The Tragedy of a Man Who Cursed: On Leonardo Padura's *The Novel of My Life* (2002).

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Abstract

This article explores how in *The Novel of My Life* Heredia's tragedy—that is, his forced exile—stems from a dialectics between colonialism and culture in Cuba. This process reveals the transatlantic mediations between the imperial politics of Spain and the colonial character of nineteenth-century Cuba. To flesh out this interplay, the article pays attention to what Enrique Tandeter called "el carácter colonial de la formación social" or "el hecho colonial" as well as to what the Brazilian cultural theorist Roberto Schwarz coined as "misplaced ideas." If in classical tragedy, the conflict of ethical forces is resolved by a higher force, in Padura's novel this conflict is presented in social and historical terms that bear overwhelmingly on the existential (Williams 57). Heredia's tragedy is depicted in the novel as a result of a socio-historical reality in which Heredia's enlightened, liberal ideas about politics and independence had become "misplaced ideas"

in the Cuba of the 1820's. The novel explores the contradictions between the political structures and culture of the Spanish absolutist state and European Enlightened ideas in colonial Cuba. The novel focuses on the ways in which Spanish rule had moved away from "enlightened despotism" and from constitutional liberalism, and was predominantly exploitative, structured by violence and utilitarianism and, through the renewed system of slavery, it embraced a racist ideology. While I give an account of particular instances of discontinuity in the history of the Spanish empire with respect to colonial Cuba, my focus in this essay are not the discontinuities in the Spanish rule but its continuities. For in *The Novel of My Life* the continuities in the forms of imperial domination over the Cuban colony are what decided José María Heredia's tragic fate.

Keywords: Leonardo Padura; *The Novel of My Life*; nineteenth-century colonial Cuba; José María Heredia; misplaced ideas.

Resumen

Este artículo explora cómo en *La novela de mi vida* la tragedia de Heredia—es decir, su exilio forzado—surge de una dialéctica entre colonialismo y cultura en Cuba. Al mismo tiempo, esta dinámica revela las mediaciones transatlánticas entre la política imperial de España y el carácter colonial de la Cuba decimonónica. Para articular esta relación, el artículo presta atención a lo que Enrique Tandeter llamó "el carácter colonial de la formación social" o "el hecho colonial," así como a lo que el teórico cultural brasileño Roberto Schwarz acuñó como "ideas fuera de lugar". Si en la tragedia clásica, el conflicto de las fuerzas éticas es resuelto por una fuerza superior, en novela, este conflicto se presenta más bien en términos sociales e históricos que afectan drásticamente la existencia del ser humano (Williams 57). La tragedia de Heredia se describe en la novela de Padura como resultado de la realidad sociohistórica en la que las ideas liberales e ilustradas de Heredia sobre política e independencia eran más bien "ideas fuera de lugar" en la Cuba de la década de 1820. La novela explora las contradicciones entre las estructuras políticas y la cultura del estado dinástico español y las ideas ilustradas europeas en la Cuba colonial. Aunque Leonardo

Padura presenta algunas de las particularidades del período en que Heredia vivió en Cuba entre la metrópoli y la colonia que había engendrado, la novela se centra en las formas en que el dominio español fue predominantemente explotador, estructurado por la violencia y el utilitarismo y, a través del sistema de esclavitud, generó una ideología racista. Si bien doy cuenta de instancias particulares de discontinuidad en la historia del imperio español con respecto a la Cuba colonial, mi enfoque en este ensayo no son las discontinuidades en el dominio español sino sus continuidades. Puesto que en *La novela de mi vida* son las continuidades en las formas de dominación imperial de la metrópoli sobre la colonia cubana las que deciden el trágico destino de José María Heredia.

Palabras clave: Leonardo Padura; *The Novel of My Life*; Cuba colonial del siglo diecinueve; José María Heredia; ideas fuera de lugar.

I. Overture

Leonardo Padura's *The Novel of My Life* (2002) narrates the life of the Cuban poet, José María Heredia, and his involvement in Cuba's nineteenth-century struggle for independence from Spain. He was involved in the Masonic conspiracy of the *Soles and Rayos de Bolívar* for Cuba's independence. (Padura, *José María Heredia* 227). Because of his involvement with the revolutionary cause, the poet was forced into exile in the United States and Mexico. The novel is divided into two parts—"El mar y los regresos," and "Los destierros"—a narrative of Heredia's life before and after exile, told through three storylines that mirror each other, a key feature of Padura's fiction. Riddled with ellipses, prolepsis, and analepsis, the storylines are the following: 1) Heredia's autobiography—also titled *The Novel of My Life*—which narrates his life in Cuba and exile. Padura's novel begins with Heredia writing his autobiography from his deathbed in 1839; 2) the story of Fernando Terry, an Heredia scholar exiled to the United States who returns for a short period of time to present-day

Cuba in search of the poet's lost autobiography, and 3) the presumed fate of Heredia's autobiography, at the hand of his son, during the years of the Cuban Republic (1902-59). Lastly, in a more implicit way, the novel alludes to the effects of the colonial and neocolonial periods in the revolutionary and postrevolutionary Cuba in the twentieth century.

This article explores how in *The Novel of My Life* Heredia's failed political projects—culminating in his forced exile—stems from a dialectics between colonialism and culture in Cuba. At the same time, this process reveals the transatlantic impositions of Spain's imperial politics over the colonial political landscape of nineteenth-century Cuba. To flesh out this interplay, the article pays attention to what Enrique Tandeter called "el carácter colonial de la formación social" or "el hecho colonial" (quoted in Ortega 109) in his article titled "Sobre el análisis de la dominación colonial," written in 1976, as well as to what the Brazilian cultural theorist Roberto Schwarz coined as "misplaced idea" in his book of the same title.

I argue that Heredia's fate, depicted in Padura's novel as a tragedy, is the result of the socio-historical reality in which Heredia was immersed. If in classical tragedy, the conflict of ethical forces is resolved by a higher force, in Padura's novel this conflict is presented in social and historical terms that bear tremendously on the existential (Williams 57). Heredia's enlightened, liberal ideas about politics and independence were rather "misplaced ideas" in the Cuba of the 1820's. In other words, some of these European liberal ideas became "misplaced ideas" when they were displaced first in the Spanish context, and subsequently in the colonial context in Cuba. The incongruence between the political structures and culture of the Spanish absolutist state and enlightened European ideas projected themselves onto colonial Cuba.

