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¿Un cubano más?:  
An Interview with René Depestre about  
his Cuban Experience

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I first became aware of the great Haitian writer René Depestre (1926–) when I saw the immortal Cuban film *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Gutiérrez Alea, 1968). A scene from that film is a literary roundtable on the topic of “Literature and Underdevelopment,” and among the participants (including David Viñas, Edmundo Desnoes, Gianni Toti, and others) is Depestre, whose cameo pronouncement on the topic under debate always seemed to me (like the film itself) of an underappreciated profundity:

La cultura en un país subdesarrollado no puede ser otra cosa que una operación a veces costosa, dolorosa, mediante la cual un pueblo toma conciencia de su capacidad de transformar su vida social, de escribir su propia historia, y de recoger lo mejor de sus tradiciones para hacerlas fructificar y para enriquecerlas con las condiciones de la lucha de la liberación nacional.

This pronouncement on the role of culture in a revolutionary society—and the tension between the poet’s rarified vocation and the expression of a genuinely popular culture—was my *entrée* into reading Depestre and something that I have always taken as a critical key to interpreting his work.<sup>1</sup>

In 2011, I wrote a letter to Depestre (he does not use email) at his home in Lézignan-Corbières in the Aude Department in the South of France. I was interested in speaking to him, specifically about his experience living in Castro’s Cuba for almost twenty years, from 1959 to 1978, where he published some of his most important works, including *Journal d’un animal marin* (1964), *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’Occident chrétien* (1967), *Cantate d’octobre* (1968), *Poète à Cuba* (1976) and his first novel, *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979), originally published in Spanish as *El palo ensebado* (1975). Despite this total personal and ideological investment in Cuba and its revolution during those years, it seemed to me that most of the critical commentary on Depestre was articulated from a Francophone and Haitian perspective that did not sufficiently take into account the Cuban context and milieu. So despite the existence of numerous excellent interviews with Depestre over the years (such as those conducted by Colin Dayan, Jean Jonassaint, Mohamed B. Taleb-Khyar and others), I wanted to speak with him specifically and exclusively about Cuba, a passion we share. Much to my delight, his hand-written response to my letter embraced the idea with enthusiasm and included an invitation to come to his home. I did so in June 2011.

The result was not only a lively discussion but also, I believe, a friendship leading to several repeat visits over subsequent years. Perhaps it is because Depestre is approaching the end of his life and wants to set the record straight, but for whatever reason, once we began conversing about Cuba and other matters, the proverbial floodgates opened. Our first session lasted five or six hours. His energy to speak about Cuba and his past seemed boundless. He appeared to hold nothing back, including revelations about the intimacy of his friendship with Che Guevara, the guerilla training he received to infiltrate Haiti in 1959, his experience taking over the National Editions of Cuba publishing house and the editing and publishing of *Don Quixote* in 1960, and finally the surprising degree of his participation in the infamous "Heberto Padilla Affair" and his subsequent marginalization. And of course he was more than willing to offer his historical assessment of the Cuban revolution itself, which was in some ways surprisingly nuanced. The interviews were conducted in French with some phrases in Cuban Spanish (that I have left untranslated) thrown in for good measure.<sup>2</sup>

**Paul B. Miller:** What were your first impressions or ideas about Cuba when you were growing up in Jacmel, Haiti?

**René Depestre:** First of all, when I was a child, many Haitian workers from the Jacmel area would leave to cut sugarcane in Cuba, the *braceros*. From this region in the south of Haiti, thousands of people departed and some would return with news from Cuba. They talked about Cuba, they had learned a little Spanish, so I knew that there was a big island named Cuba where the Haitians were cutting cane. That was my first notion of Cuba and it was striking for my childhood imagination.

My father, when he was with his friends, would talk about José Martí, about [Carlos Manuel de] Céspedes, about the great founders of the Cuban nation, such as Antonio Maceo, so he had an understanding of Cuba. And then Nicolás Guillén came in 1942, Alejo Carpentier in 1943, so at that moment I had an idea that there were great intellectuals in Cuba of some importance.

When I was an adolescent, Guillén came to Haiti and was brought into my class, where he recited poems. I was in high school, in *seconde*, so I knew of Guillén. Maybe that was a bit at the root of my calling to be a poet, because I saw a great poet up close. I was fourteen or fifteen at the time. He recited poems in Spanish, and we went crazy with curiosity to see such a man. And then, the next year, Carpentier came too, and he gave a presentation in French with extraordinary talent and brilliance. Carpentier gave a presentation on *lo real maravilloso*. It was the first time he spoke in public on the notion of the American marvelous realism, an idea he had formed in Haiti during his trip. For my generation, it was a baptism of fire, because we already had a notion of the marvelous real that he spoke of, but Carpentier gave it intellectual, cultural, and historical foundations and connected it with German romanticism. For me it was an extraordinary point of departure.

Many years later I would discover with fascination the history of Cuba that I found much more coherent and richer than the history of Haiti itself, because Cuba had its own Creole bourgeoisie of Spanish origin from different provinces; and there was the black population as well—the encounter between Africa and Spain was, I would say, more “harmonious” than in Haiti, where there was a rupture with the whites. I would also go on to discover the Cuban *intelligentsia*, the virtual *pléiade* of poets and writers of great talent such as Guillén and Carpentier (that I had already known as an adolescent) but also José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, Roberto Fernández Retamar, and all the poets, Eliseo Diego, José Martí ... I discovered Fernando Ortiz, an extraordinary intellectual, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* is a masterpiece, and everything he wrote about the African heritage. I read everything Cuban, all the poets, the novelists, the essayists and even arrived at a point at which I had forged a Cuban mentality.

Earlier, when I went to Paris as a university student, my student housing was assigned by chance in the Cuban pavilion. I could have just as easily landed in a Swedish or Swiss pavilion, so by living in the Cuban pavilion I got to know the Cuban students, and I became interested in the history of Cuba. I started to better understand Cuba, without knowing that one day I would live in Cuba, marry a Cuban woman, have Cuban children, and when I was thrown out of Czechoslovakia (after having been expelled from France as an “anti-colonial agitator”), I made the move of going to Cuba, thanks to Guillén, in 1952.

Batista took power on March 10, 1952, and I arrived in Cuba on March 22, and they arrested me, they put me in prison with my wife, and then they expelled me from Cuba. Consequently, it was a new experience of Cuba. I discovered racism, because at the time I was married to a white woman, a French woman of Hungarian descent, a very beautiful Jewish woman. This attracted the attention of the Cuban secret police. And Batista's people found it odd that a beautiful and cultured woman would marry a black man, and they tried to separate my wife from me. They said, he's a Haitian, and what's more, a Bolshevik, a black Bolshevik, he's the devil incarnate! We were expelled together, and they forced us onto an Italian boat. In 1952 we were expelled from France, Czechoslovakia, Cuba, and Italy.

