
A particularly suggestive, expressive, and musical title graces this book on cultural relations between Cuba and Spain in the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. These relations, as in other cases of countries with close historical links, transcend the official level, involving fruitful personal ties between citizens and organizations in various political and economic positions.

Thanks to the publishing house Iberoamericana-Vervuert, which constantly promotes bibliographic connections between Europe and Latin America, and the pen of Ángel Esteban (a professor of literature at the Universidad de Granada who specializes on Hispanic America with a particular focus on the Caribbean, and who has been energetically disseminating texts and authors from the two continents), we are able to immerse ourselves in a continual coming and going of people and ideas, a never-ending cultural exchange in the form of music, cinema, literature, and history—intersections that Esteban suggests in the prologue are a fundamental element of the “naturally transatlantic” identity.

The fourteen authors, some of whom also became the protagonists of their own tale, are, for the most part, men of Cuban origin who have divided their time between the island and exile. The oddness of their circumstances adds intrigue to the work, as well as a sense of the future and a spirit of dialogue in the construction of this “land that will be,” in the happy expression of Luis Manuel García Méndez when dealing with the vicissitudes of the journal Encuentro de la cultura cubana (1996-2009).

The striking individuality of the work is due to its character as a space in which different times, forms, and topics coincide, a mixture of academia and popular culture which invites readers to enjoy common and affective elements (a bit forced at times) and whose pages see the convergence of García Lorca with Leonardo Padura, Nicolás Guillén with Diego el Cigala, and Jorge Perugorría with Luis Buñuel, all inhabitants of a virtual “Madrid” that reaches Miami and so many other “Habanified” cities.

The work consists of four sections, focusing on historical, literary, cinematographic, and musical aspects, plus a final section offering personal and professional testimonials from representatives of Cuban culture on the difficulty of diffusing it and the complexity of institutional integration.
Esteban has managed to provide a balanced range of different views and therefore essays that vary in both arguments and quality (although a text on visual arts is missing from among these). The work begins with a lone text (the only purely historical one) by Pablo Guadarrama González, which establishes an interesting general framework of Spanish and Cuban cultural relations in the twentieth century, but the structure of which is somewhat muddled at times, dotted with certain strange terms ("self-discovering," "self-establishing") and referring euphemistically to the reality of Cuban exile since 1959 ("socio-economic and political factors") or demands made for Spanish citizenship by the grandchildren of Spaniards ("trend of many descendants of immigrants to preserve their paternal citizenship").

This is followed by articles that make large chronological leaps but which are highly suggestive, such as the essay by Rafael Rojas on imagery of the sea in Cuban literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Since he has been living in Mexico, Rojas has challenged the island tradition of focusing on land by emphasizing the value of the sea as the focus of cultural discussions on Cuban exile through authors such as Herberto Padilla, Gastón Baquero, and Reinaldo Arenas, as well as what this involves in terms of changes to the anthropological paradigm.

Virgilio López Lemus invokes la décima, a type of verse commonly used in Spanish Baroque and all over America and Cuba, to illustrate the importance of common factors on the two continents, while Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera personifies the mutual influences, in terms of time and space, of Federico García Lorca and Nicolás Guillén, who met in La Habana in 1930.

Ángel Esteban and Cuban specialist Yannelys Aparicio contribute an extensive essay on the writer Miguel Carrión, focusing on the Spanish heritage in Cuban identity. There is one suggestion, which I believe to be involuntary on their part, that José Martí "was able to champion all manner of revolutions and accommodating spirits" (p. 91); meaning, surely, the extensive uses and abuses of his thought by people with different ideologies and agendas.

Luciano Castillo’s essay on Luis Buñuel’s relationship with the city of La Habana, where the Spanish filmmaker never lived, discusses the influence on his work of the tales told at home in the capital during his father’s time. It is curious and interesting.

A chapter devoted to the renowned Cuban actor Jorge Perugorría, in the form of an interview, is disappointing, providing a stark contrast to the
exhaustive work of Emilio Cueto on the abundance of Spanish songs on the island— their authors, genres, topics, rhythms, and protagonists, all accompanied by a list of their compositions between 1604 and 2008.

Ángel Esteban’s interview with Diego el Cigala, exploring the syncretic nature of the musical relationship with the great Cuban pianist “Bebo” Valdés, is interesting and expressive.

The book ends with texts full of interesting, little-known pieces of information, such as writer Leonardo Padura’s on Cuban publishing trends in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the various exiles between Cuba and Spain, and the adventures of Cuban writers since 1959, as well as his personal experience of achieving the dream of so many of his fellow citizens by breaking into the Spanish publishing market—in Padura’s opinion, the platform that has saved Cuban literature over the last two decades.

Luis Manuel García Méndez contributes an excellent essay on the journal *Encuentro de la cultura cubana*, which unfortunately disappeared in 2009. He makes a fierce defense of this great publication, which foresaw “the plural Cuba of tomorrow.” His reference to inconsistent criticism and reluctance to have dialogue on the part of the Cuban authorities is complemented by the perspective offered by Alejandro González Acosta in the following chapter on Spanish and Cuban language schools which is, basically, a rough portrait of the exile, biased government, and asphyxia to which Cubans are subjected under the current regime.

To end on a high note, the Cuban poet Manuel Díaz Martínez, who lives in Spain, delves into the Spanish roots of his work, making reference to authors such as Gustavo Adolfo Becquer, Jorge Manrique, Francisco de Quevedo, Lope de Vega, the brothers Antonio and Manuel Machado and Miguel Hernández. Overall, this appealing book opens up unexplored territory on the mutual cultural influences between Cuba and Spain, and the benefits of interaction and resolving difficulties—a task which, ultimately, as Ángel Esteban himself suggests, touches on the most intimate and creative aspects of human beings in the community.

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