



SINGING OUT OF TUNE:

REVOLUTIONARY DISSONANCE IN THE PRELUDE TO THE PADILLA AFFAIR

by Katerina Seligmann

On October 28, 1968, Heberto Padilla won, and at the same time was not completely allowed to win, the Julian de Casal National Prize for Poetry in Cuba given by the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC).ⁱ This prize was awarded three years before his contentious relationship with Cuba's revolutionary regime deteriorated, becoming what is now referred to as *el Caso Padilla* or the "Padilla Affair"; three years before Heberto Padilla was arrested and jailed by Cuban State Security upon the release of the manuscript of his novel *En mi jardín pastan los heroes* (*Heroes are Grazing in my Garden*);ⁱⁱ three years before an open letter to Fidel Castro was published in *Le Monde* and signed by prominent European and Latin American intellectuals of the Left expressing their concern over Padilla's imprisonment;ⁱⁱⁱ three years before Padilla delivered a televised confession of his counterrevolutionary activities upon his release from prison.^{iv} These events made Padilla a famous figure in Cuban cultural politics, but they do not make sense without an adequate understanding of their prelude, Padilla's book of poems both prized and condemned in 1968.

The book that earned him the prize, *Fuera del juego* (*Out of the Game*) collects poems Padilla wrote in Moscow, Budapest and Prague where he corresponded for the newspaper *Prensa Latina* through much of the 1960's. Because so much of the criticism of this book relies on a singular and autobiographical reading of that book's title, I would like to offer with this essay several alternative readings of the idea of his exclusion, his being "fuera del juego," which take into consideration the sense of plurality provided by the author in later publications and in many of the poems included in this collection.

Padilla's commitment to plurality has already been emphasized in José Prats Sariol's recent publication, *No leas poesía*, and I hope with this essay to contribute to a pluralistic reading not only of the title, but also of its implications for Padilla's place in Cuban literary and political history. In fact, ten years ago, in the introduction to the 30-year anniversary edition of *Fuera del juego*, Padilla had the following to say about the collection of poems:

Con los años he llegado a la conclusión de que aquellas eran actitudes más extremas, obstinadas en imponer mi sistema personal, tan legítimo como a los que me oponía. (8)

Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that those attitudes of mine were extreme, determined to impose my personal system, just as legitimate as those to which I was opposed. (my trans.)

Padilla's retrospective statement follows from one of the most important issues *en juego* (at play) at least in these poems and in his autobiography: ideological authority proscribing debate and suppressing plurality, with the force of violence. Padilla's commitment to plurality at work in his poems remains so strong over the years that he critiques himself for emulating in them the kind of authority he sought to reject. In this essay I seek to re-direct the dominant reading of the book's title in order to shed light on both the pluralistic force of Padilla's critique of the Cuban Revolution and the role of the poet and intellectual within this ideological movement. Reading Padilla's "out of the game" poems pluralistically alongside the statement written by the selection jury awarding him the prize, I orient this essay towards the possibility for the kind of pluralism Padilla wished for Cuba's revolution.

The jury that granted the prize, which included Cuban literary giant José Lezama Lima,^v included an explanatory statement detailing its unanimous decision to award the prize to Padilla. This statement situates Padilla's work in relation to the Revolution. In fact, claiming,

Fuera del Juego se sitúa del lado de la Revolución, se compromete con la Revolución y adopta la actitud que es esencial al poeta y al revolucionario; la del

inconforme, la del que aspira más porque su deseo lo lanza más allá de la realidad vigente. (“Dictamen” 87)

Out of the Game situates itself on the side of the Revolution, it is committed to the Revolution, adopting the necessary attitude for both a poet and a revolutionary; that of an inconformity which aspires to more because of its ability to desire beyond present reality. (my trans.)

This statement seems to echo Fidel Castro’s definition of the revolutionary in his famous speech on revolutionary cultural policy delivered in 1961 before a large audience of Cuban artists and intellectuals. This speech, titled “Palabras a los intelectuales,” claims the following:

Ser revolucionario es también una actitud ante la vida, ser revolucionario es también una actitud ante la realidad existente, y hay hombres que se resignan a esa realidad, hay hombres que se adaptan a esa realidad y hay hombres que no se pueden resignar ni adaptar a esa realidad y tratan de cambiarla, por eso son revolucionarios. (8)

To be revolutionary is also an attitude towards life, to be revolutionary is also an attitude towards existing reality; and, and there are men who resign themselves to that reality, there are men who adapt to that reality and there are men who cannot resign themselves or adapt to that reality and try to change it, which is why they are revolutionary. (my trans.)