Although Padura presents some of the particularities of the period in which Heredia lived in Cuba between the metropolis and the colony that it had engendered, the novel focuses on the ways in which Spanish rule was

predominantly exploitative, structured by violence and utilitarianism and, through the renewed system of slavery, embracing a racial ideology. While I give an account of particular instances of discontinuity in the history of the Spanish empire with respect to colonial Cuba, my focus in this essay are not the discontinuities in the Spanish rule but its continuities. For in *The Novel of My Life* the continuities in the forms of imperial domination of the metropolis over the Cuban colony are what decided José María Heredia's political defeat.

When talking about ideas of the Enlightenment, I am taking into account the Enlightenment both as a historical occurrence and as an ethos (Duprey 1-19). As a historical occurrence, it produced an epistemic transformation concerning the vision of the world; as an ethos, it linked history and human agency. Bianca Premo, for instance, has found cases in the Spanish colonies in which illiterate litigants appropriated enlightened ideas in the daily practice of law, something that has been traditionally understood as the production of elite, literate and European men (1-25). Likewise, Michelle McKinley presents the multiple channels through which enslaved women claimed their freedom, even when their legal status was that of property under the civil law of slavery, within the urban labor market in colonial Lima; in this way McKinley reveals instances in the lives of enslaved women in which they acted as subjects with agency rather than as mere human property (1-25). Enlightenment thus enabled a culture that simultaneously, and paradoxically, embraced, transformed, and rejected enlightened ideas of justice, equality and liberty.

It is along these lines that this essay addresses the following questions: How did enlightened ideas of universality, progress, and equality, for instance, undergird the violence and development of the slave system in colonial Cuba, but also challenge the Spanish Monarchy through the local claims for independence? Who were the individuals and groups that supported Cuba's independence from Spain during José María Heredia's time? How was the early nineteenth-century experienced in Havana society? How did enlightened ideas

spread in Cuba through literary culture? How does Padura represent in *The Novel of My Life* the contradictory ways by which nineteenth-century society grappled with the possibility of an independent Cuba?

In this historical novel, the Cuban author shows the contradictions of ideological life in nineteenth-century Cuba. European liberal ideas were "misplaced" while being reproduced in or exported to Spain and Cuba. As Tilmann Alternberg indicates, in spite of the geographical distance, and the prohibition of part of the enlightened thought in Spain and the Hispanic colonies throughout the eighteenth-century, the gap between the European innovations and the partly clandestine arrival of new ideas to the Spanish colonies of America was increasingly reduced until its virtual disappearance at the end of the century. Already half a century before the outbreak of the Wars of Independence, the main writings of the European Enlightenment circulated in the Spanish Americas. In academic circles, both the Spanish Enlightenment and the books popularizing enlightened knowledge in the rest of Europe were read and amply commented, although not always favorably (198). Rather than being ideas that did not reach Spain or Cuba, "misplaced ideas," developed or materialized themselves in dissimilar or even unexpected ways. Although this different materialization stems from the accumulation of historical strata, Padura presents Heredia's tragedy in social and political terms that also had an impact on the existential.

II. The Tragedy of a Man Who Cursed

"You taught me language, and my profit on't is, / I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language!" (Act 1, Scene 2, 363-4), outcries the "savage" Caliban to Prospero, his "civilized" master. These lines from Shakespeare's celebrated play *The Tempest* became among the most cited lines cited by Roberto Fernández Retamar in his *Caliban* (1971). Retamar's intentions by evoking the words of a character from a seventeenth-

century British play, in a book written in the context of a revolutionary Cuba that had become Latin America's symbol of liberation from postcolonial and neocolonial rule at the time, was to elucidate the significance of the linkage between language, culture and identity in the (re)foundation of the Cuban nation. He is concerned with the formation of identity in the absence of diverse languages in Cuba. If language plays a significant part of what defines a culture, what kind of independent identity is available to those who know no other language than that of its former oppressor? Retamar asks. Shakespeare's Caliban had already been the object of reflection about national formation and Latin American culture in José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900). For Rodó, Ariel is the symbol of European civilization and Caliban of Latin American barbarism since according to him it was impossible to have a civilized nation that does not continue with, and pursue European values. Thus, in his quest to bestow Shakespeare's savage with dignity, after having been disparaged by Rodó. Retamar presents his allegorical interpretation of Caliban:

> Nuestro símbolo no es pues Ariel, como pensó Rodó, sino Calibán. Esto es algo que vemos con particular nitidez los mestizos que habitamos estas mismas islas donde vivió Calibán: Próspero invadió las islas, mató a nuestros ancestros, esclavizó a Calibán y le enseñó su idioma para poder entenderse con él: ¿qué otra cosa puede hacer Calibán sino utilizar ese mismo idioma —hoy no tiene otro— para maldecirlo, para desear que caiga sobre él la "roja plaga"? No conozco otra metáfora más acertada de nuestra situación cultural, de nuestra realidad. (42-43)

For Fernández Retamar, *The Tempest* refers to colonial and postcolonial Cuba. The island that Shakespeare creates in his play is in Latin America, and Caliban is Latin America's Carib. Calibán is thus identified with the "suffering masses," with the indigenous and *mestizos*, with a Latin America that no longer exclusively belongs to the *criollo* elite of European descent. Yet, Retamar

ascertains an important qualification—it is impossible to elude European influence in Latin America's cultural formation, for the very language that narrates the formation of the Latin American nations is European:

> [d]escendientes de numerosas comunidades indígenas, europeas, africanas, asiáticas, tenemos, para entendernos, unas pocas lenguas: las de los colonizadores [...] Ahora mismo, que estoy discutiendo con estos colonizadores, ¿de qué otra manera puedo hacerlo, sino en una de sus lenguas, que es ya también nuestra lengua, y con tantos de sus instrumentos conceptuales, que también son ya nuestros instrumentos conceptuales? (25)

Latin America has inherited not only the master's language but also their conceptual instruments. Still, Fernández Retamar does not speak of imitating more powerful nations like the Europeans. For him, Latin America's particularity—he calls it "authenticity" —resides in past and present acts of resistance. Moreover, this "authenticity" consists of turning the language of the colonizers against them and learning, as Caliban did, to curse. In this spirit, in the nineteenth-century Cuban colony, individuals and groups found, through their defiance of the Atlantic slave trade, an opportunity to establish new identities, new self-conceptions, to create for themselves a new place within society and a new role in public life. But what are the consequences of cursing, rejecting, or dissenting, especially when the subject is immersed within relations of political power? More specifically, what were the consequences for someone who dares to question and reject a deeply entrenched institution such as slavery? Both history and literature have shown us that ostracism has been, more often than not, the consequence of such a rejection.

