

LA PATRIA Y EL TIRANO:
JOSE MARTI AND THE ROLE OF
LITERATURE IN THE FORMATION
OF THE CUBAN NATION(S), PAST
AND PRESENT

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When in 1492 Columbus didn't discover the island of Cuba, he initiated a period of Spanish domination that, while briefly interrupted by England, lasted over 400 years. In the process, Cuba's indigenous population of Taino and Siboney Indians was decimated through starvation, disease, and outright slaughter. As a result of this wholesale erasure of Cuba's indigenous cultures, the island became—and remained for many decades—an extension of the mother country in fact as well as name; that is, the cultural void created by the extinction of the indigenous peoples was aptly filled by Spanish cultural institutions—a consequence of the rapidly diminishing numbers of Tainos and Siboneys and resulting predominance (to put it mildly) of Spaniards on the island.

By the early 19th century, however, the cracks in Spain's colonial armor were becoming obvious. Serious rifts were starting to develop between the *criollos* (people of Spanish ancestry born in Cuba) and the Spanish nationals who governed the island: questions of slavery, freedom of education from state control, and the close alliance between Spain and the Catholic church emerged as major points of contention. Additionally, the United States was by the mid-19th century actively shopping for a Central American or Caribbean location in which to establish Negro colonies—a sort of dumping ground, that is, for its increasingly large and disquieting population of U.S. blacks—with Panama, Haiti, and Cuba as possibilities (Frederickson 148-52).

In 1879 José Martí, a young poet and intellectual, was deported to Spain for having organized a revolutionary committee in Havana. This proved, however, to be only the beginning of the young Martí's

revolutionary efforts, as he went on to become the chief spokesman and organizer for Cuba's independence efforts. But most important for my own purposes here is the surprisingly large body of work that Martí left behind upon his death in 1895. For it is precisely Martí's written work—especially his poetry—that helped create and fuel notions of Cuban nationalism ("La Patria") culminating in Cuba's final war for independence from Spain in 1895.

But the influence of Martí's work on notions of Cuban national identity extends far beyond its immediate effect as an inspiration for Cuban rebels before the Spanish-American War. The symbol of Martí has, through his written work and personal example (he was exiled and ultimately martyred for the cause of Cuban independence), become a cultural icon for Cubans everywhere. It would, at first glance, seem suspect to claim for Martí a heroic status among Cubans "everywhere," and yet that is precisely part of my point; indeed, Martí's legacy bears a significance for Cuban and Cuban-American culture that cuts across distinctions of class, gender, and—most importantly for my purposes here—ideology. Martí's life and literature played a formative role in the development of a national identity for both the capitalist, U.S.-dependent Cuban republics of the first half of the 20th century and Fidel Castro's subsequent revolution in 1959; he is, in fact, revered even today by yet another Cuban nation—that of exiled Cuban Americans in Miami and elsewhere who dream of liberating their homeland from the totalitarian clutches of the Castro regime. And therein lies the problem: for such is the protean nature of Martí's literary legacy that it has contributed to the forging of national identities as diverse as Castro's Socialist regime and the rabidly anti-Communist Cuban American community.

To attempt to settle the matter via a close and assumedly "correct" reading of Martí would, I think, be pointless (except, perhaps, to prove that such a reading would be as undesirable as it would be impossible); such a project would clearly be defeated from the start by the very nature of Martí's work, as well as my own subjectivity as the son of Cuban exiles. Rather, my interest here is in the very ways in which Martí's work came to be appropriated (or in Derrida's terms, "signed for") by such divergent national and ideological movements. For it is precisely in the appropriations of Martí, and the divergent discourses of Cuban nationalism subsequently constructed around them, that will enable us to better understand the role of Martí's literary role in the formation of the opposed Cuban nations.

I

Yo soy un hombre sincero
de donde crece la palma,
y antes de morirme quiero
echar mis versos del alma.

Yo vengo de todas partes
y hacia todas partes voy:
arte soy entre los artes;
en los montes, monte soy.

Yo sé los nombres extraños
de las yerbas y las flores,
y de mortales engaños,
y de sublimes dolores.¹

The above verses are the opening lines from *Versos Sensillos* (*Poesias* 127), which is Martí's best-known volume of poetry and represents perhaps the fullest flowering of his poetic gifts. It had been many years since, as an adolescent attending a predominantly Cuban high-school in Miami, I had read them all; and I understood then (as it had, indeed, been taught to me by the most dutiful of Cuban-born teachers) that Martí's poetry, and these poems in particular, were of great significance to me as the son of Cuban exiles; they were, as I was told, of greater importance to me than anything I could ever read in, say, Shakespeare's sonnets. Certainly this had a great deal to do with the sense of a shared identity; for although to read and learn about Shakespeare and Blake and Faulkner was, scholastically, admirable enough, it was spelled out to me in no uncertain terms that these writers were not as important, simply because they did not speak to us—the citizens and heirs of the "true" Cuban nation who, like Martí himself, were now exiled from our beloved homeland.