Before arriving in Cuba a second time in 1959, I had published an editorial in the Haitian press about the Cuban revolution. The article ended up on the desk of Che Guevara, who read it and said that he absolutely needed to meet this young man, because he understands our revolution. I had understood; I had secretly listened to the *Radio Rebelde* broadcast from Sierra Maestra, with the volume down very low every evening. I said to myself that something very serious was happening here.

I was in Port-au-Prince. [François] Duvalier had been my family's doctor, and when I came back to Haiti and he had taken power, he called me in and offered me an important position in his government. I didn't want it, because when he

laid out his program, it was a Fascist program. He admired Salazar, Franco, Chiang Kai-Shek. I told myself I couldn't serve a man like that. So, from the beginning of my arrival in Haiti, I split with Duvalier, I was cut off, I was at my mother's house, I wasn't working, I was listening to the radio, I was writing, I was reading a lot. My library traveled with me in all my peregrinations, so my books were my companions. I was at once a man of action and a man of the library, because what I had taken away from my studies of Marxism, above everything, was that for the first time in the history of philosophy, there was a doctrine that didn't separate thought from action—that was seductive for me.

I had been a student leader in Haiti, I had been imprisoned in Haiti, I was active in Haitian Communist Party, and the truth is that communism disappointed me very early, but the enemies of communism were unaware of my disillusionment. They thought I was a hard-core communist, but at the time I was myself already having doubts about the Soviet Union itself, about Stalin, about Dimitrov, about the third international... I had my own ideas that didn't coincide with the official line, but that didn't correspond either to what the opponents of socialism were saying. I was opposed to Stalinism but not for the same reasons the traditional opponents of Stalinism were.

I started listening to *Radio Rebelde* in January 1958 and I was amazed by what I heard. I already spoke Spanish, I had lived in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil, so I already had a Latin American experience. I told my comrades—we had already organized a clandestine core, a revolutionary cell that was fighting against Duvalier and the Tonton Macoutes—I told them, we have something extraordinary that is taking shape very close to here, in the Oriente province of Cuba, seventy-seven kilometers from Haiti. I'm going to join the Castristas in the Sierra Maestra. For me, it wasn't enough to just listen to the radio, no! One had to act. There had to be a Haitian in the Cuban July 26 Movement. There was an outcry against me, and they told me I was an adventurer. That the people fighting in Cuba were white. "Castro is a white man; Che Guevara is white! These are white people fighting against the mulatto Batista! What do you expect to find in this mess of whites fighting against the mulatto in power?"

I said, "But you all are crazy. I listen to what they are saying. They're working on agrarian reform. They're working on a literacy campaign. These are democratic measures." Because at that moment, I wasn't thinking in communist terms, because I had already had my little experience of communism. I had doubts—I knew the communist parties from the inside because I was a former communist leader myself, I wasn't an entry-level communist, I was a communist leader in exile. When I went to Moscow, I was taken seriously, I met communist leaders and had visited the Kremlin.

And so I wore two hats. I was a poet, an intellectual, and a writer, but I was also a man of action. I said, we must join the rebels in the Sierra Maestra, but this

idea was shot down by my comrades. They told me that if I did that, it was a rupture with the Haitian communist cell, that I had to wait and see what was going to happen in Cuba, not to rush. I missed the opportunity, because if I had gone to the Sierra Maestra, and if I had met Che Guevara, not in an office in Havana, but in the guerilla campaign in the Sierra Maestra, my life would have taken a completely different direction.

I should have broken it off with the others and left in a fishing boat to join the Sierra Maestra. It would have been easy. It was practically like "tourism." I could have done it and I didn't. And I told Castro and Guevara: "I wanted to join you at the time, but the local communists in Haiti didn't want to let me go. They said that you were white men and that we could expect nothing from the white men in Cuba—they're racists." That said, there was some truth to that—a lot of white Cubans were racists, as I had already discovered myself with my wife under Batista.

So I missed the opportunity. When the rebels triumphed on January 1, 1959, I told myself that this is getting serious, and I was right—when I listened to Che's words in January, and Camilo Cienfuegos', these men were revolutionaries, democrats. It wasn't a question of communism. I didn't know what these young people's ideologies were, I thought that they were just "leftists," Latin American left-wing democrats. So I said, you prevented me from going clandestinely but this time I'm going. So I then wrote the article for the Haitian press. It was not an easy task, because I was forbidden from publishing in Haiti. Duvalier had completely cut me off, but I had a friend I had studied with (in a small country, personal connections count). He was the head of a newspaper, Haiti's main newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste*. He told me, I'm going to talk to the president about it, and he told Duvalier, you know, Depestre is going to write an article about Cuba. He listened to the radio, he knows the facts. What's more, Duvalier had persecuted Fidel's partisans who were passing through Haiti to get to the Sierra Maestra. He had jailed them and everything. There was an enmity between Castro and Duvalier—Duvalier was afraid of Castro in the beginning, so Duvalier thought, maybe Depestre can be of use to us, we're going to use him. Publish his article, and then we'll see afterwards.

I published the article and it was a solid commentary. The new ambassador from Cuba had come to Haiti, read the article, and sent it the same day to Cuba. The ambassador sent me a message, telling me that the Cuban authorities had read my article, Castro and Guevara included, and that they were quite impressed that a foreigner, someone who didn't live near them, understood them so well. What they didn't know was that I had listened to their radio transmissions and was following their movement very closely. There was a journalist named Claude Julien in the French press who had followed the developments in Cuba and who had written a very good article in *Le Monde*. Julien also wrote the first book in French on the Cuban revolution, called *La Révolution cubaine*. He was an executive editor of *Le*

*Monde* and wrote an article: "Cuba: entre la peur et l'espoir" (Cuba: Between Fear and Hope). It was one of the best articles anyone had written about Cuba at that time. He had gone to the Sierra Maestra, met the Cuban leaders and had done a first-class report that planted the idea in my head.