In *The Novel of My Life* that act of courage is carried out by a Cuban *criollo* considered as an outcast by the creole elites in colonial Cuba, but deemed today as the first national poet of the island. On October 31, 1823, Heredia was accused of conspiring against the Spanish Monarchy. A month later, the

government of Spain issued a warrant for his arrest, but he escaped from the colonial authorities. As the novel's narrative voice explains:

> El viaje a Matanzas, a través del valle del Yumurí, fue esta vez como un descenso a los infiernos [...] comenzaría mi destierro, y con él, el aprendizaje verdadero de lo efímera que suele ser la felicidad y lo inconmensurable que puede resultar el dolor. (182)

When accused, he is called a traitor, a conspirator against the laws of the metropolis for having spoken of freedom and independence as well as of political and cultural sovereignty. Spain also condemned him for having had the audacity to talk about the problem of slavery in Cuba. In 1823 the Cuban poet would begin the long road of his exile. Political exile, indeed, has been one of the ghosts that have haunted the history of Spain (Kamen 4). Heredia, Padura affirms, "es el primer gran desterrado cubano y el primero de los nacidos en esta isla condenado a morir en el exilio" (*José María Heredia* 222). Exile is, as Edward Said described it, one of the "saddest fates" (369). Forced exile entails the displacement of one's language and culture along with the perennial sadness of knowing that there is no possibility of return. In this sense, the passage of time is lived by those in forced exile in a different way, they are waiting for a deferred future that might change their fate. As a poet who knows that he will die in exile, Heredia is aware of the passage of time. For the poet, time represents the heaviness of history over the human being, allegorized in the novel by the presence of the tempest. The tempest, both on earth and sea, becomes a literary *topos* of the novel's story, endowed with a specific poetic function and evocative power. The tempest gives life to an experience of the passage of time and history that involves the character of Heredia. If the voyage on the sea creates the union of the space-time coordinates, in Heredia's trips to Mexico and Havana the storm is a destabilizing force of this union. It destabilizes both the sea and the existential outlook of

the banished poet. Also known as the "Cantor del Niágara," Heredia was the creator of numerous literary works that articulated his repudiation of Spanish colonialism as well as an initial formation of national consciousness.[1] Regarding Heredia as Cuba's national poet, Padura formulates an apposite question:

> Qué acontecimientos y de qué trascendencia fueron los vividos en la Isla . . . para que [Heredia] hasta el entonces sin patria definida empezara a convertirse en algo tan etéreo y difícilmente sostenible como "ser cubano," en un momento en el que apenas existía una noción del país llamado Cuba. (324)

Differentiating Heredia from other members of the island's Creole elite may be a way to first tackle Padura's interrogation. The Cuban poet was born in a family of *criollos* in Santiago de Cuba in 1803. During his childhood and youth, he lived in other colonies of Latin America, since his father was an official of the Spanish government. As the son of a family that belonged to the Cuban elite, from a young age he studied Latin, the classics, and the French literary tradition. In Cuba, the poet was considered an outcast by some groups of the Creole elite that were loyal to the Spanish Monarchy and held sway over the political and economic domains in the island. For the loyalist Creole elite, Heredia's attraction to the liberal political values he was exposed to, both in politics and literature, sounded too advanced and dangerous. Besides, Heredia's family were not colonists or plantation owners. On the contrary, when his father died, he left the family in a precarious economic situation, and consequently, Heredia's family was considered by the Cuban creole elite a declassed family. Regarding the family's economic situation, Padura explains that "La injusticia que entraña esta situación caló de manera profunda en la conciencia del joven Heredia que siente en carne propia la ingratitud de la corona española para con sus más fieles servidores en el lejano mundo americano" (*José María Heredia* 219). Heredia's family belonged to a class that was between, or in the middle of, the "sociedad blanca dominante," and "el

abismo de la sociedad negra esclava de la plantación" (*José María Heredia* 227). Declassed and outcast: it was easy to betray him. Accordingly, in 1823, members of the creole elite revealed to the Spanish authorities that Heredia was part of a conspiracy against the Spanish Monarchy.

During the years he spent in the Virreinato de la Nueva España (1819-1821) Heredia acquired a political awareness of the social situation of the colonies in Latin America that led him to support independence from Spain. In Mexico, he witnessed the aftereffects of the first separatist attempt of Hidalgo and Morelos and the declaration of independence of the Mexican colony. Meanwhile, the victory of the 1820 liberal revolution in Spain denoted a counterrevolution in Mexico advocating its independence. This was a preemptive reaction led by ultra-royalist dominant elites against the progressive anti-clerical policies of the new liberal Cortes that represented a direct challenge against the social position of the Church in Mexico, which not only was the owner of half of the land but constituted the de facto banker of the Viceroyalty. The upshot: Iturbide's Mexican empire (Anderson, "La naturaleza y el sentido de las guerras" 35). The experience of this rebellion and the political consciousness it created in Mexican intellectuals and public men influenced Heredia's political awareness, which was articulated in his support of separatism and constitutionalism. For Heredia, both separatism and constitutionalism had to abolish slavery in Cuba and incorporate blacks as citizens. Indeed, the experiences of colonialism and exile both motivated and marked Heredia's writing.

Considering that colonialism became an ideologically charged concept in the nineteenth century, in what follows, I offer a general mapping of the transatlantic concatenations—the symbolic and literal chains—between Spain's imperial politics and colonial culture of Cuba and their resonance in *The Novel of My Life*. Specifically, I will flesh out Padura's depiction of the transatlantic colonial history of Cuba both from a cultural and political point of view. I circumscribe my analysis to the period between the 1790s to the 1830s

because during these dates events of political and cultural significance – such as the French, the Industrial, the Haitian, and Liberal Revolutions in the case of Spain – marked and changed the history of the French, British, and Spanish empires respectively and mutually, and they had a powerful influence on the colonies of the Caribbean, specifically in Haiti (the first post-slavery nation in the modern world) and Cuba. This period also frames Heredia's political life in the island and in his first *sojourn* in Mexico as well as his forced exile first to the United States and then back to Mexico, where he lived until his death in 1839.