It seems as if the selection jury’s statement takes Castro’s definition of a revolutionary and adds two notable elements: first, not accepting an existing reality not only describes the revolutionary, but the poet as well. Secondly, the jury’s statement takes how Castro defines the revolutionary and gives him yet another name: *el inconforme*. The jury’s statement in fact hinges on inconformity— *ser inconforme* is more than just a political position, it is a way of living and of being. Inconformity might first denote a rejection of conformity, but reading the Latin prefix “in,” not only to mean “not”, but also as “inside” and “towards”, would imply that inconformity contains the latent possibility to be read as against, inside and towards conformity all at the same time.^{vi} The possibility of a multivalent *inconforme* operating within the revolution is exactly what Lezama and the

rest of the jury perhaps-counter-intuitively argue to defend their selection of Padilla's poems. I draw attention to this word because it is exactly the indeterminacy of the divide, the space between inside and outside that makes Padilla's "case" so remarkable.

In response to the selection jury's statement, The Executive Committee of the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) issued a statement that allows the selection jury's decision to stand while condemning Padilla's poetry as counter-revolutionary according to their interpretation of the book's poetic content. UNEAC agreed, however, to publish Padilla's book along with their statement denouncing his poetry as "ideologically contrary to the revolution" ("Declaración" 115, my trans.).^{vii} If the selection jury's decision statement hinges on Padilla's critical poetic position towards the revolution as the possibility of an inconformity from within, UNEAC's counter-statement staunchly locates Padilla's critique as outside the revolution by interpreting his book's title literally and autobiographically. According to the UNEAC statement, whose authors are careful to remind us that it is written in 1968, *el año del guerrillero heroico*, 'the year of the heroic guerilla fighter': "Desde su título: 'Fuera del juego,' juzgado dentro del contexto general de la obra, deja explícita la auto-exclusión de su autor de la vida cubana." ("Declaración" 116) ("Beginning with its title, 'Out of the Game,' judged within the general context of the work, makes explicit the auto-exclusion of the author from Cuban life"). This interpretation, that Padilla posits himself in his title as "out of the game," is supported by the historical trajectory lived by Padilla vis-à-vis the Cuban Revolution, has stood the test of time and ideology. For UNEAC, "Cuban life" is the game in question. For Prats Sariol, the game is the Revolution as an established power, and much like the UNEAC reading of the title, it is Padilla who is outside of it: "Por si fuera poco el título remata la denuncia, colma la copa, insiste en que su voz se encuentra para siempre *Fuera del juego*, es decir, de ese juego con el Poder establecido" (288) ("If there were any doubt, the title finishes off the denunciation, fills the brim, insists that his voice is located forever *Out of the Game*, which is to say, of that game with established Power"). According to this reading, Padilla's poems, from their title, opt out of the game played with established power. The reading has "worked" historically, but it occludes, perhaps because it does "work" so well, other interpretations which might help us understand the nature, nuance and depth of the criticism crafted by Padilla's "out of the game" poems.

My first offering to a pluralistic reading of the title is a variation on the dominant reading that is based on the book's opening and most famous poem, "En tiempos difíciles." In this poem, the body parts of an anonymous man ('aquel hombre') are asked of him, and in the end, after being asked for various parts of his body, he is asked to 'get walking':

A aquel hombre le pidieron su tiempo
para que lo juntara al tiempo de la Historia.
Le pidieron las manos,
porque para una época difícil
nada hay mejor que un par de buenas manos....
...Le explicaron después
que toda esta donación resultaría inútil
sin entregar la lengua,
porque en tiempos difíciles
nada es tan útil para atajar el odio o la mentira.
Y finalmente le rogaron
que, por favor, echase a andar,
porque en tiempos difíciles
esta es, sin duda, la prueba decisiva. (13)

They asked that man for his time
so that he could link it to History.
They asked him for his hands,
because for trying times

nothing is better than a good pair of hands...

They explained to him later

that all this gift would be useless

unless he turned over his tongue,

because in trying times

nothing is so useful in checking hatred or lies.