After my editorial was published, the Cubans invited me. I jumped through a lot of hoops, and I was able to leave Haiti in March. I did some fairly secretive negotiations with "my friend" Duvalier, and they let me leave because Duvalier thought I would be more useful in Cuba, that I would be a link to Castro. But upon my arrival in Cuba, the very first day, I gave a press conference announcing my rupture with Duvalier, and the following Sunday I was received by Guevara, in his private home. He had an asthma attack the day before and received me shirtless in his room. I was thinking I would stay a half-hour, an hour at the most, and he ended up keeping me six hours! I had six hours of uninterrupted conversation with Che Guevara and we spoke about everything, including literature, because he knew I was a poet. He was familiar with French poetry and spoke French well. We talked about Nâzım Hikmet, [Paul] Eluard, [André] Breton, [Louis] Aragon. We talked about everything, and naturally about politics. He laid out for me out their entire project. He confided in me immensely!

That a Cuban leader like Che Guevara spent six hours with me—I was amazed. It was an extraordinary honor. At one point his wife came in, and I had dinner with them. I can say, I believe, that I could count myself among Che's friends. By the way, he wanted to take me to Bolivia. It's significant that I didn't go to Bolivia with him, because I would be dead if I had.

When Che told me what he was proposing, I told myself, this is a program that is leading toward communism. I didn't even dare to think it, given the nearby presence of the United States—it was outrageous! So I told him: "Pero Comandante, por lo que estoy oyendo, me parece que se trata de un programa muy revolucionario." I didn't want to use the word "communism." He looked at me mischievously, smiling, and told me: "Chico, se trata de una revolución so-ci-a-l-i-st-a" (he divided up each syllable just like that). And then he put his index finger to his lips, to let me know it was a state secret. This was March 1959. The American press was scarcely starting to have suspicions regarding the political ideology of the Cuban Revolution, but I had learned in March 1959 that the Cubans had a socialist project in the shadow of the Americans! It was an extraordinary secret, and at the same time I was happy because I had practically broken with Stalinism. I was seeing a new regime led by young people who wanted to reclaim the Marxist revolutionary flag, and I was delighted!

It's what I was hoping for but didn't dare to dream. And then he asked me, "What can I do for you?" (We used "tú" rather than "usted" right away.) I outlined the situation in Haiti: Duvalier, the terror, the Tonton Macoutes, the *papadocracie*, the Haitian horror, and he tells me: "We're going to help you Haitians. We're going

to launch a revolutionary action in Haiti." Then, throughout all of early 1959, we brought over young Haitians and prepared for an expedition to initiate the guerilla in Haiti. I received guerilla training and was put at the head of a small cell of around one hundred Haitians to attack Duvalier. It wasn't really my way, this guerilla approach, nor the commando approach, no. I'm a poet. But if my group had come to power in 1959 or 1960, we could have saved Haiti.

That said, I wasn't entirely convinced that a guerilla war in Haiti was the way to go because we were too poor. According to my studies of Mao, a guerilla war cannot be waged in a country that's too poor, because guerilla warfare has to be "like a fish in water," as Mao said. Che agreed that the guerilla war was not a universal method suitable for all conditions. I would have preferred a commando action: land a few kilometers from Port-au-Prince, on the coast, openly attack the palace, take control of the palace, and seize Duvalier in his bed! It was doable. We were all very young, well-trained men. I was athletic. We take over like that! A revolutionary coup.

So we were preparing to infiltrate Haiti, but at the same time we were also preparing a double action. Because on the other side of the island of Hispaniola, there was the Dominican Republic and there was Trujillo. And Trujillo had an army that could intervene in Haiti if a guerilla force took power in a revolutionary coup, so we had to also carry out an action to get rid of Trujillo. So we started training Dominicans as well. There was a Dominican captain who had been in the Sierra Maestra, where I wish I had been, who took the lead of the Dominican movement. This group landed in the Dominican Republic in June 1959 and were all massacred. The CIA had infiltrated the Dominican camp. So Castro and Guevara said that if the CIA had infiltrated the Dominican camp, then they had surely infiltrated the Haitian camp as well, so we had a catastrophe on our hands if we went ahead with our plans. Fidel himself said, you're going to all be massacred by the *Duvaliéristes*. After the Dominican failure, we can't send you. But we were ready! Nobody knows about this. That's why we didn't invade in 1959. After the Dominican failure, it wasn't wise, it wasn't responsible, to underestimate the CIA.

Guevara told me, well you have the choice: either you stay in Cuba, and I'll help you integrate into the revolution, or you can go elsewhere. I had thought about going back to Paris, I already had the possibility of working at UNESCO, which was my backup plan. I told myself, if I split with the communists, I have to have a place, because in France my situation was untenable. I was on the French police's radar, I had a thick file at the Paris police *prefecture* as an anticolonial agitator, so only an international institution could "recycle" me.

But I accepted Che Guevara's proposition to stay in Cuba. At the time, there was a Congress of Black Intellectuals in 1959 in Rome, where I was supposed to meet up with Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. That was my exit door out of Cuba in 1959, to meet up with the black revolutionaries in Rome. Fanon, Césaire,

Senghor, the whole group, they organized the Second Congress of Black Writers, the first having taken place in Paris in September 1956. So that's why I wasn't at the congress, because Che told me that at this moment, the serious developments are not happening in Rome at a congress of black or white intellectuals, they are happening here in Cuba. Choose. And he was right. I told him, "Comandante, yo no voy a pensarlo mucho. Yo me quedo en Cuba." He gave me an *abrazo* and appointed me to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

When I arrived at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, sent by Che Guevara, there were still people from the Cuban *ancien régime*, where no black person had ever set foot as a civil servant. Because the former Cuban regime was racist, there weren't any black people in the upper administration in Cuba, and they boycotted me. They isolated me. It was a true ostracism, because all the staff had belonged to the former diplomatic corps. So I let Guevara know. Guevara told me, "esos hijos de puta van a saber que su tiempo está contado. Si tú quieres puedes quedarte en el ministerio a aguantar esos hijos de puta o si no yo te nombro en otro lugar." He appointed me to "intervene" (in the Cuban parlance of the time), to take charge of the journal *El Diario de la Marina*, which was the main Cuban newspaper at the time that was waging a vicious anti-Castro campaign. We decided to take control of all of the big newspapers and create a single publishing house, "la Imprenta Nacional." And he told me, you will be the literary supervisor of this publishing house, we'll call it the National Editions of Cuba.

I was already a soldier, so I put on my uniform. I showed up at the office of the editor-in-chief of the *El Diario de la Marina* [José I. Rivero] who knew what was happening already, but he received me cordially. I informed him that his mission as a journalist was over. It was unbelievable, a completely arbitrary act. I'm aware today that what I did was not very ... but we were in revolutionary times, the newspaper was violently attacking the Cuban revolution. It was a far-right newspaper, a big newspaper. The director was a good man. I respected him, and I did things properly. I communicated to him the decision the government had taken to put an end to his activity, that his newspaper was done.