Of course, this phenomenon by which Martí's literary works have translated into notions of Cuban nationalism has been addressed, to some degree, by much of the nation-formation criticism that falls under the rubric of postcolonial thought. Surely the idea of literature as a central element in the forging of national identity is nothing new; the work of Timothy Brennan, to cite just one example, provides a fairly comprehensive overview on the subject (I am thinking particularly of his *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, part of which is anthologized in Homi Bhabha's collection *Nation and Narration*). It is Brennan, in fact, who gives us this view of the role of literature in the rise of the European nation-state:

On the one hand, the political tasks of modern nationalism directed the course of literature, leading through the Romantic concepts of "folk character" and "national language" to the (largely illusory) divisions of literature into distinct "national literatures." On the other hand, and just as fundamentally, literature participated in the formation of nations through the creation of "national print media"—the newspaper and the novel. (Bhabha 48)

Although Brennan develops the notion of interdependency between literature and nationalism more fully in later chapters, and although Martí's claim to literary fame stems mostly from his poetry (Martí did publish both novels and journalistic essays during his lifetime, but it is his poetry that is most widely known), the literature-nationalism relation as described in the above passage is, I think, still useful as a point of departure for the study of Martí. Of interest here is Brennan's assessment of the relation as a mutual creation of national and literary entities; for clearly, it is just as accurate to say that the Cuban revolution against Spain created the necessary forum for Martí the literary patriot as to say that Martí, as producer of a specifically Cuban "national literature," helped create and fuel notions of Cuban "nationality" that were essential to the cause of Cuban independence. Certainly then, we can say that Brennan's model is somewhat useful in thinking about Martí and Cuban nationalism, because it illuminates the link between them: namely that "the political tasks" of 19th-century Cuban nationalism created Martí just as surely as Martí helped create the Cuban nation.

I must, however, emphasize what I see as the limited applicability of the Brennan model and others like it ("somewhat useful") not on theoretical grounds, but for what I see as a lack of scope. These are not sins of commission but of omission; I find Brennan's model to be limited not for what it contains (we have seen that this is not the case), but for what it leaves out. In the specific case of Martí and Cuban nationalism the complications are twofold; and while we must certainly recognize their interdependence, I shall try to address them under separate headings, which I will call issues of temporality and issues of appropriation.

As regards the former category, we can say that Martí's work raises issues of temporality that problematize the notion of the literature-nationalism relation as a necessarily contemporaneous one. To better understand this point, we need only see the fact that Martí's literature has transcended—or more literally, survived—the nation it was originally intended to create; that is, the power of Martí's work as a nation-forming literature continues, long after its emergence in the 19th century, to fuel notions of Cuban nationalism into the present

day, and is certainly more widely known now than it was at the time of Martí's death in 1895.

I have used "notions" in the plural here, to call attention to a point that, however naïve, remains crucial to our understanding of both Martí and nation-forming literatures as a whole: namely, that a given 'national' literature can—and in Martí's case, does—contribute to the creation of as many "nationalisms" as it produces interpretive communities. And in Martí's case, two such Cuban nationalisms exist simultaneously, in the form of the socialist Castro regime and the exiled "nation" of Cuban-Americans in the United States. Both groups acknowledge Martí's life and literature as occupying an important place in their respective national identities; yet the two "nations" also constitute wildly different representations of Martí's revolutionary message, and historians, scholars, etc. from each camp accuse the others of having misappropriated (or better, mis-appropriated) Martí for their own ideological ends.

My own interest here, as I have stated earlier, is not to endorse or otherwise privilege either a "capitalist" or "Marxist" Martí (to name but two of the many possible appropriations) at the expense of others. That is, I do not aspire to provide a "correct" reading of Martí that would neutralize or refute what has been "done" to him under the guise of various ideologies; rather, it is precisely these "misdeeds," if we may so call them, committed in the name of whatever version of the true Cuban nation, that bear the most significance for our purposes here. Or, in other words, I am interested less in a "right" appropriation of Martí than in learning how such appropriations go wrong—or better, how appropriations happen, and whether there is any such thing as a "right" one.