And finally they begged him, please to *get walking*,^{viii}

Because in trying times,

that is, without a doubt, the decisive test. (Reid 25)

A strictly-autobiographical take on this poem would reinforce the dominant reading of “out of the game.” Padilla, since a publication^{ix} where he lauded the censored Cabrera Infante the previous year, had already been alienated from official party life, and as such can be seen as a man kicked out of the revolution. But this poem, as Padilla makes sure to note in his autobiography, precedes his article on Cabrera Infante—in fact, it was published by the *Revista de la Casa de las Américas*^x before he wrote that article. An anecdote from Padilla’s autobiography might help us understand one reading of “out of the game” where the critical intellectual, not just Padilla himself, is left out of the game of the revolution. Padilla tells a story of a 1959 visit by Fidel Castro to the office of *Revolución*, the national newspaper where Padilla had contributed articles since the revolutionary regime came to power. In this visit, Castro suggests that a militia of intellectuals should be formed by the writers of *Revolución*, and that it should be named for a writer. When someone suggests that the militia be named for the writer Rubén Martínez Villena, Castro agrees on that name because Villena was “a man who gave up literature and dedicated his life to revolutionary struggle” (*Self Portrait* 55). Padilla makes sure to add, in case there was any doubt lingering over the veracity of his story, that the newspaper *Revolución* published an article in 1959 covering that militia’s inauguration with a photo of its founding members, including Padilla. For Padilla, what the revolution most wanted from Cuba’s writers was that they sacrifice literature to the

revolution. In fact, Castro's "Palabras a los intelectuales" suggests that the ultimate test of the revolutionary character of a writer or an artist is being able to make that kind of sacrifice: "... el artista más revolucionario sería aquel que estuviera dispuesto a sacrificar hasta su propia vocación artística por la Revolución" (8) ("...the more revolutionary artist would be the one who would be willing to sacrifice even his own artistic vocation for the revolution").

In the poem, after "*aquel hombre*" is asked to hand over several body parts to the revolution, including his heart, his tongue is finally demanded. It is not enough that he turn in the rest of his body; he must also offer his tongue. Not only is the tongue asked of him, but he must give it over willingly.^{xi} What does it mean for Padilla—or the artist—to have to turn in his tongue? The poem does not suggest a forced disabling of the man's tongue and its expressive capacity, but an entreaty to *freely* offer it to the service of the revolution. But that "free" agent never responds in the poem—things are asked of him, but his response remains open-ended. How one reads the end of the poem determines how to read the man's response. Two readings (at least) are possible. The first is the autobiographical one alluded to above: Padilla is this man, and refusing to turn his tongue over to the revolution, is kicked out of the revolution's elite cultural establishment. Suppose the man in the poem does turn in his tongue, though. He could also "*echase a andar*" ("get walking") as a revolutionary without his tongue. This could mean one of two things: either he gives up the intellectual writing game and turns to revolutionary labor of another sort, or he uses his expressive capacity only in service of the revolution.

By examining the poem in the same book entitled "Poética," I would like to propose that we can take *Fuera del juego* as evidence of Padilla's decision, in fact, to stay *in* the game of the revolution and to speak his own truth even if it strikes a dissonant chord. He proposes, as a poetics, to tell the truth, or at least his own personal truth:

Di la verdad.

Di, al menos, tu verdad.

Y después

deja que cualquier cosa ocurra:

que te rompan la página querida,
que te tumben a pedradas la puerta,
que la gente se amontone delante de tu cuerpo
como si fueras
un prodigio o un muerto. (Padilla 27)

Tell the truth.

Tell, at least, your truth.

And later

let whatever may, happen:

that they break your beloved page,

that they knock down your door with stone throws,

that the people

pile up in front of your body

as if you were

a sage or a corpse. (my trans.)

Throughout the book, Padilla critiques the privileging of history over poetry by the revolution. In this poem, however, his poetics works through an ambivalent interpretation of Aristotle's distinction between history and poetics. For Aristotle, history should tell the truth of what happened, while poetry should tell things as they might have been or could be (57). Poetics belongs to the realm of the possible, not to the realm of the truth of events.