III. Cuba and the metropolis: 1790s-1830s

Spanish imperialism politically and economically controlled its distant territories in the new world, such as the island of Cuba, through institutions created locally by the metropolis. The Spanish empire, one of the most formidable in Europe since the sixteenth century, had begun in the early modern age and it unquestioningly adhered to a mercantilist policy and forced conversion to counter reformist Catholicism, however, both ideologies were in deep decline by the early nineteenth century.[2] Colonialism in Cuba, understood as a consequence of Spanish imperialism, put into practice the laws, economic structures, and methods of empire through the work and loyalty of *colonos* (colonists) or *peninsulares* (Spaniards) and different forms of settlement. As J. H. Elliott points out, the colonies in America were legally integrated into Spain (7). Some of these legally incorporated practices and structures included slavery, mining, and a mercantilist monopoly which put peninsular economic interests at the center. Generally speaking, colonialism consolidated a culture of control and dominion exercised by Spanish political institutions through the figure of the colonist. Indeed, colonization profoundly metamorphosed Cuban society. It created marked inequalities, social hierarchies, and the emergence of Cuban creole elites (the *criollos*), which were predominately loyalist to the Spanish Monarchy and ambivalent if not actively hostile regarding questions

of independence, cultural, and national identity.

Nineteenth-century Cuba was a colonial and slave society. And, as such, it lacked meaningful political and economic sovereignty, and only had a modicum of cultural autonomy. What were the tensions between those seeking independence from Spain and the challenges posed by the structures of the plantation? On the one hand, the institution of slavery, which created slave societies in the colonies of the Caribbean, had established a hegemonic hierarchy throughout the colonial world. The institution of slavery was epistemically? embedded within the cognitive world of the metropolis and the colonies. It was also a system that was deeply implanted in the popular imagination of both Spain and its colonies. In *The Novel of My Life*, Heredia confides to the priest and philosopher Félix Varela that the problem of slavery in Cuba is like a sort of pre-Christian atavism.[3] For Heredia, Cuba was a country in which servitude had the form of human slavery (Padura, *La novela* 101). Throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century, slavery had indeed become a fundamental component of both the Cuban social formation and its socio-cultural image.

The slave system, which made Cuba a profitable colony, was upheld by extreme violence. As Ada Ferrer has explained, in the European colonies throughout the Caribbean, governors encouraged both the slave trade and the plantation production, along with the force that sustained these two forms of profit (4). Lisa Surwillo has forcefully summed up the specificity of the nineteenth-century Spanish slave trade:

> What is peculiar about colonial Cuba is not the institution of slavery—which lasted until 1863 in the Dutch colonies, 1865 in the United States, and 1888 in Brazil, for example—but the simultaneously illegal and lucrative transatlantic slave trade that fed it. The transatlantic slave trade was carried out by *negreros*—slave ship captains—but this same word was also used to describe the capitalists who financed and masterminded slaving expeditions to Africa

> and then managed the smuggling of contraband men and women onto the island. These businessmen created huge fortunes and vast networks of influence that extended across insular (Cuba) and peninsular Spain. (3)

Indeed, by the mid-1820's Cuba was the world's largest producer of sugar and had become the largest importer of enslaved Africans (Ferrer 5-10). The slave system in the Cuban colony was, moreover, a significant impediment to the realization of the independence of the island, and Padura's novel echoes this conundrum in the conversation between Heredia and Dr. Hernández, one of the most loyal members of the *Soles y Rayos de Bolívar*:

> Lo que te voy a decir es muy triste, José María: desde diciembre todo está listo para el alzamiento, pero siempre quedaba pendiente una cuestión...—Los negros—solté, y el doctor asintió.—No hay solución mientras haya esclavos. Nadie nos quiere apoyar... Es la trampa de Cuba. (158)

While the Liberators of the Wars of Independence in South America vocally opposed slavery, the majority of Creole elites in Cuba were loyal to the monarchy and reinforced the brutal and profitable system. Indeed, in one of his many forced exiles, Simón Bolívar traveled to post-revolutionary Haiti, which was under the rule of Alexandre Pétion. Pétion provided arms to Bolívar on the condition that he abolished slavery in the Spanish colonies. By the end of the 1820s, all South America had been liberated, and slavery abolished. Cuba, on the contrary, had become the largest importer of enslaved Africans. Neither Spain nor the colonial authorities in Cuba could conceive of another economic organization for the Spanish colonies. Another possibility, other than the slavery, was rendered unthinkable not because it could not happen, but precisely because of the likelihood—the possibility—of its materialization. The increase in new rules and laws in the Spanish colonies, as well as the granting of rights that had been obliterated for a long time, such as the right to free

trade, granted to Cuba in 1817 attests to the metropolitan efforts to avert the independence of the colonies in America.

In Cuba, groups and secret societies developed plans for rebellion and an armed uprising, as well as private forms of association and communication. On this matter, Richard Gott explains that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Cuban society was interested in the ideas of the European Enlightenment, the possibility of independence from Spain, the spread of Freemasonry and the Haitian Revolution (48). The first attempt at independence was in 1795. The second one was in 1810, by the "free people of color," when Spain was fighting against Napoleon's invasion in the Napoleonic War (1808-1814). The so-called "imperial loyalists" in Cuba suppressed this uprising. The third attempt was in 1820 by the *Soles y Rayos de Bolívar* (Gott 48-52), which coincided with the peninsular liberal uprising in 1820-1821. Indeed, a group of educated Cubans began to seek a different political and cultural landscape for the country, and Heredia was one of them. Influenced by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, he believed that free citizens would establish the Cuban nation, and, therefore, a new community would emerge based on the natural rights of the individual in a shared struggle against colonial tyranny. For Heredia, liberty meant civic participation in public life. His political principles were the reflection of an epoch in which patriotism and cosmopolitanism, as Perry Anderson points out, were not understood as opposing political notions ("Internationalism" 7-9).

Similarly, a series of socio-political events such as the French, Haitian, and the American Revolutions, changed both societies and mentalities, influencing the emergence of a dissenting culture in Cuba that brought Enlightened ideas to the island. In the case of Spain, in particular, these were further shaken by Napoleon's invasion, which created a vacuum of power for the Crown, as well as the constant struggles between liberalism and absolutism, whose pivotal points were the Cádiz Constitution of 1812, the restoration of absolutist monarchy in 1815-1820, and again in 1823-1833, and the Liberal Revolution

of 1820-1823. The Spain of the nineteenth century was already a different empire. Like Napoleon's invasion of Spain, the independence movements in South America forced change in the Spanish empire. Hence, Spain developed a constitution, political parties and political ideas of inclusion that sometimes were within the reach of Cubans, sometimes not; but when these were within reach, not only the Creole elite seized them, but so did Afro-descendant Cubans. The Cortes and the Constitution of 1812 thus brought about partial changes in the politics of the Spanish Empire, but they were short-lived. Yet, and this is the crucial point, these did not necessarily engender a radical change of the existing political culture or its main actors, and largely left untouched the mainstay of imperial domination after Ferdinand VII was restored as an absolute monarch in 1814. In many ways, the so-called liberal policies of the time had been closely linked to Bourbon reform agendas; thus, their potential political import was shortened in advance. As Jesús Sanjurjo points out, the links between liberalism and abolitionism, which can be clearly seen in the French and British contexts, cannot be directly transferred to the Spanish case. Since, although the rise of political liberalism and the foundation of representative institutions were key to the reception and construction of anti-slavery ideas in Spain, it was not until the political radicalization of the 1860s, specifically in the context of the *Revolución Gloriosa* (1868) that abolitionist demands became once more an essential part of the liberal program (19).[4] The displacements in Padura's novel, from the space of the historical experience to the subjectivity of the human being, offer images of the social and political life of Havana as, for instance, the description of the city's atmosphere in his visit in February of 1821:

> En medio de tantas novedades logré saber que el mayor motivo de alegría para mis amigos eran los aires de libertad que se respiraban en la isla desde la institución del sistema constitucional. Una verdadera efervescencia política se había adueñado de la vida habanera y hasta sangrientos altercados se venían

> dando entre constitucionalistas y absolutistas. Algo incomprensible para mí era que los ricos criollos todavía abogaran por el régimen absolutista de siempre, pero la razón de aquel empeño político era [...] que esos ricos cubanos obtenían del rey cuanto deseaban, y las nuevas podían poner en peligro sus muchos privilegios [...] En unos pocos días aprendería yo a vivir en la nueva libertad que se disfrutaba en Cuba. (91-94)

Just as Heredia was interested in European literature beyond the Spanish traditions, he believed that he was part of a broader world that embraced common political ideas about patriotism and nationalism, liberty, and independence. Enlightened political values influenced his beliefs, his literature, and his actions. Taking into consideration Heredia's enlightened values, in an analysis of his poetry, Padura writes:

> No se debe olvidar que en su anticipación Heredia tuvo a su favor la herencia del Iluminismo y la praxis revolucionaria europea y americana, así como la propia filosofía y la estética del romanticismo, tan ligada a los procesos nacionalistas en todo el mundo occidental. Pero recordemos también que en su contexto histórico específico lo nacional solía manifestarse a través de la *diferencia* y la *oposición* [...] su poesía se anticipa a la fundación –decididamente consciente– del discurso nacional cubano que en la cuarta década del siglo comenzaran a fraguar los narradores del periodo. (*José María Heredia* 248)

In *The Novel of My Life*, the question about whether or not Bolívar would liberate Cuba from the Spanish yoke, and incorporate the island into the Gran Colombia, attests to a quintessential characteristic of the struggle for independence in Latin America, the idea of the political community across the continent:

> ¿Sería en verdad preferible el yugo español que el riesgo de lanzarlo todo por la borda con una sublevación de esclavos? ¿Sería cierto lo que se contaba de

> una expedición enviada por Bolívar para independizarnos y sumarnos a la Gran Colombia? (104)

For Heredia, Cuba's destiny was tied to that of the Latin American continent, that is, independence from Spain. The Liberators of the Wars of Independence were fighting across the continent to liberate other colonies. Yet, the idea of a political community across the continent, which Heredia embraced until his death, was a misplaced idea in the context of Cuba since such community did not include blacks. In the realm of ideas, by 1808 Cuban creoles had begun to articulate a socio-political awareness of the colonial situation. Colonialism, as both a material reality and a concept, had become the prism through which creole elites initially understood the relationship between the emerging nation and the metropolis. As Francisco Ortega notes:

> En 1808 la crisis de legitimidad produce . . . una alteración de las cuerdas imaginarias . . . Si hasta 1808 eran los funcionarios y los reformistas españoles quienes exhibían una aguda conciencia de los múltiples sentidos de colonia, serán los americanos, a partir de ese momento, quienes asumirán la interlocución y explorarán las consecuencias políticas de ser colonia. (125)

This socio-political awareness consisted of recognizing both the opportunities and the risks of a defining period in the history of the Spanish Monarchy and the Cuban colony (Ferrer 262). But these opportunities and risks were determined primarily by Cuba's key world export: sugar. When Joseph Bonaparte took the crown, Elliott explains, "there was no longer an uncontested source of legitimate authority in Spain and its empire of the Indies" (374). The influence of the political values of the Enlightenment, the vacuum of power caused by the Napoleonic wars—which created a crisis of unprecedented proportions–and the consolidation of Spanish liberal politics, inaugurated a political culture of profound local struggles and antagonisms in nineteenth-century Cuba.

Among those antagonisms was the materialization of the political and civil rights of the *americanos* (vis-à-vis the *peninsulares*), the fight for the abolition of slavery, as well as the articulation and representation of the Cuban nation.

It is important to note that liberal Spaniards also produced anti-slavery treatises that were especially valuable in developing the debates surrounding the anti-slavery liberal turn. The first were the speeches of Isidoro Antillón in Madrid in 1802, the Spanish poet and renowned liberal Manuel Quintana and the young liberal priest, José María Blanco White. Concerns about the welfare of slaves and the future of trade were raised repeatedly in the Spanish Cortes from 1810-1812. Their proposals, however, never gained momentum and were ultimately unsuccessful. Still, these nevertheless demonstrate that there was an independent legislative movement towards the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the Spanish Empire, however minoritarian and ineffective it turned out to be (Berquist 189-92).

IV. Misplaced Ideas and Ideological Life

Heredia's betrayal by other members of the Creole elite occurred within the context of a hyperpoliticized and tumultuous transatlantic battles of power, including ideological power, between Cuba and Spain. The restricted intellectual life that colonialism had created in Cuba, as I have explained, was at war with abstract and universal European ideas, yet these were present both in the ideological and the practical life of the Cuban *americanos*. The Brazilian literary critic, Roberto Schwarz captures this dialectical contradiction when he explains the following:

> [i]n countries that have emerged from colonization, the system of historical categories shaped by intra-European experience comes to function in a space with a different but not alien sociological conjunction in which those categories neither apply properly nor can help but be applied... This space is different because colonization did not create societies similar to that of the

> mother country [...] But it [also] is a space of the same order, for it is controlled by the embracing dynamics of capital, whose developments give it a standard and define its guidelines. (117)

As Adriana Johnson has explained, Schwarz has added a new perspective to the problematic of cultural copying, thinking it as a question of misplaced ideas through an analysis of the functions and failures of nineteenth-century European liberal ideas in Latin America. For Schwarz, although European ideas were adopted in Latin America, they were strangely distorted. They were out of place or, rather, they were "misplaced" (22). In this "system of displacement" (Johnson 22), Schwarz identifies two opposite effects that bear on the ideological life of Latin America. As Johnson further points out:

> On the one hand, the distortion of European liberal ideas debased ideological life and 'diminished the chances for genuine thought.' On the other hand, however, it produced an effortless daily skepticism in matters of ideology because the displacement of liberal ideas meant that they could not function as a 'horizon of thought' but appeared instead against a much 'vaster background, which rendered them relative' (Johnson 22).