It is important to remember that, in reading both Martí's texts and various conflicting "readings" of them that have subsequently been produced, it is simply not enough to say, "Martí did not think that," "Martí did not want that," or "that is not what Martí meant"; it is also not enough to accuse one or the other side (or even both) of misappropriating Martí's legacy, then wonder naïvely how such a "falsification" was possible. The project before us is one not of adjudication but of analysis: to take on Martí's nation-conscious literature with the aim of illuminating how and why the same texts—and in some cases, the same words and statements—can be made to serve national meanings and contexts that are clearly incompatible.

Much of the confusion surrounding Martí and his beliefs (read "intentions") regarding the building of a Cuban nation is reflected in his biographies. That much of this polemic was, in the first place, a result of the widely divergent political and ideological agendas of Martí's biographers seems certain. But it is equally true that even Martí biographers who assume a scholarly impartiality have had

difficulty negotiating among the conflicting Martí-isms constructed by previous generations of Martí scholars; indeed, it is often all they can do to present the problem of the appropriations themselves—albeit sometimes inadvertently. To understand better the ideological quandary in which contemporary Martíán scholars inevitably find themselves, consider this passage from an essay entitled “An Introduction to José Martí”:

José Martí was an acute observer of the United States, where he lived for some fifteen years, and is considered one of the great writers of the Hispanic world. His importance for the American reader, however, stems even more from the *universality and timeliness of his thought*. (Ripoli 1, italics mine)

Ripoli's essay, as indeed the rest of his book, is an attempt to expose Marxist interpretations of Martí's thought as willful misappropriations of the Martíán legacy. In so doing, Ripoli implicitly reveals his own subjectivity as an anti-Communist thinker; but more significant at this point in our inquiry (we will deal with Mr. Ripoli at length later on) is his representation of Martí in the essay's opening paragraph. What is particularly striking in this passage is Ripoli's description of Martí's work as both universal and timely; for unless this is a typographical error (mistakenly substituting “timeliness” for, say, “timelessness”), what Ripoli has inadvertently uncovered here (I say “inadvertently” because he does not explore the issue further) is the dichotomy between Martí and the various Martí-isms—that is, between: 1) the notion of a “universal” Martí, theoretically locatable in his poetry and fiction and somehow abstracted from historical and ideological contexts; and 2) the various historicizations of Martí and his works, which I will call the temporal Martíés and which we can see most clearly in the various appropriations of Martí taking place within the polemic of the current Marxist-capitalist battle over the Martíán legacy.

It is extremely tempting to posit such a “universal” Martí, as such a construct (and let us not forget that it can, ultimately, be only a construct or appropriation) can serve as both a “correct” reading of Martí against which subsequent appropriations can be measured, and as a scapegoat of sorts, as evidenced by several scholars' faulting of Martí for not having sufficiently systematized his thought into a more organized treatise. Upon the former point—the idea of a universal Martí as a “correct” one—we need dwell only long enough to understand that any such construction, as I have already implied, would itself be an appropriation, an abstraction of Martí from the inextricably historical context out of which his works were produced. Ripoli himself admits to the folly of his original statement later in his essay:

“Although given to speculation, Martí had an overriding desire to affect reality, and so constantly strove to reduce abstract thought to concrete formulae of conduct” (Ripoli 2). And the “reality” to which Ripoli refers can only have been, for Martí, the reality of Spanish colonialism and emerging Cuban nationalism in which he lived and thought.

The question of Martí as being “universal” by virtue of his own inability or unwillingness to systematize his thought is, I think, more complicated, in part because of the temptation to pinpoint the lack of a concrete Martí-ism as the reason that any and all appropriations are possible. In this context, what Ripoli calls Martí’s “universality” seems instead to point to the lack of prescriptiveness in his work; and whether this lack of a systematic ideological treatise would eventually have been corrected by Martí (a viable speculation, since he died in battle at the age of 45)—or indeed, whether he had any interest at all in such a work—it is certainly tempting to see subsequent appropriations of Martí’s work simply as interpretive attempts to either fill in the ideological vacuum left in his wake, or to refute, and therefore displace, previous such projects (certainly we can see Ripoli’s work as a bit of both). Because we clearly cannot hold Martí responsible for the use made of his writings by such interpreters, and because (as we shall see) the structure of the Martí text leaves such questions of meaning unanswered, the history of his written work—or if you like, its afterlife—raises serious questions not only for the various interpretations of Martí’s texts but for the appropriation of his legacy as a Cuban patriot.