So what are the implications of Padilla proposing a poetics of truth-telling? And what does he mean by "truth"? Even when poetry is subordinated to or excluded from the game of history, it persists. If the game is a revolutionary history that diminishes the value of poetry, then Padilla writes poetry back into history, defining it almost as

history, fusing the two. The game he's playing with Aristotle's definition of history and poetry is a poetic game whereby poetics, defined as history, subsumes history, not vice versa. In his memoir, looking back on his education, Padilla scoffs at painters and poets, saying:

Poets and painters seemed to me a barbarous lot. I believed that their genius was a kind of primary, animal secretion, and I would gladly have exchanged the most attractive metaphor of the century for a formulation that was as close to exactitude itself. (*Self Portrait* 16)

Again, what would exactitude look like? Whose exactitude? Exactitude to what end? At least part of what is at stake in Padilla's poetic project outlined in this poem is a non-representational poetics, one which would materialize as truth, as exactitude, itself.

Still, the poem suggests that even poetry as truth-telling can be dangerous. Even poetry re-defined as history is subject to the force of those who would stamp it out of history. The end of the poem is uncertain. The body of the truth-telling poet is either that of a sage or a corpse, indicating the possibility that keeping poetry alive, even under the confines of the historical, could in fact change history. Either the poet manages to change the terms of the game, thus becoming a sage, or he falls prey to revolutionary history, and dies.

The danger of either of these options appears just before the end of the poem: the people before the adulated sage cum dead poet are piled up regardless. If the poet dies, these people die too—they pile up with the poet. Killing the poet does not imply a singular death, but a collective death. If the poet is adulated, they also die, perhaps because an adulated poet is valued above others, a value which not only threatens equality but the possibility of pluralism.

Another reading of "out of the game," comes out of Padilla's critique of heroism in the poem, "Sobre los heroes." If worshipping the poet as a sage is dangerous, it is because the sage is like a hero. And according to the end of this poem, heroes "Modifican a su modo el terror/ Y al final nos imponen/ la furiosa esperanza" (*Fuera del juego* 25) ("Modify terror in their way/ and at last impose/ furious hope"). Even hope, when imposed by the figure of the hero, is dangerous for Padilla. If heroes are the winners in

the game of history, they are no longer participating in it *as a game*. Within a game, even if it is a competitive one, the outcome is still uncertain. When the game ends, however, someone wins—it is oriented towards an end, an end that declares winners. When the game is history, the winners become heroes, and heroes are elevated above others, and as such, are granted the authority to impose their orthodoxy as they will, or modify terror as they see fit.

The problem, of course, is that 1968, the year of “*el guerrillero heroico*” (“the heroic guerilla fighter”), called for a poetic homage to revolutionary heroism. It was, after all, the year after the death of Ché Guevara, who according to Lourdes Casal, had, ironically, been opposed to suppressing literary innovation in Cuba, even though he called most writers counter-revolutionary: “Sin embargo, el Ché Guevara rechazaba los intentos de censurar la creación literaria y acomodarla a los moldes estereotipados de un realismo ‘socialista’ controlado por funcionarios” (7) (“Ché Guevara rejected, however, the attempts to censor literary creation and to accommodate it to the stereotyped molds of a ‘socialist’ realism controlled by government officials”). For him, a revolutionary aesthetic would come with time, out of the revolutionary process: “Ya vendrán los revolucionarios que entonen el canto del hombre nuevo con auténtica voz del pueblo...” (Guevara 14) (“The revolutionaries who will sing to the tune of the new man with the authentic voice of the people are still to come”). He could see an authentic “voice of the people” coming out of the revolution, eventually. Ché Guevara, the revolutionary “hero” par excellence, envisions a voice of the people, not a heroic, singular voice. One might ask what it would take for a poem like “En tiempos difíciles” to depict the poet willfully handing over his tongue in order to spawn this veritable voice of the people. What would the implications of willfully turning in the poet’s tongue to join the chorus of the revolution—as opposed to his feeling forced to hand it over to an apparatus of power that wants to squash out debate—actually look like? In fact, in Padilla’s memoir, he includes a scene in which he recites “En tiempos difíciles” to Ché, who very much enjoys the poem and its call to revolutionary sacrifice. Ché’s initial response to the poem is, “Exactly the same idea that I have about history” (*Self-Portrait* 122). Padilla does not respond to him. He remains silent. Ché had understood the sacrifice demanded by the poem, but he missed the questions it raised. In an earlier section of his memoir, while Padilla is in Russia, he makes a very sad discovery about his role as an intellectual in the

revolution, a discovery upon which hinges any reading of “En tiempos difíciles”: “In moments of great passion, the honest intellectual must remain silent or lie” (75). If for Ché Guevara the man handing his tongue over to the revolution sacrifices his personal voice for the good of the revolution, for Padilla, handing in his tongue will not help foster the voice of the people to be sung by later poets. For Padilla, the singing one does with a sacrificed tongue is a lie—the man at the end of that poem is either silent or lies.