Schwarz's starting point is the contrast between the ideological function of liberal ideas in Europe—their place of origin—and their place of adoption. In Europe, for instance, enlightened ideas or the liberal ideology was the expression of a bourgeois conscience, in nineteenth-century Cuba—one of its places of adoption—where slavery was the primary mode of production, an ideology that postulated the freedom and equality of all men, as well as the universality of law, was "misplaced." According to Schwarz, for an ideology to be "in place" it must constitute an abstraction of the very process to which it refers (Schwarz 39). Therefore, as Johnson points out, "while in Europe liberal ideology constituted an abstraction of industrial capitalism, the importing of

liberal ideas to Latin America produced a scenario in which these liberal ideas could only stand side-by-side with [a] very different social makeup." (23) As in Brazil, Cubans were faced with the slave trade, a dynastic State and cultural colonialism. At the same time, they celebrated the universal claims of liberal values, of civil liberties, and, specifically, Spanish constitutionalism. European liberal ideas were, as Schwarz argues, an "unavoidable frame of reference" in Cuba. For cultural colonialism, as Retamar's words remind us, was a "quasi natural fact."

In the case of Cuba, the institution of slavery clashed with various liberal ideas such as liberty and equality, but it had also become a profitable business in the plantation industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, described by historians as the "second slavery." This concept captures the relationship between slavery, capitalism and slave commodities as part of the global economic expansion of the nineteenth century. It also demonstrates the plasticity of slavery as an institution, the enormous power of capital and the economic entrenched interests of that period. (Tomich 483-8; Fradera 30). Indeed, the renewed presence of slavery in Cuba revealed the inadequacy and dissonance of the abovementioned universal ideas. The very historical reality ("hecho histórico") of the country would make enlightened ideas "misplaced ideas." European ideologies did not address appropriately the social reality of the country, yet these ideas were not discarded by Creole elites, nor were they completely extraneous to colonial Cuba. They were cited, heard, read, and reflected upon by some groups of the Creole elite. Therein they also took their distinctive—if distorted—shape. In the process of creating its social order, colonial Cuba continually rejected, affirmed, and reaffirmed liberal ideals, but in ways that were incongruent both with the social reality of the colony, and with the universal principles demanded by European liberal constitutions. As Schwarz notes: "Embedded in a system, they do not describe, even in appearance, the ideas of the bourgeoisie saw everyday life invalidate their

pretension to universality from the very beginning [...] The grounds for its claims to universality was shaken" (28). As the narrative voice of the poet in *The Novel of My Life* recounts about 1818 in Cuba:

> Mientras toda América se revolvía contra el imperio español, en la isla apenas se advertían atisbos de sedición. El río revuelto de una metrópoli, asediada por invasiones, días de constitucionalismo y años de absolutismo, y el de las tierras vecinas enfrascadas en una tierra sin retorno, había traído una excelente fortuna a los pescadores criollos y nadie quería modificar tal estado de cosas. (48-49)

Indeed, the universality of enlightened European ideas not only was misplaced in colonial Cuba but also in the metropolitan context. What happened in Spain with these enlightenment European ideas? Eduardo Subirats argued that Spain had an insufficient Enlightenment. the leading figures of enlightened values in Spain (Cadalso, Jovellanos, Feijóo) were deeply traditionalist in relation to many cultural, moral, and political issues concerning Spain. Américo Castro even referred to Feijóo, Azara, and Jovellanos as "planets" and not "stars" with their own light (quoted in Subirats 30). Feijóo had an eclectic posture concerning old and new ideas. Protected by the court, he never transgressed the limits imposed by religious and political orthodoxy. Thus, science and the philosophy of nature were abided to sacred dogmas and traditional theology. Gabriel Paquette proposes the concept of "enlightened reform," during the reign of Carlos III, in contrast to those of "enlightened despotism" and "enlightened absolutism." He views the latter two terms as facets or components of a broader category of Enlightenment reform. Paquette argues that political and economic concepts penetrated the consciousness of Spanish monarchs, ministers, and royal advisers, and therefore influenced the fiscal and administrative reform programs inaugurated by European states in the eighteenth century (1-3).

Charles Noel points out one of the weaknesses of the Enlightenment as a concept and synthesizes another interpretation, namely that the Enlightenment has more to do with the creation of new institutions and practices of bourgeois sociability and consumption than with the triumph of reason over superstition (147-49). Indeed, Pedro Ruiz-Torres asserts that already under the Habsburg Dynasty and later on during the reign of Carlos III, there were "nuclei of the Enlightenment," specifically in the Basque Country and Catalonia, and through the nation-wide enlightened network of the *Sociedades de Amigos del País*, which sought ample reforms in the economy and in agricultural practices. Yet, this shift had a utilitarian character, which suggests that reformist approaches were stronger than radical political departures. Such reforms left preexisting hierarchies and relations between the enlightened nobility, the church, and members of the administration, local authorities, merchants, and industrialists largely untouched (474-87).

It is worth remembering, then, that, more often than not, these reforms continued to be exclusionist and elitist, and only had utilitarian ends. Analogous to the pattern of eighteenth-century "enlightened monarchies" in Central and Eastern Europe, the Enlightenment reform adaptations did not alter the central, archaic, hierarchical, and racialized structures of the Spanish empire. These, on the contrary, remained in place without significant alteration (Bluche 321). Indeed, these reforms did not change the "fundamentos tradicionales" of the monarchy (Ruiz-Torres 623). In political terms, reforms were not emancipatory, nor did they eliminate racialization or social hierarchies. In fact, Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra has reminded us that the bourbon reforms produced riots and discontent and raise political consciousness among Creole elites who were ready to declare independence after Napoleon invaded Spain (33). Yet, it is important to note that Creole elites were motivated by utilitarian reasons, namely their vying for power and hegemonic domination of social relations in the (post)colonies.

