terms in either the political or the intellectual arena. Unable to wrest an unconditional surrender from Cubanologists,⁵ official critics have tried to discredit them while seeking to impose the exclusionary protagonism of the prince onto the realm of ideas.

Official Cuban criticism has been as ineffectual as it has been acrimonious. Initially, Cubanology was attacked for its alleged anticom-

munist biases and for its supposed unwillingness to accept the legitimacy of the revolution.⁶ More recently the charge has been scholarship at the service of Reaganism.⁷ The targets of such diatribes are “notorious Reaganites” like Jorge Domínguez, Carmelo Mesa-Lago, Sergio Roca, Jorge Pérez-López, and Lawrence Theriot. But the message has been delivered to anyone who analyzes the revolution from a perspective other than official machismo-leninismo. I find the spirit of Jorge of Burgos hard at work here, in a new edition of *una pelea cubana contra los demonios*.

The price of relevance is high, but not because (as Heberto Padilla suggested recently) expatriate intellectuals become rootless and disoriented in losing their main interlocutor, the dictator. The poet errs because it is hard to lose sight of Mr. Castro and undoubtedly foolish to try to do so, as foolish as it would be to try to study Cuba and ignore the work of Mesa-Lago et al. Instead, relevance is costly because the prince has noticed. But the prince, in turn, must bear his own costs. Attempts to present the speeches of the Cuban revolutionary leadership as forms of analytical discourse on contemporary Cuba are difficult exercises in translation. Once removed from their rarified, heroic context, these speeches become easy prey.

Twenty years of socialist revolution and socialism have brought many things to our country which no one, not even our fiercest enemies, would dare to deny. Socialism worked the miracle of eradicating illiteracy. . . . Socialism worked the miracle of eliminating many diseases and reducing the number of deaths in the first year of life. . . . Socialism worked the miracle of bringing our country into first place in Latin America in the field of culture. . . . Socialism worked the miracle of eradicating unemployment in our country. . . . (Speech of 16 Apr. 1981, *Castro Speeches* 2:325)

A system that works miracles must obviously be beyond reproach, and any evaluation of that reality in terms short of solemn may be interpreted as a defamation campaign. But solemnity invites laughter and sarcasm that, although frowned upon in the academic community, find outlets among those who plead to be included out of Cubanology, like Carlos Alberto Montaner: “In the Kingdom of Serendip, as the tale goes, every action of its confused prince produced results exactly opposite to those he intended. Fidel Castro suffers from the Serendip Effect; he is endowed with that ironical gift of achieving the opposite of what he sets out to do” (Montaner 1985, 20).

The unconventional quality that made the young Castro such an attractive and unique figure has deserted him, and Castro’s attempts to recapture that rebellious style—whether by inviting other governments to repudiate their foreign debts while he renegotiates his own, or by mounting attacks against the socialist government of Felipe González while regretting aloud the moment Spain set foot in America—make

him vulnerable. To be sure, his rhetoric is politically purposeful (he may be currently trying to embarrass the Soviets into forgiving Cuba's foreign debt to the USSR), but his choice of metaphors is, to say the least, poor. Elsewhere Montaner observes: "Fidel Castro has declared himself an aboriginal indian. Not bad. In 1975, when he sent his troops to Angola he declared himself an expatriate black, but he was unable to specify whether he was congo or carabali. . . . Poor Castro! He does not understand anything . . . he has not found out that to the Marxists—and he swears to be one—the conquest and colonization of the indians was a correct qualitative step toward class struggle. He has failed to notice that America and Cuba are European concepts."⁸

What is noteworthy here is not that the irrepressible Castro cannot realistically expect to create an official Cubanology (a contradiction in terms) or become its most consummate exponent. Instead, Castro's exchanges with those unbound by academic norms may help resolve the "organic crisis" of Cubanology.

Cubanologists share a heavy existential burden with other students of Communist regimes, by which I mean an admirable and total dedication to the study of regimes whose political formulae of domination change at a pace similar to an agonizingly slow game of baseball. To their credit, Cubanologists have kept their composure and succeeded in maintaining academic and public interest in a scholarly approach to Cuba. But twenty-six years of revolution may have begun to take an inevitable toll.⁹ The response of the Cubanologists has been varied. In desperation, the more critical element "can only provide informed guesses or best estimates to these and other related questions concerning political succession in Cuba because we are dealing with a future full of uncertainties in which all the variables cannot be ascertained. Hence, we must rely on informed but nonetheless speculative analytical exercises that identify the 'most likely' succession probabilities" (González in *Cuban Studies Project* 1985, 3). These difficulties notwithstanding, the topic of political succession in Cuba can hardly be dismissed as Reaganesque wishful thinking.