In fact, Castro’s famous statement from his “Palabras a los intelectuales” speech dictating the Cuban Revolution’s cultural policy further emphasizes the double bind lamented by Padilla’s poem. Castro famously declared the official policy of the Revolution towards cultural production to be, “...dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada” (11) (“In the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing”). This formulation (evoking an earlier one by Mussolini^{xii}), subverts the expected opposition between inside and outside by opposing inside to against, as if outside automatically meant against. The hard part for those involved in Cuban cultural production upon the pronouncement of this “policy”, which Padilla’s case symptomatically reveals, was determining the dimensions of the Revolution’s inside.

Lourdes Casal cites Spanish journalist Juan Fernández Figueroa’s prophetic words of 1968, just after the literary contest, in order to offer her own reading of “out of the game” in which not just Padilla, but many Cuban intellectuals must curb their tongues to give way to the revolution:

O la revolución se detiene...o los intelectuales han de ‘ceder’ en Cuba, ‘rendir su voz’ a la Revolución...Los intelectuales están ‘copados’, según la frase castiza...No me satisface, pero no me engaño. (Casal 9)

Either the revolution is detained...or the intellectuals will have to ‘cede’ in Cuba, ‘yield their voice’ to the Revolution...The intellectuals are ‘cornered’, as the saying goes...It does not satisfy me, but I am not fooled. (my trans.)

From here, Casal concludes with a reading in which, Padilla’s “En tiempos difíciles” is rendered, not a metaphor or a trope, but in fact, the statement of *exactly* what position Cuban intellectuals of the time lived: “Padilla—y con él, muchos otros—, tuvieron finalmente que ‘dar su lengua’ a la Revolución en estos ‘tiempos difíciles” (9) (Padilla—

and with him, many others—, finally had to ‘give their tongues’ to the Revolution in those ‘difficult times’). Both Fernández Figueroa and Casal acknowledge that the revolution lived a tenuous position, one that could not handle the free-flowing tongues of its intellectuals. Although it may be difficult to read “En tiempos difíciles” in retrospect without a certain tragic air, it may be the poem in which Padilla reaches the exactitude he strived for: turning in your tongue, and walking, either out of the revolution, or into it, silent or lying, whichever way chosen, illustrates the condition of the Cuban intellectual of the time.

It is because Padilla’s *Fuera del juego* is a book written *through* the tension of the demand to go silent or lie for the revolution that it cannot be seen only through the lens of the UNEAC decree that it is counter-revolutionary and directed out of or away from the revolution. It is not the revolution *qua* revolution that Padilla’s book insists on speaking *towards* and *in*, even if from the foul line (after all, it is a foul ball in baseball that is called “fuera de juego”), but particular circumstances of the revolution which are demanding the unbearable choice of silence or lying which Padilla refuses to make precisely *by writing*.

According to Manuel Díaz Martínez, one of the judges on the selection committee, the decision to grant Padilla the award was a unanimous one made by the entire jury. They all agreed that *Fuera del juego* was critical to the revolution, but revolutionary *for being critical*, as is suggested by their collective statement. About this, he states:

En la reunión que el jurado celebró al concluir la lectura de los libros concursantes sostuve que *Fuera del juego* era crítico pero no contrarrevolucionario—más bien revolucionario por crítico—y que merecía el premio por su sobresaliente calidad literaria. Los otros miembros del jurado eran de igual opinión. (“Caso Padilla”)

In the meeting that the jury held after reading the books of the contest I sustained that *Fuera del juego* was critical but not counterrevolutionary—in fact revolutionary because it was critical—and that it deserved the award because of its outstanding literary quality. The other members of the jury were of the same opinion. (my trans.)