I was embarrassed, but I don't regret it, because I did things in their proper form. I was surrounded by the army personnel in his office, but I expressed myself as an intellectual, and he took the news with elegance. He told me, well, okay, what a shame. He almost had tears in his eyes. He was a noble man all his life—the newspaper had belonged to a large Cuban family since the late nineteenth century. It was a Cuban institution. And to see a black man, in uniform, with a heavy accent in Spanish, inform him that his newspaper could no longer be published, it's almost inconceivable! It's almost inconceivable that I, a young man, a foreigner, arrives in his office armed with Czech-made sub-machine gun in my hand (that I was afraid of firing!) that I set down on the table.

So I took control. I settled into this man's office, and I organized the management of a publishing house. And Castro gives the order to publish *Don Quixote*, *El Quijote*, as the symbolic first book, because he himself was a sort of Quijote, an adventurer of the Caribbean. So that's how I created the edition with one-hundred thousand copies—one-hundred thousand!—that we practically handed out for a few cents per copy. It was an event because Castro wanted the first cultural action of the Cuban revolution to be a major *coup* like that. The publishing of *Don Quixote*—it was an entire program. Not many people know anything about that today. My name doesn't come up when they talk about the edition; people say that it was Alejo Carpentier who did it. The anonymous preface was written by me.<sup>3</sup> I wrote the preface by situating the Cuban revolution in the historical framework of Latin-American Quixotism. In my preface, I painted Castro himself as Don Quixote, along with Che, fighting windmills. In reality, it was a bit like that, the Cuban revolution battling windmills. It's symbolic when I look at it today, isn't it? We fought windmills and promulgated for the wind. The international communist movement itself promulgated for the wind.

And from that moment on I became integrated into Cuba and took part in all the activities of the revolution. It would be very long to recount my personal history of Cuba, where I remained up until 1978. And at a given moment I was marginalized. I was separated from all cultural activity between 1972 and 1978, I practically did nothing. But until 1972, I was an extremely active man in the cultural realm.

As for my wife, she didn't like the Cuban regime when we went to Cuba. I should have followed her, but I had the choice, either stay in Cuba or go to Israel with her, but I didn't want to go to Israel because I was afraid the Israelis would take me for an Arab. They would have thought I was an Arab or a Bedouin. I would have had a lot of enemies in Israel, because of my color, with an Israeli woman. At that point, we decided to separate. She decided to lead her life in Israel, and me, in Cuba. She was disillusioned very quickly in Cuba. She saw that Cuba was going to be taken over by the Soviet Union and fall into the same Soviet system.

I witnessed the revolution deteriorate very quickly, even before Che Guevara left for Bolivia. They failed to create, if I may say so, a Cuban renewal of socialist ideas. The confrontation with the United States resulted in the Cubans running to the arms of the Soviet Union as a counterbalance. If the Americans had truly been savvy at the time, Cuba would have never become pro-Soviet, but American anticommunism was so brutal at the time, so primitive. The Americans were simply not going to permit such a small country to stake out a sovereign position, to impose its own point of view, and even less nationalize the sugar industry and the American interests on the island—that was something sacred, and it was shocking. And when the hammer started coming down, the Cubans panicked, because if the Americans had decided to impose their full might against them from the very

beginning, Cuba would have been incapable of resisting. But they hesitated and Cuba had just enough time to form an alliance with the Soviet Union.

As for myself, I witnessed, day by day, the growing alliance between Cuba and the Soviet Union. I was at the very heart of the matter, because I had been to Moscow. I met with the KGB people and the Russian politicians who were the first ones to arrive in Cuba. I had the reputation of being a friend to the Soviet Union because my support of Marxism existed prior to the Cuban revolution. The Russians sought me out to interrogate me about Cuba. They didn't know the Cubans very well and were wary of Castro, whom they found unpredictable.

**PBM:** Can you speak more about your involvement with Cuban culture and literature?

**RD:** As an adolescent, I had already discovered Guillén and Carpentier as I discussed earlier. Later on I discovered José Lézama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, Roberto Fernández Retamar, and all of the Cuban poets, Eliseo Diego, José Martí. I discovered Fernando Ortiz, a genius who investigated everything. In addition to *Contrapunteo*, everything he wrote on African heritage is first-rate. Moreno Friginals' *El ingenio* is a masterpiece, and others ... the entire generation of [Miguel] Barnet, Nancy Morejón. I knew everyone, in a friendly way. I was very popular in Cuba. That's why my rupture caused so much commotion.

I wanted to have a deeper understanding of Cuba, starting from my reading of Don Fernando Ortiz. So, I studied the history of Cuban music. Through Carpentier and Ortiz, I studied the history of the sugar and tobacco industry, the Cuban economy with Moreno Friginals—I studied everything. I thought that Cuba was forming not only a cultural, but also a civilizational ecosystem in the Caribbean in every way (economical, political, ecological), and that it wasn't by chance that the revolution exploded precisely in the most evolved country of the region, where there was a working class already formed through the federation of sugarcane and tobacco workers. Cuba had a great civic and political history. Then there was the fact that it had the good fortune of having a philosopher like José Martí, who had thought about the Cuban problem during the struggle for independence—not all of the Latin American countries had someone with a global vision of their society. Such was the case for Martí, who is more than a great poet. Nor is it by chance that Fidel Castro declared himself Martí's disciple.

And so I read everything: all the poets, the novelists, all the Cuban essayists. I put myself in the Cuban mentality. Guillén himself teased me: "tú eres un cubano más, chico, tú no eres haitiano, ni francés."

I discovered that Cuba had a particular idiosyncrasy: its music. Not only popular music, not only salsa, rumba, mambo, all of the popular Cuban tunes, but classical music and ballet played a big role. Cubans, from childhood, are possibly the most musical people on the planet, and it shows in the personality of a country.

I had long talks about it with Alejo Carpentier, who was a musicologist and who knew European music intimately, who was friends with Erik Satie and all of the great musicians from the "groupe des six."<sup>14</sup> Carpentier was a great specialist of Beethoven, who played piano like a professional. We talked a lot about Cuban music and its place in Cuba's idiosyncrasy. I was completely invested and interested in Cuban music.