Less critical, but equally exasperated by the involutions cycles of contemporary Cuban politics, other "Cuba watchers" are becoming more impatient, questioning "whether the enormous quantity of political activity in Marxist-Leninist regimes such as Cuba translate into qualitative opportunities for popular influence on government decisions. . . . Officially, the supervision and guidance provided by the vanguard party are not considered a hindrance to the effective articulation of citizen demands. This is not the most credible of claims; it hardly seems likely that such an elaborate apparatus of restraints would exist where there is little or nothing to be restrained" (Rabkin in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 267). This kind of concern is likely to turn into an

examination of whether Cuba's worst difficulties are derivative or self-inflicted.

The more committed may continue to find refuge in their own ingenuity, but their writings also raise crucial questions.

When Cuba's history is compared with the histories of other nations in which socialist revolutions have taken place, it is evident that unionization had a more thorough and extensive impact there than elsewhere. . . . In other countries where revolutions have led to efforts to establish socialist organization . . . the entire economies . . . were connected to and affected by capitalist development . . . [but] these economies were not capitalist; they were not urban; they were not modern. . . . Cuba has the distinction of being the first and only capitalist nation to experience a socialist revolution (MacEwan in Halebsky and Kirk 1985, 421–22).

If Cuba was not such a "Third World" outback after all and if the Cuban working class was so advanced, why has socialism suffered such battering in Cuba? Why have there been so many false starts? Why has Cuba remained so utterly disorganized? I would advance the proposition that, regardless of the kind of Cubanology practiced, analysts must come to grips with the role of Fidel Castro in contemporary Cuba.

The War of the End of the World

Antonio Annino is a recent arrival in the realm of Cubanology, but he deserves special mention for the elegant manner in which he has synthesized some of the premises established during three decades of Cubanology. Annino assumes (correctly, in my view) that the exceptionalism of the Cuban case is rooted in the autonomy of the political sphere, in the fact that Cuba passed directly from a populist crisis to a socialist revolution through a series of extraordinary acts of political will (1984, 8–10, 53–64). It goes without saying that Annino rejects the thesis of the inevitability of the revolution. He argues that only after the revolution had been consolidated (as a result of the strategy followed by Castro) could the party be created (1984, 85–97). That strategy was predicated on charismatic appeal and a centralized coordination of the mobilized radical voluntarism of the masses (1984, 112–16, chap. 4).

This basic scheme of political domination has provided the regime with continuity and is also the locus of its principal contradiction, namely, the extraordinary influence of Fidel Castro. His presence requires and sustains a utopian militarism not based on firm commitment to principle but on blind loyalty to a leader increasingly unable to work miracles. The outcome is a strategy of legitimation predicated on a relentless struggle against intractable problems. At home, the strategy implies that President Fidel Castro "has banished from the hearts of his countrymen all hope of ever living in a fair and prosperous country"

(Montaner 1985, 51). These are the words of an unforgiving critic, to be sure, but they echo the official rhetoric:

If there's no wealth there'll be very few things to distribute. That is a reality, and in rectifying its idealistic mistakes the revolution had the courage to adopt the pertinent measures. But contradictions do arise. And we must guard against socialist formulas eroding communist consciousness; we must prevent socialist formulas from diverting us from our lofty objectives, our communist dreams. We must prevent ideological indolence and misunderstanding of these truths from diverting us from our goal of developing the communist human being. (Speech of 4 Apr. 1982, *Castro Speeches* 2:336)

Abroad President Castro has projected this style even in some of his more statesmanlike initiatives, as in his address at the Seventh Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement:

Broadly, the main efforts of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and all the other Third World countries may be summed up in the following aims: To struggle tirelessly for peace. . . . To struggle without respite for an end to the unequal trade that depresses our real export income. . . . To struggle against protectionism. . . . To struggle for the cancellation of the external debt. . . . Together we have striven and struggled and together we have scored victories. In the same spirit and with this same determination, we must be ready to wage the most colossal, legitimate, worthy, and necessary battle for our peoples' lives and futures. (*Castro Speeches* 2:212–16)