The problem, for the jury and for Padilla, was that the poet, as a person, had been tagged counter-revolutionary, prior to the book's entering the contest.^{xiii} Díaz Martínez says that the Cuban members of the jury knew they would be met with anger from UNEAC if they selected Padilla for the prize. Casal explains that it was not just Padilla's earlier praising of Cabrera Infante that which pushed him to the sidelines of the revolution. Just before the literary contest, Cabrera Infante conducted his first inflammatory interview heavily criticizing the revolution (Casal 7). When Padilla's letter to the newspaper *El Caiman Barbudo* on Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres* was published the previous year, Cabrera Infante had remained ambiguous towards the revolution, but after this 1968 interview, his position became clear. And according to Casal, "Esto dejó a Padilla en la peligrosa postura de haber defendido a un 'traidor'" (7) (This left Padilla in the dangerous position of having defended a 'traitor'). Having defended someone who had been labeled a traitor to the revolution posited Padilla, even before the analysis of his poems, as "out of the game."

A look at how to read "out of the game" in Padilla's poems is incomplete, of course, without a study of the book's title poem, which begins with: "¡Al poeta, despídanlo! Ese no tiene aquí nada que hacer" ("Bid farewell to the poet! That one has nothing to do here"), and ends by describing the poet as, "Canta, entre dientes, La Guantanamera" ("He sings, through clenched teeth, the Guantanamera") (*Fuera del juego* 43). This poem, again, can be read in different ways. Firstly, it describes the revolutionary regime's attitude, demonstrated by Castro and Guevara as seen above, as well as others, towards poets. But could it also be Padilla's own self-critical position? Because the poet,

No entra en el juego.

No se entusiasma.

No pone en claro su mensaje...

Encuentra siempre algo que objetar. (43)

Does not enter the game.

Is not enthusiastic.

Does not make his message clear...

Always finds something to object. (my trans.)

Like the criticism of the poet in both “Poética” and “Sobre los heroes,” this poem can be seen as Padilla’s own critique of the poet (perhaps even of himself), the one who frustrates the revolution, singing behind clenched teeth the national song. What would it take for a poet to sing clearly, without clenching his teeth? And what would it take for both the revolution and its poets to sing *with* the people, not *above* them? The multiplicity of voices Padilla projects throughout the poems perhaps begins to answer this question. As Patterson argues:

Mientras el líder autor trata de imponer una voz absoluta, Heberto le contrapone la suya y demostrando en qué radica la esencia del auténtico poeta, hace hablar a otros. De tal modo, el poeta establece con su voz un universo plural, la diversidad de opiniones, el enfoque crítico y el cuestionamiento del poder. (34)

Whereas the leader author tries to impose an absolute voice, Heberto contrasts his own, and demonstrating where the essence of the authentic poet lies, makes others speak. That way, the poet establishes with his voice a plural universe, diversity of opinions, a critical emphasis and a critique of power. (my trans.)

Perhaps Padilla has not become that poet of the future as imagined by Ché Guevara, but rather proposes the kind of polyphony of a would-be revolutionary pluralism.

Just after the contest, in the journal *Verde Olivo*, an article written under the pseudonym *Leopoldo Ávila* and titled “Las provocaciones de Padilla” (“Padilla’s provocations”) responds to Padilla’s book, continuing to read Padilla as out of the game, but in a way that also brings him back into the game, or at least within its rules. Ávila says about Padilla, “Aunque él se crea fuera del juego, las reglas del juego de la Revolución están dadas...” (“Even if he believes himself out of the game, the rules of the game of the Revolution have been given”) (114). UNEAC posits Padilla as outside the revolution while still publishing his book from within it, and the hard line Ávila lets Padilla know he is subject to the rules of the game even if he is positioning himself outside of it. Really, even as Padilla keeps being read “out of the game,” he is constantly in the game. Even his later arrest, detainment, confession, and all the international

attention they provoked, entered and were very much “in the game.” Ironically, what is “out of the game” is always actually, part of the game.^{xiv} And one might ask of Cuban intellectual history since the revolution: Has any Cuban intellectual (or any Cuban) inside or outside of Cuba, left the game of the revolution, or stopped being an interlocutor with it?