In the eighteenth century, Bourbon Spain created a concept of "Patria" [Fatherland] that foreclosed the relative political and cultural autonomy the kingdoms of Spain had enjoyed during the dynasty of the Hapsburgs. Under Bourbon rule, Spain was to be defined by one language, one culture, and one religion. In this projected politically and culturally homogeneous Spain, new Academies were established by the patronage and the control of the king to foster such a unified national culture (Ruiz-Torres 235-6). In line with these measures, the Holy Office banned the books of Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau. Although enlightened Spaniards were familiar with the ideas and texts of the French and English Enlightenment, they were mainly opposed to supporting any plan that would undo "el nudo de la sociedad" to use Ruiz-Torres' terminology. Accordingly, they did not advance the reception of the most radical European ideas, which conflicted with the ideological life of a traditional monarchy, the Catholic Church, and the Inquisition. In general terms, the spirit of the renewal of ideas was somewhat alive in Spain with the interest of the so-called *novatores* in science, historical criticism, humanistic studies, and philosophy. The spirit of renewal developed further with the creation of universities, the curiosity for modern writers, and the knowledge that was produced through contact with the New World in the colonial enterprise. Nevertheless, with a powerful thrust, a dynastic State halted these attempts of social and cultural change while remaining a utilitarian promoter of both science and letters. And yet, the enormous influence of Catholic orthodoxy, still marked by the strict lines of Counterreformation, was a significant obstacle to the development of new ideas in Spain (Ruiz-Torres 211-24).

As a member of the Bourbon Spanish Monarchy (1715), Cuba inherited the laws, political life, and culture of a dynastic state. For instance, the history of higher education in Cuba reflects the obliteration of an authentic development of enlightened ideas in Spain. During the colonial period, higher education in Art, Grammar, Theology and Sacred Scripture was only provided

by educational centers managed by religious orders established in the island, until the founding of the University of Havana in 1728. With the creation of the University of Havana, a more modern approach to higher education became a determining factor in the development of society and culture in Cuba. The University of Havana, however, emerged within a heated intellectual environment: deep changes in the social order, the rise of Protestantism, the loss of royal patronage, and the growing criticism of scholasticism and the hegemony of the Catholic Church. This convulsive environment had a lasting impact on the teaching and ideological struggles of the new University.

Despite this permanent impact on the teaching at the University of Havana, by 1812, philosophers and pedagogues carried out the task of changing higher education in Cuba. The most salient figure was Felix Varela, who taught in the Cátedra de Constitución [Constitutional Chair], which reconciled the study of philosophy with the study of law. Varela's Chair studied the relationship between colonial politics, civil rights, and the abolition of slavery.

Varela was one of the three candidates for deputy in the Cortes. The other two were the wealthy Havanan Leonardo Santos Suárez and the Catalan merchant Tomás Gener. The Catalan had extensive trading ties to import slaves. The hopes deposited in that event would reveal, however, Heredia, Del Monte, and Saco's "political ingenuity" (95). Varela, a constitutionalist and convinced liberal, had rebelled against the laws of the metropolis:

> Desde su cátedra [Varela] solía lanzar ataques cada vez más directos al gobierno monárquico, al Estado centralizado y a las diversas formas de tiranía, mientras explicaba y parafraseaba la Constitución española, cargando sus comentarios con el atractivo sabor de palabras tan poco habituales en Cuba como independencia, democracia y soberanía [...] cuando Domingo le preguntó al padre Varela qué esperaba obtener para Cuba de las Cortes españolas, escuchamos una respuesta alarmante. -Nada [...] Este país no puede esperar nada ni de las Cortes ni del gobierno de España más que continuar sojuzgado y dirigido por leyes absurdas. (94-95)

In this context, nonetheless, a Creole elite interested in scientific development and higher education also emerged as a modernizing class intent on promoting capitalist industrial development. This "modern" though Hispanic colonial bourgeoisie was mainly interested in modernizing the country's means of production even if it meant increasing an enslaved workforce and maintaining a colonial relation with the metropolis as a guarantor of the status quo (Sanjurjo 133). While the dissemination of "useful knowledge," carried by the scientific orientation of Enlightenment thought, was even celebrated by the most conservative groups, the reformist and revolutionary implications of the most philosophical side of the Enlightenment, even if they were assimilated by the Creole aristocracy, found no resonance in the attitude of the official representatives of the colonial regime (Altenberg 198).

Likewise, the freedom of the press granted by the Cádiz Constitution of 1812 disturbed established ideas as presented in the periodical press in Spain, the interests of educated landowners in the economic development of the country, and the creation of the Cuban Institute of Technical Education, were all fundamental elements that contributed to the renewal of educational standards in Cuba and the modernization of the means of production. However, the trips of American Creoles to Europe and North America were closely monitored, and those who studied in France, Germany, or England were viewed with suspicion. The political and socio-cultural orders of the colonial monarchy prevailed in Cuba. In the 1830s, the Spanish absolutist monarch, Ferdinand VII decreed the closing of all Spanish universities, and in 1863 the study of philosophy was banned in the Cuban colony (Joseph Pérez 69-76; McClelland 138-47).

In Padura's *The Novel of My Life,* the mounting social tensions and contradictions of both the monarchy and the Cuban colony coalesce around the exilic figure of Heredia. The renewed impetus of slavery and the intent of modernizing the means of production and education reveal the incongruences

of colonial society in Cuba. Just as the challenge of Brazilian intellectual life was not simply colonial mimicry, as Johnson explains, but "the exclusion of the poor from the universe of contemporary culture" (Schwarz quoted in Johnson 28), in Cuba the slaves were excluded from the universal claims of freedom and equality as well as from the natural rights of all men. Slavery, and its social divisions, remained the most significant impediment to independence on the largest Caribbean Island.

Betrayed, ostracized, and banished for life, José María Heredia died without seeing Cuba's independence. During his last visit to Habana in 1837, he had the most revealing conversation with the General Miguel Tacón, described as "el sátrapa" (311), the "implacable censor de toda idea liberal" (311), the merciless soldier who had expressed "su odio contra todo lo americano" (311) and a General of "omnípodo poder [para] aplastar vidas y países" (311). Upon entering the office where they meet, Tacón does not smile, and his "raven eyes" try to make a better figure composition of the poet, which perhaps did not fit to that of a political enemy (311). The following passage is taken from the final pages of the novel. Since their conversation reveals the socio-political issues and contradictions discussed so far in this article, it is worth quoting in its entirety:

- ¿De verdad quiere oír lo que pienso de usted? Pues pienso que usted cumple su misión, pero ha impuesto el terror, la censura y la delación como forma de vida en este país. Usted odia a los que hemos nacido en esta isla. Usted es enemigo de la inteligencia, impone la demagogia y, como todos los dictadores, pide a cambio que lo amen [...]
- ¿Traer progreso a esta isla donde habrá ferrocarril incluso antes que en España es un acto despótico? ¿Está usted seguro que censurar a dos o tres inteligentes es peor que permitir la indecencia, la inmoralidad, la constante agresión que imperaba en la prensa? ¿No piensa usted, señor Heredia, que impedir el caos en que puede derivar esta isla con una revolución en la que los primeros alzados serían los negros, que acabarían con nuestras

instituciones y nuestra religión, es preferible que aceptar la sedición que usted mismo promovió hace unos años? [...]