Jacques Derrida has wondered, in his writings on Nazi appropriations of Nietzsche, whether there is not “some powerful utterance-producing machine that programs the movements of the two opposing forces at once” (Derrida 29). Seen in this context, the question now becomes not simply one of process but of origin; that is, instead of “How can such conflicting interpretations of Martí come about?” the more appropriate question would perhaps be “What is it that programs these antagonistic forces to produce such diametrically-opposed utterances?”—and here again we cannot naïvely answer “Martí’s texts.” I say “naïvely,” because to claim that conflicting understandings of Martí are produced by Martí’s ambiguous texts is to forget that texts are always ambiguous. Interpretations—or better, “readings”—of a text are necessarily produced by readers; and what is being brought into question here is the act of reading itself, and how reading produces political positions (or if you like, political “readings”). As such, the challenge before us is to resist falling prey to the tyranny of the individual “reader” of Martí long enough to uncover what it is that allows him to be understood or “read” in such violently opposed ways.

II

If the name of Martí is today synonymous with notions of Cuban nationalism and sovereignty, it is in part because of a body of work that is acutely concerned with both the nationalist cause for which he fought (and died) and the role his art played within that struggle. And it is, I think, precisely because of this condition of self-reflexivity and autobiography within his work that we can claim Martí as the name of one who presented the philosophy of both his art and his life, as equivalent to his name—or as Derrida puts it, he has treated his philosophy and life “with his name and in his name” (Derrida 6); that is to say that Martí, by making his ideology and his art the central themes of his written work, has effectively put both his name and his biographies on the line, with some awareness of the risks always incurred in such a project. By “risks,” of course, I do not mean only the immediate dangers of incarceration, exile, and the like (although these were, in Martí’s life, evident enough); rather, the danger here is not only to Martí’s life but, more ominously and irrevocably, to his name—that is, not only to the life (which perishes) but to posterity. Thus emerges the true nature of the risk incurred by Martí in the texts that bear his name; it is a risk to the future of the name, and especially to the political future of the texts to which he signed it.

Keeping all of these risks in mind, we may read Martí beginning with the introduction to *Versos Libres*, his first published book of poetry; it is here that Martí first puts both life and name “out front”:

Estos son mis versos. Son como son. A nadie los pedí prestados. Mientras no pude encerrar integras mis visiones en una forma adecuada a ellas, dejé volar mis visiones: ¡Oh, cuánto áureo amigo que ya nunca ha vuelto! Pero la poesía tiene su honradez, y yo he querido siempre ser honrado. Recortar versos, también sé, pero no quiero. Así como cada hombre trae su fisonomía, cada inspiración trae su lenguaje. (*Poesías* 43)

His own identity—the one he declares to us with the text upon which he signs his name (or rather, his homonym)—is presented here as being equivalent to his text. I say “equivalent to,” because neither I nor Martí can responsibly say “one with” or “the same as”; the life is never the writing, as Martí himself acknowledges from the first line: not “Yo soy mis versos” but “Estos son. . . .” “Estos son”—the entity of the written page, the “inadequate form” of poetic language in which the poet tries to “encerrar,” to enclose or define his vision—“estos son”. But if the vision itself is the “áureo amigo” that is gone and beyond the reach of language to retain, the verses nevertheless retain their “integrity,” their “honradez,” through the author’s personal signature: “mis versos”—the text is to the vision as the fisonomía

(face or portraiture) is to the man, and in this case is signed for as such. Clearly then, we may see Martí's autobiographical verses as an "*auto-fisonomía*" or "self-portrait" of sorts, with the poet signing his name not to the object per se, but rather to his own position in relation to it. Thus we have "equivalence" of writer and text, rather than unity or synonymy, for we know, after all, that the portrait never is what it is of: it can only represent.

Martí can never know whether in the present (or even in the present in which he writes) anyone will see in the "forma (in)adeuada" of his "versos" his visions, or "visiones," as he wished them understood. What is certain, however, is that we will see—and create "readings" from—the "auto-fisonomía" or "self-portrait" of the poet as constituted by the language of his text, to which he has signed his name. And as the texts survive the poet and continue to be read in his name, so are the number and variety of readings attributable to the name not limited to those produced during his lifetime, the "I-live" of his present; on the contrary, it is only after the poet's death that the consistent and conflicting readings begin in earnest, evolving into opposing "Martís" which subsequent readers will either choose from or combine as they construct their own reading, their own "Martí":

This life will be verified only at the moment the bearer of the name, the one whom we, in our prejudice, call living, will have died. It will be verified only at some moment after or during death's arrest (arrêt de mort). And if life returns, it will return to the name but not to the living, in the name of the living as a name of the dead. (Derrida 9)

And it is indeed to the name of Martí to which these readings ultimately return. As we have seen, however, there is—despite whatever "honradez" the living poet may have had—more than one "Martí," and more than one name which these readings return to "verify." Given all this, it would be tempting (and satisfying to some) to simply say that there are as many "Martís" as there are readings of him, that each reading in effect constructs a new homonym, and leave it at that. What we have already seen, however, refutes this, or at least qualifies it; for even if we must acknowledge this endless proliferation into eternity of homonymic "Martís" (and a new one constructed with each new reading), we can also group the great majority of these readings under the two names of Martí to which most have returned and continue to return today; that is, we can say that most of the readings return either to a "Marxist" Martí of the Left or a Martí of the Right.