**PBM:** Can you tell me about the cultural life in Cuba in the 1960s?

**RD:** So there was an incredible creativity thanks to the revolution, because the revolution was, and I can attest, a kind of *renaissance*. There was hope for a different world than what Cubans had known up until then, and it was also the first time that a man of this stature, Fidel, had appeared. And many of his comrades, Che, Camilo [Cienfuegos] and the others, were full of generosity, ready to sacrifice, and were proposing something very different from what the old communist party was proposing. It was the country ... of hope. And there were many young people in exile who returned, like Heberto Padilla, Edmundo Desnoes, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Pablo Armando Fernández. There were others already there like Lezama Lima and Eliseo Diego. There was an established *intelligentsia*, not only consisting of groups of individuals who shared Castro's ideas, but an *intelligentsia* with a man like Carpentier, who was a wellspring of knowledge, who took the experience and knowledge from his Venezuelan and Parisian exile to Cuba. And Guillén as well, who was a very good poet.

So there was the convergence of a number of cultural conditions to accompany the revolution, but there was a polemic with the young intellectuals who participated in [the literary supplement to the newspaper *Revolución*] *Lunes de Revolución* with Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who was a new figure, a very gifted man I knew very well. I was connected with *Lunes de Revolución* and people couldn't get over it, because I was considered to be an old communist, it was known that I had lived in Prague, that I had worked in the traditional communist movements in Brazil and Chile, and that I wasn't a Cuban Johnny-come-lately.

I had a communist past when I arrived, and upon my arrival in Cuba I was expecting a reform of the communism that had persecuted me when I had been thrown out of Prague. Fortunately, I knew important people who supported me, like Pablo Neruda, Jorge Amado, and other South American communist leaders with whom I had bonds of friendship. I had been sent to the Kremlin, no less, and had met with the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. So I was "somebody" when I arrived in Cuba. I was well liked, because I always worked without sectarianism.

**PBM:** Did these Cuban writers, artists and intellectuals have an impact on your work?

RD: What had an impact on my work, on my life, it's not the individuals or their works, it's Cuba itself, the Cuban people, Cuban life, the Cuban practice of life, the Cuban practice of sex, the Cuban practice of dance, language, Cuban *choteo*, that people don't know about in general, which is a form of Cuban humor. Visceral things.

So I cannot say that Guillén, Carpentier, Lezama, *etcetera* had an impact on my work. I admired them, I read them with a great deal of interest. I can speak about them at length. I can speak about Guillén, I believe, with a great deal of rigor.

PBM: Can you tell me about your experience working with Tomás Gutiérrez Alea in both *Memories of Underdevelopment* and *Cumbite*?

RD: In the scene of the literary roundtable in *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, Gutiérrez Alea said, "forget that it's a film, you're together reflecting on the Cuban revolution." It was the first time I had met my co-panelists, the Argentine David Viñas, Totti, Desnoes, who were on the panel.

As for *Cumbite*, for me it was a rather bitter experience. I was told that they were making a film based on [Jacques Roumain's novel] *Gouverneurs de la rosée* [*Masters of the Dew*]. Since Gutiérrez Alea was the best film director of the period, I was very enthusiastic. I trusted in his talent, but he was unable to render in cinematographic terms the lyricism that Roumain achieved with language. In this respect I found that the film was a letdown. I even had the feeling the film was a failure while we were making it, because I was there but couldn't change anything, because no one could advise him to change anything. But secretly, I was very unhappy to see that they were truly straying far from *Gouverneurs de la rosée*. What was needed was to find a cinematographic equivalent of Roumain's language and the film was too realistic, too flat. So I articulated this criticism afterwards and Nicolás Guillén went so far as to criticize me, because Fidel and Raúl Castro had seen it as well, and were not pleased, and I was in part blamed for not having done something to prevent it.

PBM: Did you know Reinaldo Arenas?

RD: Yes, I knew poor Reinaldo personally, and even during the period where he was the most persecuted, I expressed my friendship to him. I was among the few people in the street who would approach and talk with him. The others were afraid. He said, "Tú tienes cojones Depestre." I responded, "Why *cojones*? It's a matter of principle. I admire your talent. Naturally I don't agree with what they're doing to you. You're free to be homosexual, for God's sake! It's not my concern." He gave me an *abrazo*. He was surprised that I would even come up to him in the street. He told me, "You are the only intellectual who sees me in the street and comes over to me without fearing that the police would see me speaking with you."

Virgilio [Piñera] was my friend too. He had translated one of my books, *Mínerai Noir*. They were all my friends. I knew Lezama. I didn't share any of the prejudices that the leadership of the revolution had with respect to Piñera, Lezama Lima, Eliseo Diego and others who worked under my authority at the National Editions of Cuba and who were happy to have a leader like me, because I didn't apply the party slogans and had my own human way of dealing with them.

I didn't have any problem with them, but I had a position. I was a man of the party. I had gotten into Cuba through Guevara, and I defended the principles I thought were Marxist. I didn't fight the revolution from the outside, but from within. But we couldn't—it was an illusion. It was a romantic illusion to believe that we were going to change things from the inside of the communist movement. Everyone who tried failed, whether it was in Russia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, or Cuba. Even Gorbachev couldn't change what was happening. The party was doomed from over fifty years of Stalinism.

PBM: Were you aware of the UMAP?<sup>5</sup>

RD: I was against the UMAP, as you can imagine. I did everything, to the small extent that I was able, to stop it. Not everyone agreed with it and it was a serious error. I was aware of it when they decided to create the UMAP, but couldn't stop it. At root it wasn't a political position against homosexuals—homosexuality was a pretext because many of them were against or ambivalent about the revolution.

The UMAP was a short-lived event that didn't last, that they regretted later. I spoke with the Cuban leaders at the time, and I criticized the UMAP. Since I had connections in high places, I told the leaders that it was a criminal act, and they agreed with me and said that Fidel would take care of it. And he did—he gave the order to shut it down.

There was a general chaos at that time. We didn't know day to day what the leaders were going to decide, and Guevara became insane with all this chaos. It didn't bother Fidel though, because he was a chaotic person himself. He read everything, absorbed everything. When he discovered a book he would devour it. He wasn't cruel and could be compassionate. He wasn't a dictator *à la* Pinochet, but he could be ruthless with his enemies.

I knew Castro's character well, because I studied him, I observed him. I was seated at his side, like I am here with you, all evening long, on many occasion. He was hard, relentless. I watched him, and sometimes his expression became frightening. I told myself, "You should avoid being on this man's radar, he could wipe you out with no mercy." He was Machiavellian. He was a man of *realpolitik*, but he had his good side, he could behave with kindness, with tenderness. I knew women who had been his mistresses, who told me what a gentle and tender lover he was. It's contradictory.



Castro as a historical character still intrigues me greatly, because he's a dictator, but not just any dictator. It's a laziness of the mind to compare Castro to Pinochet, or Somoza, or Batista. He's a *caudillo*, but there are many categories of *caudillos*. Castro had greater complexity.