Conversely, Cuba faces these interlocutors, even if they are effaced, ceremoniously, all of the time. The first part of Castro’s famous proclamation, “dentro de la Revolución, todo” (“Palabras” 11) has become a prophecy too strong to uphold its counterpart of “contra la Revolución, nada.”^{xv} In *Of Grammatology* Derrida addresses the inside of language and writing as the supposed outside-of-it in a way that might illustrate the inside-outside relationship at stake in this essay. For Derrida, what has been considered dangerous, since Plato, about writing, is that it is viewed as a forced entry upon the interiority of language, or “an eruption of the outside within the inside” (34). Through language, writing also enters language, erupts upon it, in it. It is not because language is inside writing, but because writing is inside language that this is the case. Padilla’s eruption on the revolution was not a refusal of the game, but an insistence that even when you are not allowed to play the game, the game plays you, and the game cannot leave you out.

Whether the game is the revolution excluding intellectual expression, history writing out poetry, or poetry and history as producers of heroes, the game as a process of exclusion looks bleak. Can there be a historical or a poetic game that does not produce a definitive, authoritative end? Perhaps, if we can inhabit the impossible reading of a multivalent inconformity suggested by the selection jury which granted Padilla the national prize for poetry, we can imagine a different kind of game, for both history and poetry. Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, who spent much time in Cuba between 1940 and 1953 and whose ideas greatly influenced the generation of Cuban writers that preceded Padilla, including his jurist Lezama Lima, introduces her 1940 book, *Filosofía y poesía*, with the following: “No se pasa de lo posible a lo real, sino de lo imposible a lo verdadero” (1) (“We do not go from the possible to the real, but from the impossible to the true”). Even if allowing inconformity to mean multiple, opposing things at the same time seems impossible, doing so would take us somewhere true. Not to the definitive place of truth which excludes the possibility of pluralism, but to a place where there are,

truly, different ways of playing the same game. Even with the force of violence, no view, method, or person can ever, truly, be left out of the game. Even if outlawed, different ways of playing find their way into, and change the terms, of the game. Padilla never left the game, even when he left Cuba years after his imprisonment. But his “case” certainly changed the parameters of that game, inside and out.

How to cite this article according to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (7th edition):

Seligmann, Katerina. “Singing Out of Tune: Revolutionary Dissonance in the Prelude to the Padilla Affair” *Pterodáctilo* 6 (2009): n. pag. Web. Day Month Year.

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.
- Aristotle. *Poetics*. In: *Critical Theory since Plato*. Ed. Adams, Hazard and Leroy Searle. New York: Wadsworth, 2004.
- Casal, Lourdes. *El Caso Padilla: Literatura y Revolución en Cuba, Documentos*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1972.
- Castro, Fidel. *Palabras a los Intelectuales*. La Habana: Ediciones del Consejo Nacional de Cultura, 1961.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976, c.1967.
- Díaz Martínez, Manuel. "El Caso Padilla (1)." *diazmartinez.wordpress.com*. Manuel Díaz Martínez, 17 Oct. 2007. Web. 10 Dec. 2008.
- . "Palabras contra los intelectuales." *diazmartinez.wordpress.com*. Manuel Díaz Martínez, 2 Sept. 2006. Web. 26 Apr. 2009.
- Fernandez-Retamar, Roberto. "Caliban revisitado." *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*. 12: 24 (1986): 245-255.
- Guevara, Ernesto "Ché." *El socialismo y el hombre nuevo*. Ed. José Aricó. México: Siglo Veintiuno, 1982.
- Padilla, Heberto. *Self Portrait of the Other*. Trans: Alexander Coleman. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1990.
- . "Treinta años después de *Fuera del juego*." *Fuera del juego: Edición conmemorativa 1968-1998*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998.
- . "Declaración de la UNEAC acerca de los premios otorgados a Heberto Padilla en Poesía y Antón Arrufat en Teatro," *Fuera del juego: Edición conmemorativa 1968-1998*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998.
- . "Dictamen de Jurado del Concurso de la UNEAC 1968." *Fuera del juego: Edición conmemorativa 1968-1998*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998.
- . "Provocaciones de Padilla." *Fuera del juego: Edición conmemorativa 1968-1998*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998.
- Patterson, Enrique. "La revolución de *Fuera del juego*." *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* Vol. 19, (2000-2001), pp. 21-39.
- Prats Sariol, José. *No Leas Poesía*. Puebla: LunArena, 2006.