Given all this, to maintain that one or the other Martí is somehow "wrong," that the (no longer) living poet "did not mean that" or "did not want that," would be, to put it charitably, naïve; to do so would be

to claim a return to the living poet which, as we have seen, can never be. What remains then, what we have to work with and the place from which we must proceed, is the name—or more accurately, the name and its homonyms.

III

Yo quiero cuando me muera,
sin patria, pero sin amo,
tener en mi losa un ramo
de flores, ¡y una bandera!²

So it is Martí's autobiographical signature, with his name projected into eternity in search of the counter-signing reading, that awaits a return. And indeed it is the name, rather than the (once) living poet, which can only hope to be remembered with "flores, ¡y una bandera!" in verse XXV of his *Versos Sensillos*, yet project an existence (or if you like, an afterlife) beyond death in the following verse: "Yo que vivo, aunque he muerto, / soy un gran descubridor" (Martí 142). But in the years immediately following Martí's death neither flowers nor flags, nor the legacy of a great "descubridor" were returned to his name; rather, what little did return to the name of Martí in the first years following the Spanish-American war was mediated by another text, part of which reads like this:

The government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence [and] the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty. (Chapman 136)

This text, otherwise known as the Platt Amendment of 1901, limited Cuban sovereignty to the extent that it allowed for U.S. intervention in Cuban affairs. And although not a literary text in the usual sense, the Platt Amendment is worth noting here for its effect upon the Cuban nation, the new nation's understanding of the literature that helped create it, and—most importantly for my purposes here—the name in which the most prominent of that literature was written.

What the Amendment really meant for the new Cuban nation, of course, was continued dependence on—and submission to—a colonial power. Many believed that Cuba had, rather than liberated themselves, simply traded one imperialist Master for another:

We are bound by double chains. We aren't independent. We are nothing but a colonial factory forced to work, compelled by the whip to give away our harvest, the fruit of our labor. We are

disorganized and demeaned, like a sorry lot of menials. We cannot defend ourselves. A wind of dispersion has swept away our consciences and every vestige of dignity, purity, and valor they contained; a wind of dissolution has disconnected the creative energies of the national spirit. We are a shadow of a people, an illusion of democracy, a yearning for freedom. We do not exist. (qtd. in Ripoli 104)

This statement, made by José Manuel Poveda in 1915, is among the more eloquent by Cuban republicans who questioned the wisdom of the Cuban War of Independence and despaired for the future of the Cuban nation under the shadow of U.S. influence. In this context, Poveda's use of the word "we" in his final sentence, with its ironic invocation of a shared identity, is most telling; for if there was now a country called Cuba, with a flag, boundaries, and the like, it was Cuban nationalism itself which had perished.

It should not be surprising, then, to learn that the name of Martí was little circulated at that time; Martí, after all, was the figure most closely associated with what was now perceived by many to have been a premature and wrong-headed sense of Cuban nationalism. As long as there were doubts about the country's prospects for true sovereignty, then, Martí's name was doomed to association with the revolution that had failed.

It is relevant in this regard that Martí's name, associated with (and signed upon) a nationalism that many Cuban republicans would have preferred to forget, would not be "counter-signed" in a full biography until Jorge Mañach's widely-read *Martí, El Apostol* in 1932. And significantly, this upsurge of scholarly and popular interest in Martí coincided with a renewed sense of Cuban nationalism; with the rescinding of the Platt Amendment in 1934 seen as the removal of the final obstacle to Cuban independence, Martí's work, with its vision of an independent Cuba unfettered by foreign influence, found itself appropriated by a new generation of Cuban nationalists:

It was this lost generation of students, exiles in their own land, who re-discovered Martí, with his nostalgic yearning for an idealized patria and his exile's vision of a socially united, racially harmonious, and economically independent country. His stature grew as the expansion of United States' cultural and economic influence brought a note of urgency to the intellectuals' search for national identity. (Hennesey 352)

We can certainly see this as a playing-out of Brennan's ideas on literature's role in nation-formation, with "the political tasks" of Cuban nationalism directing the course of literary production and,

conversely, the political agenda being itself defined partially by its national literature. But Martí's case complicates that relation because, as we have seen, the nationalism in which it plays such a prominent role is not the same one that the poet had originally sought to create; that is, in the absence of the living Martí, the new Cuban nationalism could only return, as Derrida tells us, to his name—or better, to the "fisonomía" of the revolution fought in the living man's name.