- Nada justifica pasar por encima de la voluntad del pueblo.
- [...] ¿De qué pueblo me habla usted? ¿No me dirá que habla por los negros delincuentes del Manglar que ha visitado en estos días? ¿O por los esclavos que ni si quiera saben pronunciar el castellano? – hizo una pausa y me miró –. No, no, de seguro usted habla por esos señores, que se enriquecieron con la trata y últimamente se han vuelto filántropos, porque para mantener sus bolsillos repletos necesitan ahora otra fuerza de trabajo... ¿Cuántos de ellos apoyaron la independencia de Cuba en 1823? [...]
- Que ellos vivan como viven no justifica el terror, ni la falta de libertad, ni la represión de los que piensan de un modo diferente.
- Si para conservar esta isla como española hay que acallar los reclamos políticos de unos cuantos, pues los acallamos. De los males, el menor. Eso es política y es realismo.
- También es realidad la vigilancia de una policía que sabe más de mí que yo mismo. También, que cada día hay más desterrados.
- Es un castigo cruel, y por eso lo aplicamos. Pero lo aplicamos con justicia. Si hay leyes, las leyes se cumplen. [...] ¿Qué usted cree, después de todo lo que he hecho por esta isla? Hoy en Cuba se vive como nunca...
- Creí que era por el buen precio del azúcar. Pero esos beneficios no llegan a los barracones de los esclavos que usted hace traer a Cuba y por los que siempre recibe un porcentaje en metálico... [...] El poder es como una droga y la borrachera de la historia puede ser su peor efecto.
- La historia es una puta, señor Heredia. Mal agradecida... [...]
- Pero la escriben los que tienen el poder. Aunque la otra Historia, la de verdad, es la que vale al final. Lo terrible es que no se aprenda de ella, jamás se aprende. Los pueblos nunca escarmientan... [...] Ya tiene mi renuncia política, y le ofrezco ahora mi cabeza.

Tacón sonrió entonces.

- Con su renuncia política es bastante. Hoy, en Cuba, usted es nadie. Usted es un insecto y ni sus amigos lo quieren. ¿Para qué voy a matarlo? Vivo y

derrotado usted es más útil [...]Ah y, por cierto, no se crea lo que le han dicho: la poesía es peligrosa, pero no tanto.

– Tiene razón. Ningún poema va a tumbar un tirano. Pero les hace una muesca, que a veces es indeleble [...]
[...] quiero contarle algo que a lo mejor hasta me agradece – dijo, iniciando un paseo por la habitación sin mirarme –. Su amigo Domingo se le ha escondido, ¿verdad? Pues no lo lamente. Ese hombre nunca fue su amigo. Él fue el que lo delató en el año 23, después de que usted le contara que estaba conspirando... [...] Está bien. Sólo quería que supiera quien es ese señor.
– ¿Ya puedo retirarme?
– Ya puede, ya puede. Pero recuerde algo: mientras yo gobierne esta isla, nunca volverá a entrar a Cuba. (313-6)

In this passage, Padura constructs a critical "retrato" of the Spanish General. His lack of morals reveals itself by way of his language, his values and mercilessness. What lies behind his words are precise convictions: Cuba is not a nation, therefore there is no "pueblo," and the creole idea of the nation was still intrinsically related to Spanish identity—slaves were nothing more than labor. Tacón's understanding of progress, hence, has nothing to do with independence from Spain, let alone the emancipation of slavery. In his worldview—the view of a powerful general from the metropolis—Spain was bringing progress to Cuba. Lastly, since History is "a whore" only those with power are able to access it, to write it and to be part of it. Heredia's universal ideas of liberty and equality were mere abstractions in front of the material imperative of "modernization" of the means of production in the island, a parallel process to the violent increase of slavery. All in all, it was a process by which Cuba became a profitable and productive colony, but the ideals of a liberal republic seemed to have been forever delayed.

Forced exile is a dreadfully historical process because it is politically and socially produced. It can be understood as a discontinuous state of being,

for those forced to exile are isolated from their country, but also from their histories and their political identities. Heredia's poetry, however, reveals his denunciation of slavery and tyranny, his romantic, patriotic love for Cuba as well as the melancholia of those who know themselves banished forever. Turned into a ghost by the weight of History, betrayal, fear, and forced exile, Heredia remembers the smell of Havana as well as the stormy existence he has lived:

> [e]l olor perdido de La Habana me late en el pecho con la intensidad dolorosa de la novela que ha sido mi vida, donde todo concurrió en dosis exageradas: la poesía, la política, el amor, la traición, la tristeza, la ingratitud, el miedo, el dolor, que se han vertido a raudales, para conformar una existencia tormentosa que muy pronto se apagará. (22)

On a cold morning of January 16, 1837, the poet saw from the brigantine that returned him to exile in Mexico how the waves were moving away from the last edge of the Cuban land that he would never see again (17). In *The Novel of My Life*, Padura shows the complex, intricate tensions between liberal ideas, and the reality of social life in nineteenth-century Cuba. By recounting the life of José María Heredia, Leonardo Padura incarnates in the tragic figure of his literary predecessor, the grueling contradictions of the enslaving Spanish empire and the momentary defeat, the postponing, of an independent Cuba in the nineteenth century.

Notes

1 All his poetry is collected in *Poesías del ciudadano*. His poetry about Cuba as his Patria in a political sense, begins with Poesías cívicas y revolucionarias, which he wrote between 1820 and 1823.

2 As Perry Anderson explains, within the terms of the mercantile structure, mining benefited the absolutist state, and the land (first tobacco and then sugar) the Spanish colonist ("La naturaleza y el sentido de las guerras," 36-37).

3 Altenberg notes that during Heredia's adolescence, circulated in Caracas, Havana and Mexico philosophical texts that, at a later time, he would register in the catalog of his library. This included works by Locke, Bacon, Montesquieu, Condorcet and Condillac. In this list, there are also three volumes of the philosophical writings of the first Cuban exponent of post-scholastic thought and an intellectual forerunner of Cuban independence, Félix Varela, who taught philosophy in Havana from 1818, and published his philosophical works in Spanish (198).

4 Compare with Christopher Schmidt-Nowara's *Empire and Antislavery*, which examines popular abolitionist movements in Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico in the second half of the nineteenth century. I would like to thank Pedro García-Caro for stirring me to Sanjurjo's important study.

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