PBM: For you, did he commit atrocities?

RD: No. He committed shameful criminal acts, but not atrocities.

PBM: Please tell me about your role in the "Padilla Affair."<sup>6</sup>

RD: I knew Padilla personally, because we had translated together, in the mid 1960s, a large anthology of Cuban poetry into French. And Padilla used to come to my house to work on this enormous translation of poetry. We became quite good friends. He was a man with a rebellious spirit, very ironic, who had a sense of humor, who criticized everything. The kind of individual that the communists cannot stand—communists in general despise humor. I understood this sense of humor thanks to the experience I had with surrealism. Fortunately, even before I was a communist, I had known the surrealists: Breton, Césaire, Tsara, Carpentier—the people who gave me a critical-surrealist level of intellect that called things into question.

Padilla was a "jodedor." I told him, "¡Tú vas a pagar muy cara esa actitud!" because he was always saying things about Castro. I told him, "Fortunately you're saying this to me, because I'm not going to repeat it, I'll keep it to myself" The proof is that I gave him evidence of friendship beyond and above the party line.

I publically defended Padilla and that was the beginning of my rupture with the Cuban regime. At the notorious meeting of the Writer's Union, I was the only one to speak out in his defense and to question the very legitimacy of the meeting. I announced that as a communist I was ashamed of the meeting, and that I was speaking out to defend the honor of the communist movement. That I was intervening as a communist, not as an adversary of the party. I said all that. I said that I didn't think that we should be treating a man of talent like Padilla in this way, a great poet.

At five in the morning the same night, Padilla came to my house, because they had released him overnight, and he came to thank me. No one knows this—that Padilla came to my place in tears to thank me. He told me I was "cojonudo," "Tú tienes cojones." He told me, "You took risks for me and there are going to be consequences." And he was right. I said that I knew I was going to have enemies but that I hadn't hesitated. I was a serious man, a Marxist intellectual, and I wasn't ready to tolerate just anything. I had read Antonio Gramsci, I had read Gyorgy Lukács and Walter Benjamin, the great figures of the communist revolution, and I couldn't behave like a henchman of the revolution. I saw myself as defending the honor of the revolution that very night. But from that moment on, it was over. For

the Cubans, I was an agent of the CIA, that surely the CIA had spoken to me. Well as you can imagine, I didn't know the CIA at all, except by reputation, like everybody else.

When it became known that I had publically supported Padilla, they considered that to be an unfriendly act at the very least, regarding the Cuban Communist Party. Nicolás Guillén asked me, "How could you have supported Padilla?" I told him, "It wasn't Padilla, it was a question of principles, we don't have the right to do that to a human being, to coerce a false confession." Because a few minutes before his "confession," he was forced to memorize a script and to say things that were untrue—it's horrible. I am proud to have done what I did. Padilla warned me there would be consequences, and I told him, "Ya estoy jodido."

The Cuban secret service filmed the event, and not just filmed it, but televised it on a closed-circuit so that Fidel Castro and his brother Raúl could observe the proceedings. They were in a building 100 meters away, in a private building. The ICAIC [the Cuban film institute] was there to film the meeting, so they definitely filmed my intervention. Fidel saw me. He knew me, along with Raúl, and they were furious to see the position I took. They said, "Este haitiano está comiendo mierda." Nobody knew afterwards that I had spoken out, except Padilla, who thanked me.

All the others were scared because they knew the meeting was televised, that Castro was watching. They went pale when I asked to speak. Nicolás Guillén didn't come. He was the one who was supposed to have presided, but he was a very cultured man, and he didn't want to take a risk like that and didn't come.

Later, Guillén condemned my behavior. He told me, "You sawed off the branch you were sitting on! Castro saw you, his brother too! They saw you defending an hijo de la gran puta!" Guillén didn't like Padilla either, because Guillén didn't appreciate criticism of the regime. Guillén said, "These people, they risked their hide in the Sierra Maestra. They took risks, they waged war. The rest of us intellectuals, we were in Paris, in Buenos Aires, we didn't do anything. We didn't have the *cojones* to take action like these young men, so we should just keep our mouths shut!" I didn't agree with this theory, that we had to keep our mouths shut because the men who took power were men of action, that we had nothing to say. But Guillén was Machiavellian: "You have to be clever, you lacked political talent! I thought you had more finesse." In other words, he defended the socialist *realpolitik*, like many people who had served Stalin and others. For me, if there's something about which I cannot be reproached, it's that I never walked the walk of Stalinist *realpolitik*. From the moment I knew about them I said no. I'm Haitian after all, so I had my own little tradition of rebellion, my *cimarrón* tradition.

I broke away from the Cubans publically the evening of Padilla. Castro saw it, he was watching. He said that I spoke words that put his power in question and afterwards they erased my participation from the historical record. Even the Cuban intellectuals didn't want anyone to know that there was someone who publically

supported Padilla, because it wasn't one of them. It was a black man who embraced Padilla—that has a profound symbolic value.

Guillén insulted me. I slammed his door. After the “Padilla Affair,” Fernandez Retamar broke away from me. None of them gave me any protection. And it's people like Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, Eliseo Diego, and Cintio Vitier who welcomed me, and told me I was right. But they thought it was because I was Catholic. The Cubans persecuted me and made life impossible for me after that. I had the Cuban secret service against me. It took me over five years to finally get out of Cuba. I didn't have a passport; I was stuck in Cuba. Haiti had taken away my Haitian nationality, so I was stateless. The Cubans told me I was just another Cuban—“un cubano más.” The day I started to criticize the system all deferential treatment disappeared. I was completely isolated.

I broke away from communism the night of the “Padilla Affair.” I told my wife, this is like a bad joke, it's state terrorism. From that moment on, another life began for me, and that's how it ended. I had my circle, fortunately; I had connections in Paris, at the Sorbonne, at Sciences Po. Many of my colleagues from those years had already become important in Paris. They reached out to me; one thing led to another, and with a lot of trouble, I got out through UNESCO in 1978. The Director-General of UNESCO himself was an old friend from the Sorbonne that I had known, [Amadou-Mahtar] M'bow, from Senegal. M'bow took me into his office and told me that I was one of the rare people to come out of the Cuban revolution without having made any declarations against Cuba. He appointed me a speechwriter for none other than the Director General of UNESCO. The French secret service were stunned. They said this man is a political agitator, he's in it up to his neck; we're finding his tracks in Chile, in Argentina, Venezuela, Czechoslovakia, China, *etcetera*. They overestimated my possibilities.

PBM: Did you have a cultural life at all during the 1970s?

RD: No no, nothing. I was dead, a zombie.