But what returns to the name, of course, can never be the same as what was lived in that name; or to put it another way, the counter-sign can never match up completely with what is originally signed, just as no two signatures are never exactly alike—because there are too many contingencies. By "contingencies," of course, we mean those conditions of ideology and historical circumstance that are always present at such counter-signings, conditions that give rise to both the various temporal Martí's and the claims to universality (read "correctness") brought forth by their producers and advocates. In Martí's case, we can see these contingencies in what Brennan calls "the political tasks" of the nationalist movements to which Martí's work have been applied, producing "Martí's" as different as the movements themselves.

As we have seen, it is with the second generation of Cuban republicans that we see both a renewed Cuban nationalism and the rediscovery of Martí as a "founding father" of that nationalism; but significantly, these events also coincided with the origins of Cuban communism as a nationalist rival to the new Cuban republicans. And from the divergent political tasks of the rival nationalisms grew very different "Martí's"; as the first generation of Cuban republicans had spurned Martí, so did the new communist nationalism dismiss him as a misguided optimist:

Without knowing or wishing to be, [Martí] was the advocate of the powerful. To admire him as such, and only in the context of the permanent value of his personal life as a man, is as important as to finally turn our backs on his doctrine. This is what we should do. If he could see this turn of events, nobody would be happier than he at this necessary and useful denial. (qtd. in Ripoli 62)

This statement was made in 1935 by Juan Marinello, a leading member of the Cuban Communist party; within the context of Martí's later appropriation by Fidel Castro as the inspiration of the 1959 revolution, Marinello's dismissal of Martí is all the more striking for its ambivalence. Two points are worth noting in Marinello's qualified rejection of Martí's "doctrine": 1) as we have seen, Martí never published a systematic doctrinization of his thought, leaving this task

of "filling-in" the ideological vacuum up to subsequent generations of Martíán scholars. Seen in this context, what Marinello is really rejecting is the Martíán "doctrine" constructed in his wake—or better, in his name—by Cuban republicans; and 2) Marinello further muddles the distinction between the (once) living poet and his posthumous homonym through the unsupportable claim that "Martí" would have himself approved: "nobody would be happier than he at this necessary and useful denial," an instructive parallel for those still wishing to defend Martí from mis-appropriations on the grounds that the poet "did not mean that," "did not want that," or some such thing. Clearly, then, what is being fought over here is not a living corpus but the written one, not over the life that produced the work but the name which was signed upon them.

Interestingly, the name dismissed by the first Cuban communists as belonging to an unknowing "advocate of the rich" is later embraced by a new communist nationalism; this new "Martí" is, rather than an unwitting pawn of the rich, the very inspiration for the Marxist revolution christened by Fidel Castro as the "Generación del Centenario"—of the centennial, that is, of Martí's birth. The revolution's reliance on Martí's thought can be seen most clearly in *La historia me absolverá*, written by Fidel Castro during his Cuban imprisonment:

Vivimos orgullosos de la historia de nuestra Patria; la aprendimos en la escuela y hemos crecido oyendo hablar de libertad, de justicia, y de derechos. Se nos enseñó a venerar desde temprano el ejemplo glorioso de nuestros héroes y de nuestros mártires. Céspedes, Agramonte, Maceo, Gómez, y Martí fueron los primeros nombres que se grabaron en nuestros cerebros. (Castro 126)

By invoking the name of Martí and other Cuban patriots, Castro is clearly positioning his rebellion within the tradition of Cuban nationalism associated with those names; and just as clearly, he is implicitly making a case for himself as not just the defender of those names but as their successor; that is, by defending the cause of Cuban nationalism in Martí's name, he appropriates not only Martí, but also those nationalisms previously constructed in his name. Castro, in fact, draws direct parallels between Martí's rebellion and his own:

Se nos enseñó que el 10 de octubre y el 24 de febrero son efemérides gloriosas y de regocijo patrio porque marcan los días en que los cubanos se rebelaron contra el yugo de la infame tiranía. . . . Todo eso aprendimos y no lo olvidaremos aunque hoy en nuestra Patria se está asesinando y encarcelando a los hombres por practicar las ideas que les enseñaron desde la cuna. Nacimos en un país libre que nos legaron nuestros padres, y primero se

hundirá la Isla en el mar antes que consintamos en ser esclavos de nadie. (Castro 126)

We can see here that Castro's learned and much-defended concepts of national pride ("Todo eso aprendimos y no lo olvidaremos. . .") are clearly informed by Martí's own texts, both in their shared longing for an idealized *patria* and their contempt for a despotic regime imposing itself against the will of the people.