Not long ago, Albert Hirschman remarked that “it is conceivable for the articulation of problems and the elaboration of proposals for their solution to increase at times quite independently of what actually goes on in economy and society. . . .”¹⁰ One can imagine Cuba as an extreme manifestation of this tendency. In Cuba the costs of experimenting have been high, and resolving the policy agenda has been linked to fundamental changes in human nature. To some analysts, this view might justify even more lenient analytic standards, but others would insist on a different focus. After all, President Castro, like Origen (the early Christian theologian from Alexandria), insists that no salvation exists for Cuba outside socialism, ostensibly understood as his version of socialism. This being the case, Cubanology must confront the question of where Cuba would be without her reckless prince.

NOTES

1. “Las cinco grandes preguntas de la filosofía y la ciencia política,” *Libro-Homenaje a Manuel García Pelayo* 2, Facultad de Ciencias Jurídicas y Políticas (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1980), 651–52.
2. See Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose* (New York: Warner, 1984), 68–69, 98–100, 149–53, 155–56, 214–15, 220–22, 234–36, 576–79.
3. I have borrowed the term *literal populism* from James Dunkerley, “Writing on Revolutions,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15, pt. 2 (Nov. 1983):487.
4. See Carmelo Mesa-Lago, “Revolutionary Empathy vs. Calculated Detachment in the

- Study of the Cuban Revolution," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos* 11, no. 1 (Jan. 1981):90–92.
5. This is the view of José Alvarez, "The Dying Dialogue between U.S. and Cuban Scholars," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos* 14, no. 2 (Summer 1984):66.
 6. See, for example, H. Yanes Quintero, "Comment," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1983):112–18.
 7. José Luis Rodríguez, "Un enfoque burgués del sector externo de la economía cubana," *Cuba Socialista* 5, no. 1 (Mar.–Apr. 1985):79.
 8. Carlos Alberto Montaner, "Fidel Castro, indio aborigen," *El Miami Herald*, 4 Aug. 1985, p. 13 (my translation).
 9. I was surprised by the relative dearth of monographs published on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the revolution. With the possible exception of Mesa-Lago's recent book-length essay, most of the more familiar names in the field (Jorge Domínguez, Richard Fagen, Barry Farber, Edward González, William LeoGrande, Andrés Suárez, Jaime Suchlicki, and Nelson Valdés) let the occasion pass without a major contribution. Irving Horowitz published a new edition of his anthology, while Hugh Thomas's observance consists of the short tract cited here. To be sure, the sociology of the profession also takes its toll, but there may be a degree of exhaustion reflected here.
 10. Albert O. Hirschman, "The Search for Economic Determinants," in *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, edited by David Collier (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 82.

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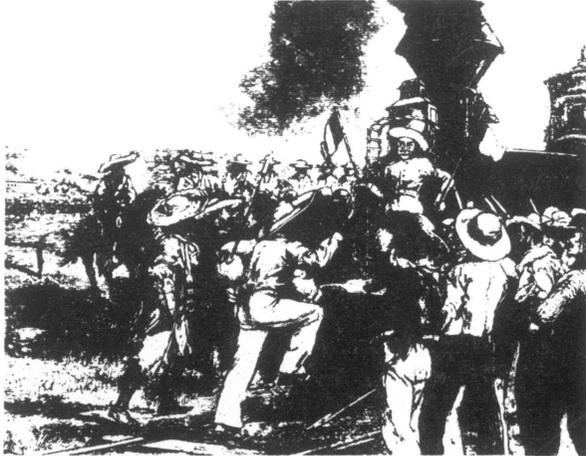
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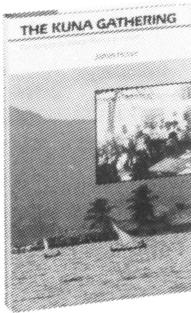
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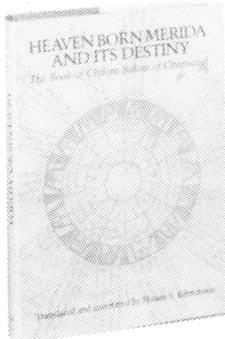


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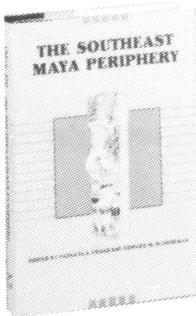
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