PBM: But what about *Le Mât de cocagne*, your first novel—was it difficult for you to make the transition from poetry to the novel?

RD: It was difficult before I actually got started; I should have written novels in my youth, when I was writing poetry. But I had a bias. I thought prose was more difficult to write than poetry. Because poetry is linked to rhythm itself—to the rain, the wind, the sea, the movement I was familiar with, thanks to my Antillean background—and so I said, I'll write novels later. But it's another type of novel that I would have written, coming-of-age novels that I didn't do, but I wrote *Le Mât de cocagne* without particular difficulty.

PBM: *Henri Postel, c'est vous?*

RD: No, I can't say like Flaubert that *Madame Bovary c'est moi*. It's the allegory of a man on his own—what can a man do on his own in the setting of a country as tragic as Haiti? So I created the character Henri Postel who, in spite of all of the adversity in his life, threw himself into a business that seemed a little baroque and a little bizarre. But I had a contagious conception of freedom, that the crowd, the people, in seeing a solitary man work like that, climbing up the greasy pole, would awaken to the feeling of a victorious personal combat, of a collectivity. It's a novel that was very well received in France. The misfortune I had with *Mât de cocagne* is that when I published it in France, I was just arriving from Cuba, and the attitude among French literary critics, was rather negative because they thought that I was a hardened communist, a communist beyond repair, and the book didn't have the audience it could have had. That's what Alain Bousquet, a distinguished literary critic, told me—that it was a very good book that was strongly considered for the *Prix Goncourt* and the *Prix Fémina*, but naturally I didn't get them because they were saying, “this is someone who just spent close to 20 years of his life in Cuba.”

The Cubans read the book as a book about Cuba, which really intrigued me, because I swear that I wasn't thinking about Cuba. Maybe I wasn't thinking about it openly, consciously, but in the end I hit two targets with one bullet. It's an allegory that is just as valid for a country under a dictatorship like Duvalier's or under a dictatorship like Castro's.

PBM: In retrospect do you consider the Cuban revolution to be a complete failure or were there partial successes?

RD: The sense of hope that the Cuban revolution awoke in the Cuban people—it was like a tidal wave. We had never seen a person in Cuba like Castro in the flesh, a historical figure that had a great emotional, psychological and moral influence. Some Cubans still continue to support him blindly without realizing that he has nothing left to say, that the revolution failed. As a socialist revolution, it's an absolute failure, like the collapse of the Berlin Wall or the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The failure is total—the proletariat as a movement, as a force of globalization, didn't work. Collectivism didn't work. Marx's ideas were not applied anywhere. I saw it very quickly, very early. It was the terror of my life, at thirty years old, to discover that the risks I had taken at twenty years old were all for naught.

Such a small country that fights back—we had never seen such a thing. What the Cubans did to the Americans was serious; it was such an intense event that involved all of Latin American society, that the Americans were taken aback. There were people, even from the right, who admired Cuba. Cuba stood up to the great American neighbor. The Cuban revolution had a global influence that goes beyond Castro, up through today. On the culture maybe more than on the literature, in Nicaragua, in Salvador, Chile, Brazil too. There were great social movements inspired by Cuba. We have not yet finished speaking about Cuba.

What struck me was that after communism's failure in the Soviet Union and in the world, Castro didn't have any personal reflection on this failure, which, after all, was partly his own personal failure as well. There was no Cuban reflection on the failure of communism and its global strategy. This is a serious flaw! So they were superficially Marxist and not Marxist deep down. Deep down, Cubans were not predisposed to communism. I don't think they were ripe for a Marxist adventure in 1959, because I was familiar with the communist experiment that had failed in Czechoslovakia, in Central Europe. The Cuban idiosyncrasy was far removed from what Stalinism demanded of people. So I saw Cuba Stalinize itself little by little. Fidel Castro left the leadership of the party in the hands of old communists, and did not innovate a new style of power himself. He was probably happy when Che left for Bolivia. Because Che was neither pro-Soviet nor pro-Chinese.

**PBM:** Did Fidel deliberately send Che into an ambush in Bolivia?

**RD:** It's more complex than that. I am thoroughly familiar with this matter. Fidel had too much respect and esteem for Guevara to take measures to expel him from Cuba, when that was possibly the wish of many of his hardline comrades, who thought that Che had become intolerable because of his positions that were neither Stalinist nor Maoist, but rather Guevarist. Castro asked Guevara's opinion on all the initiatives he was taking in Cuba, so quite a few hardliners were happy to see Che leave on his own accord. But when he wanted to leave, Fidel let him follow his own destiny. In my conversations with Che, he was always obsessing over something. That's why he wanted to help us in Haiti, in the Dominican Republic, in Nicaragua, in Venezuela. He thought there was a double mission—Castro's mission in Cuba, but also a continental mission. He wanted to revive Bolívar's dream of having a base in the north of Argentina, or in Bolivia, or in Central America.

Che saw his role in Cuba as transitional, but he was deeply implicated in the economy of the revolution. And not all Cubans liked his style, even from the earliest years. I had conversations with Guillén, who was very well informed and and was a confidant of the old communists. Guillén told me that Che's personality rubbed some Cubans the wrong way from the beginning because Che didn't appreciate *el choteo*.<sup>8</sup> He didn't have the Cuban sense of irony. Che was a Cartesian Argentine, very principled. He didn't respond to the most serious matters with laughter, like Cubans do.

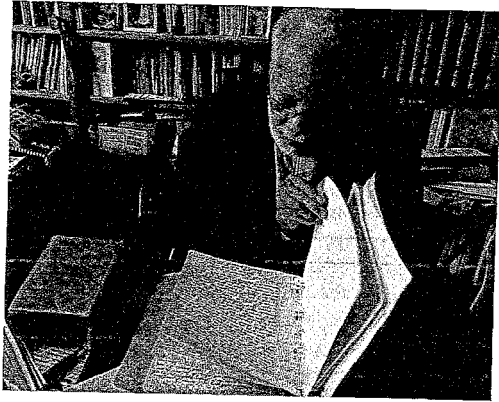
As for Castro, It's true that he was a man of action, and, alas, he still is, and that he wasn't going to throw in the towel because of the measures that Eisenhower and Kennedy took against Cuba. So he accepted an alliance with the Soviet Union, to sell sugar, first of all, and also to stand up to American military might.