Castro's text is even more striking for both its portrayal of Castro as the "rescuer" of the Martían legacy from the mis-appropriations of the Batista regime, and the similarity of his own language to Martí's. We can better understand these points—and better hear the Martían echoes in Castro's text—in another of Martí's better-known revolutionary poems:

No es un sueño, es verdad; grito de guerra
lanza el cubano pueblo, enfurecido;
el pueblo que tres siglos ha sufrido
cuanto de negro la opresión encierra . . .

Gracias a Dios que ¡al fin con entereza
rompo Cuba el dogal que la oprimía
y altiva y libre yergue su cabeza!³

In these opening and closing verses of "¡10 de Octubre!" (Martí, *Poesías* 201) we see not only the themes but the very language that Castro has appropriated for *La historia*; it is clearly visible in Castro's many references not only to Martí himself, but to the concepts of "patria" and "honradez" that so pervaded Martí's work (" . . . es concebible que los hombres honrados estén muertos o presos." Castro 127). It is not surprising, then, to read in the *Manifiesto Programa* (published in Mexico in 1956) that the ideals of the Castro revolution "encuentran su mejor y más concreta expresión en el pensamiento político del mártir de Dos Ríos: José Martí es el origen ideológico de [la revolución]" (*Manifiesto* 1).

Castro's regime, of course, has subsequently been accused, in its embracing of Marxist-Leninist ideology, of abandoning Martí's ideals, of maliciously using the Martían legacy in order to enslave the Cuban nation, this time under the guise of a totalitarian communist state. Ripoli's attacks on Marxist interpretations of Martí are particularly virulent. He repeatedly asserts his opposition to the stated Marxist project of presenting "the life, work, and thought of José Martí from the point of view of historical, dialectical materialism" (33), going as far as to predict that "the Castro regime and its supporters will in the long run be unable to conceal Martí's unshak-

able commitment to social justice within a society that respects individual freedom" (46). Certainly this criticism echoes the early communist stance against Martí's thought; but just as clearly, Castro's counter-signing of Martí's name—or better, his creation of a homonymic "Martí" upon which to found his revolution—is of such a radical nature as to make such accusations seem naïve, if not entirely irrelevant. For by appropriating not only Martí's name but his very language and writing style in his own revolutionary work, and by undertaking such a revolutionary project in the poet's name, Castro has not merely counter-signed for Martí's name but signed his own name in its place; that is, by aligning the poet's name so closely with his own, he has in fact recast Martí's nationalism and name in his own image. By invoking Martí's vision of the Cuban "patria" and substituting his own American imperialist "monster" for Martí's Spanish one, he has succeeded in creating a Cuban nationalism which, also still Martíán in name, now bears the "*fisonomía*"—literally the portrait or face—of Fidel Castro.

And it is, indeed, through this homonymic sort of "reverse ventriloquism"—with the words and "intentions" of the ventriloquist spoken verbatim by the seemingly faithful instrument of his expression, only to be transformed in the puppet's mouth in a way the master can no longer control—that such appropriations of the Martíán legacy function. And if it is easy for Castro's enemies in Miami, Washington, and elsewhere to accuse him of knowingly distorting Martí's words for his own political ends, it is easier still to forget how their own criticisms and counter-appropriations (or perhaps, counter-counter-signings) of Martí's name are themselves inevitably wedded to the "political tasks" from which they themselves arose. It would doubtless be naïve and a bit crude to simply extract the words "tirano" or "déspota" from the Martíán texts which they so populate and read them retroactively; that is, to allow Martí's words to comment upon Castro's own regime, which in the eyes of so many has itself been tyrannous and despotic (can it be mere coincidence that in the exiled Cuban-American community Castro is universally known as *El Tirano*?) as if the words had no other possible context. But it would, I think, be just as wrong-headed to overlook the undeniable relation between Martí's *tirano* and Castro's, who also poses as a spiritual and intellectual leader while oppressing and colonizing his people, mouthing the words of the patria and its patriot while transforming them into something different—something which, while beautiful for some and monstrous for others, can never be what it was. And again—it is simply not enough for the exiled Cuban nation to say "Martí never wanted that," or "he never intended that," or "he didn't say it that way." Even if this could all be proven to be true, what interest could

we, readers and constructors of our own "Martífs," find in such a thesis?