Reid, Alistair and Andrew, trans. *Legacies: Selected Poems*. By Heberto Padilla. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982.

Rivero, Raúl. "Heberto Padilla: tiempo al tiempo." *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* 19 (2000-2001): 19-20.

Zambrano, Maria. *Filosofía y poesía*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000, c. 1939.

Notes

ⁱ An earlier version of this essay was presented in October 2008 at the conference of the Program in Comparative Literature at the University of Texas at Austin, “1968: A Global Perspective.” I would like to thank Professor César Salgado for inspiring and encouraging the essay in his course on Orígenes and Professors Esther Whitfield and Adrian López-Denis for allowing me to workshop this essay in their course on Contemporary Cuban Cultural Politics. In the process of revising this essay, along with Joseph Pierce, I would also like to thank Professor Esther Whitfield for her thorough feedback and support and Moustapha Diop for his incisive critiques.

ⁱⁱ His arrest occurred in March, 1971.

ⁱⁱⁱ The letter was dated April 9, 1971 and signed among others by Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Italo Calvino, Marguerite Duras, Juan Goytisolo, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa.

^{iv} The confession took place on April 27, 1971, and a second open letter was published in *Le Monde* following it, expressing concern over the humiliation involved in the proceedings of the confession. This time, the list of signatures is longer, but both Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez notably do not include their names. The letters and documents related to the Padilla Affair can be found in both Casal’s *El Caso Padilla: Literatura y Revolución en Cuba* and Padilla’s thirty-year anniversary edition of *Fuera del juego*.

^v Two years earlier, Lezama Lima’s famous novel *Paradiso* had been scorned by revolutionary authorities because of its treatment of homosexuality.

^{vi} See the *Chambers Murray Latin-English Dictionary* for these definitions of the Latin “in” present in both the English “inconformity” and the Spanish “inconforme.” Additionally, the antonym to conformity offered by the etymological dictionary of the Castilian Spanish (*Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana*) is not “inconforme” but “disconforme.” Although the dictionary of the Spanish language of the *Real Academia Española* likens “inconfome” to “disconforme,” the space between those words offered by the collection of meanings offered by “in” is the space I am trying to open up by reading with Padilla and the selection jury awarding him the prize that year.

^{vii} What their statement does not include, and Padilla reveals in his autobiography, is that in addition he was not awarded the trip to the Soviet Union or the 1,000 peso cash award that accompanied the prize (*Self-Portrait* 131).

^{viii} Italics mark my alteration to the translation.

^{ix} See: “A propósito de *Pasión de Urbino*,” *Caimán Barbudo*, 1967.

^x This magazine, prominent not only in Cuba but throughout Latin America, was founded in 1960 and continues to operate to this day. The poem’s publication there is notable because of the magazine’s official, state-sanctioned status.

^{xi} Patterson argues that “*aquel hombre*” is rendered an object by the end of the poem (Patterson 30), but this conclusion overlooks the relational aspect at play between the man and the entity asking him to give things over. Patterson’s conclusion implies a reading of the poem whereby everything demanded is given over to the power demanding it, but that reading is not the only one possible.

^{xii} Díaz Martínez, in his blog article “Palabras contra los intelectuales” makes sure to note the resemblance of this statement to a famous one of Mussolini’s. The Mussolini statement of 1927 is just a bit longer. It reads: "Tutto nello stato, niente contro lo stato, nulla al di fuori dello stato" /"Everything inside the state, nothing against the state, absolutely nothing outside the state" (trans. Amanda Minervini). See at least this link for the Mussolini quote: <http://www.polyarchy.org/basta/crimini/sette.html>.

^{xiii} See Diaz-Martinez and Casal.

^{xiv} See Agamben’s *Homo Sacer* for a discussion of the way the sovereign in the state of exception is both inside and outside the law at the same time (15). The sovereign’s place paradoxically inside and outside at the same time in Agamben’s argument is analogous to Padilla and his poems inhabiting multiple positions vis-à-vis the Cuban Revolution.

^{xv} I do not mean to undermine or ignore censorship, arrests, exile and other forms of exclusion and detraction enacted in the scene of Cuban cultural production since the Revolution but instead to argue that even these function in relation to and within the Revolution’s game.