It's debatable, but I think that the Americans, even Kennedy, could have had more tact and made more concessions. But no American leader at the time could

conceive that they would nationalize the sugar industries, the telephone company, along with all the American interests in Cuba, including coffee. You needed a great mind of political genius to understand that substantial concessions had to be made to this country that the Americans considered to be their backyard, that they had taken over since 1900, since Cuba's independence. There was the Platt Amendment, *etcetera*, it was a little like an extension of Florida. So the rupture was inevitable, and any Cuban political leader with the slightest bit of Machiavellianism would have also jumped into the arms of the Soviet Union as well. It was unavoidable, this East-West Manicheism—if you weren't with one, you were with the other, if you wanted to survive. Because if not, Cuba wouldn't have been able to sell its sugar and the country would be economically dead. Cuba was in the wrong place at the wrong time and simply couldn't fight back against the pressure of American embargo. It chose the easiest solution, to establish a leftist dictatorship, to suffocate all possibilities of a Marxist revolutionary approach that was different from the Stalinist experience.

Guevara wasn't a Stalinist, he was Guevarist. He had his own ideas on revolutionary strategy. Castro wasn't Marxist at first. I can attest to that, from the conversations I had with Guevara and with the old communist leaders, with the ensemble of Cuban political personnel that I knew personally. Castro wasn't Marxist, he was a leftist democrat. He was a nationalist in the tradition of Martí, a healthy nationalist in the *sui generis* style, who had nothing in common with nationalism in Europe or the nationalism in other Latin American countries. It was a Cuban nationalism with a long past behind it that came from Céspedes, that came from Martí, from Maceo, from the experience of the Cuban War of Independence.

Cuba wasn't the only unfortunate political experience in my personal life, (because I had already failed in Prague, I failed in Havana, I failed in Haiti). I think political man is a loser. I don't have trouble admitting it. There are so many failed men in history, but we can make up for it in poetry, in culture, in thought. That's what I fell back on, up until now, writing my novels, my poems, and trying to have a more or less creative end to my life.



Photograph by Paul B. Miller, Lézignan-Corbières, France (June 2011)

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Abby Broughton who assisted with the translation to English.
- <sup>2</sup> See my "Il acceptait son nouvel état avec philosophie: Depestre, Cuba, and Popular Expression." *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies. Special Issue: Haiti in a Globalized Frame*. 19.3 (2015): 249-60.
- <sup>3</sup> In an article in the Spanish newspaper *El País* (March 25, 2005), Basilio Baltasar, seeking an answer in Cuba, concludes that "no one in Cuba knows" who the author of the anonymous prologue is, and goes on to suggest that it was perhaps Carlos Franqui, (the director of the newspaper *Revolución*).
- <sup>4</sup> A group of Paris-based musicians in the early 1920s including François Poulenc and Darius Milhaud.
- <sup>5</sup> The UMAP (standing for "Unidad Militar de Ayuda a la Producción") were a system of agricultural labor camps established in in Camagüey, Cuba where thousands of homosexuals and other so-called "dissidents" and "counter-revolutionaries" were interned en masse in the mid 1960s. The topic was explored in depth in the well-known documentary, *Conducta impropia* (1980) by Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal.
- <sup>6</sup> In 1971, the Cuban poet Heberto Padilla was arrested for expressing counter-revolutionary sentiments in his prize-winning book of poetry *Fuera del juego*. After an international outcry against the regime and in support of Padilla, a private assembly was held with the members of the Writer's Union (UNEAC) in which Padilla dramatically "confessed" his counter-revolutionary crimes and incriminated other writers and intellectuals. As Padilla himself acknowledges in his autobiography *La mala memoria* (1989), Depestre was present at Padilla's "auto-da-fe." With some discrepancies, Padilla corroborates in a footnote that Depestre indeed spoke out in his defense.
- <sup>7</sup> In Cuban parlance (as opposed to the much more vulgar Spanish variant), a joker, someone irreverent.
- <sup>8</sup> A brand of Cuban humor described by the essayist Jorge Mañach as "refusing to take seriously something usually considered serious" ("Indagación del choteo," 1928).

## Una conversación: Pedro Blas Julio Romero y su *Terreiro sin fronteras*

MEGAN JEANETTE MYERS  
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Pedro Blas Julio Romero, conocido y auto-identificado como el "poeta negro", es poeta, novelista, gestor cultural, investigador, activista, y locutor de radio. Apasionado por la lucha social y cultural que ha llegado a definir su cartagenero barrio Getsemaní, su poesía atraviesa los límites de su nativa Colombia y se desborda a otros espacios geográficos donde predominan las religiones africanas, la música afroantillana y donde se manifiesta una historia común definida por una constante lucha por el respeto y la dignidad de los conglomerados negros. En 1993 Romero ganó el premio nacional de poesía Jorge Artel con *Rumbos* (incluido en *Obra poética*, 2009). Otras publicaciones incluyen *Cartas del soldado desconocido* (1971), *Poemas de Calle Lomba* (1988), y *Pañol de proa* (2011). Después de pasar más de veinticinco años de marinero, el poeta parece encontrarse más enraizado en su querido Getsemaní, donde éste enarbola una resistencia cultural con la que este barrio se ha enfrentado en los últimos años a una grosera como indolente amenaza de desalojo. Este barrio es representativo de la "otra ciudad", la negada, la que no se desea ver, y se compara y se intersecta con otros espacios de periferia que Romero ha identificado en otras partes del mundo, reclamándolos como el suyo y así uniendo la historia común de los afroamericanos. Esta entrevista se realizó por videoconferencia el 27 de abril de 2016.

**Megan Jeanette Myers:** La selección de poesía que está incluida en este número del *Afro-Hispanic Review* se titula *Terreiro*. ¿Me puede hablar de estos poemas como un conjunto y decirme cuándo se los escribió?

**Pedro Blas Julio Romero:** *Terreiro* representa otra faceta, no obstante el ya haber tenido una valiosa experiencia en Cuba respecto a las religiosidades africanas con lo de su música y baile. Después termino impactado con lo palpado en la pureza de Brasil, donde voy aprendiendo de los sagrados *Terreiros* o *Casa Ilé de Santo*, para empezar a través de mis versos con darle énfasis a la religiosidad combativa de las liturgias africanas. Hablo de las religiosidades africanas en el sentido de llegar a ser las mismas la expresión de cantos, música y bailes donde muchas veces lo anterior se encamina en una combatividad, y no es de sorprenderse cuando en las huelgas los brasileños salen en una manifestación cantada de danza contestaría como llega a ser *Capoeira*. Entonces me atrevo a aseverar de que a partir de la tierra donde nací la más crudamente racista que haya podido yo percibir en el mundo, como es la Cartagena de Colombia, y donde muy a pesar he podido llevar yo en la misma considerables años de mis sesenta años de vida impulsando las