We must answer: "Nothing," or at least: "Very little."

We must answer: "We don't want the Martí you have constructed," then reflect and add: "But we have built one, too. We prefer ours only because we have made him in our own image, our own *fisonomía*. We like our Martí better, because he has our face."

One can, however, imagine the following objection, a loose, composite translation of all the anti-Castro diatribes I have absorbed during my years as a Cuban son growing up on (North) American soil: "¡Cuidado! Martí's words are not, can never be, the same as those of the communist ideologues, and not only because the latter have grossly caricatured the Apostle (*el Apostol*) to the point of mockery. If one does more than take short passages out of context, if one reconstructs the entire *obras* with their intended articulations, ironies, allusions, etc., then one will clearly see that what sound like the "same" words say exactly the opposite, shamelessly subverting the words they mime and, in the process, destroying through their disrespect the mission of our great *Apostol*."

Yes—but one would still have to explain, to account for, the existence of this mimetic (or better, mime-etic) inversion. Once we abandon the project of uncovering a definitive, universal, intended "meaning" for Martí's nationalism, we are then forced to confront our own guilt in the matter: that we construct "Martífs" too, as surely as those against whose textual "perversions" we rail. For even if the intentions of the original, (once) living Martí had nothing to do with it, it cannot be mere contingency that the texts upon which he has signed his name, and by which his name is known, have served to further the causes of ideologues; that is, it did not—indeed, could not have—come about by accident or happenstance that the only Cuban nation-state to claim Martí as a founding father is a Marxist one.

I am not at all suggesting that this "Marxist Martí" is somehow legitimized by its status as a nation-state, nor that this statehood and its subsequent parting with previous Martían scholarship has rendered its appropriations fraudulent; I cannot responsibly do either, because the future of Martí's name and texts is still open, still yet to be decided. But we must not blind ourselves to the fact that there remains a Marxist Cuban nation which professes that its revolution is a Martían one.

I am also not suggesting that we read the counter-sign before the sign; that is, that we read Martí retroactively in order to judge Castro (or, for that matter, Martí himself) on the basis of what we know communism to be; we are only now learning what communism really is, its future is also open, as we read the nations that have also been formed upon the texts and names of Marx, Trotsky, and others. The

future of Cuban communism, then, is still to be read, and the political reading of Martí is, I think, a necessary part of that future. We must remember Homi Bhabha's reminder to us that the founding of all such nations:

like all myths of origin, memorable for [their] balance between epiphany and enunciation at once, a moment of originality and authority, as well as a process of displacement that, paradoxically, makes the presence of the book wondrous to the extent to which it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced. (Gates 163)

And indeed, part of what Bhabha calls "wondrous" about texts such as Martí's is precisely this "process of displacement," this production of readings and texts and ideologies, all upon the name—and in the name—in which they were written.

I will end, appropriately, with a passage from Martí's own texts; because I wish to show that he, too, was despairingly aware of the ambivalence of language, of the ease with which the political writing and reading of texts can create both *patrias* and *tiranos*, wonders and monsters. The politician and the speechwriter to which he refers clearly know this as well:

Su fuerza estaba en la claridad con que veía las intenciones de los hombres, y la certeza con que deducía de ellas los tiempos. Pero las disfraces las mandaba hacer. Tenía siempre al lado uno de esos literatos revocadores que visten de ideas finas las ambiciones y maldades de sus dueños, lo cual es uno de los delitos más vergonzosos y negros con que se pueda un hombre deshonar. Todas las tiranías tiene a mano uno de esos cultos, para que piense y escriba, para que justifique, atenúe y disfrace. (*Obras* XII 276)

And it is yet again to accusations of misreadings, of displacements, of *disfraces* (literally, "costuming" or "masquerading") to which Martí would have us finally return. But for us, this cannot be an ending, for we have not counter-signed Martí this far to stop now; we must, rather, take this as our starting point for the signs and counter-signs, the readings and "readings," which must always continue.

Notes

¹ The translations in notes 1-3 are mine:

I am a sincere man
From the land of palm trees,
And before dying I must
release these verses from my soul.

I come from all places
And to all places I go:
Art am I among arts;
among mountains, a mountain am I.

I know the strange names
of the plants and the flowers,
and of mortal betrayals,
and of sublime pains.

²I want, when I die,
without a home, but without a master,
to have upon my grave
some flowers, and a flag!

³It is not a dream, but the truth; the cry of war
of the Cuban nation, enraged;
the nation that for three centuries has suffered
all the blackness of an enclosing oppression. . .

Thank God that at last and completely
did Cuba break the chains that oppressed her
and proud and free raised her head!

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