Poetic Prose and Useless Fictions:
Political Ideology and Literary Form in
Eliseo Alberto’s Informe contra mí mismo

ABSTRACT
In Informe contra mí mismo Eliseo Alberto appropriates and configures as literary genre the political informe that Cuba’s socialist government has solicited from thousands of its citizens over the years. In Alberto’s informe (originally “commissioned” by the Cuban government, but elaborated and marketed for the international literary community some twenty years later) the state ideological apparatus becomes, literally, the pre-text for a narrative of disillusionment. Alberto’s text is more, however, than an instance of revisionist history, since the ambitious experimentation with narrative form and historiographical convention represents a serious inquiry into the nature of these discourses. Indeed, while the binaries of literature and history, poetry and politics, storytelling and argumentation structure the narrative, they are not resolved, ultimately, in favor of one term over the other, but rather performed and deconstructed. Informe contra mí mismo is published in a historical juncture in which Cuba appears to face just two choices, represented by the metanarratives of socialist revolution, on one hand, and of the inexorable globalization of capital, on the other. These choices, however, offer Cuba a national narrative either of protracted resistance to global capitalism under a totalitarian regime or of wholesale capitulation. Informe contra mí mismo begins to lay the discursive groundwork from which alternative narratives might emerge.

RESUMEN
En Informe contra mí mismo Eliseo Alberto imagina de nuevo el “informe” que el régimen cubano le solicitara en los años setenta, convirtiendo el estratagema gubernamental en pleno género literario. Por lo tanto, el informe original representa, literalmente, el pre-texto para la narrativa de desengaño que en los años noventa el autor lanza al mercado internacional. El texto de Alberto es, sin embargo, mucho más que una instancia de historia revisionista, puesto que su innovador manejo de la forma literaria y de las normas historiográficas representa una profunda indagación retórica y epistemológica en estas prácticas discursivas. Por cierto, en vez de resolver a favor de un término u otro las consabidas dicotomías de literatura e historia, poesía y política, estética e ideología, Alberto indaga en las dicotomías mismas, llevando a cabo su deconstrucción. Informe contra mí mismo se edita en una coyuntura histórica en la que al parecer Cuba enfrenta dos posibilidades, representadas por las “metanarrativas” de revolución socialista y de la
globalización capitalista-estadounidense. Estas metanarrativas, sin embargo, ofrecen a Cuba dos caminos derrotistas: el de una lucha perpetua contra el capitalismo global — bajo un régimen totalitario — o el de una capitulación absoluta ante el mismo fenómeno. Informe contra mí mismo representa nada menos que una contribución importante al proyecto discursivo del cual podrán surgir narrativas alternativas.

Eliseo Alberto’s Informe contra mí mismo engages right from the outset, from its very title, the complex, virtually intractable dialectic of political ideology and literary form, appropriating, as it does, the Cuban Revolution’s institutionalized political informe to label a work written and marketed for an international literary community. The text has its origin in the actual informe that Cuban government officials asked the author to write about his own family in 1978. Alberto’s family is ideologically suspect for a number of reasons: it once belonged to the “rancia aristocracia cubana” (15); the author’s father, the well-known Cuban poet Eliseo Diego, is associated with the Orígenes literary group, which is too elitist and bourgeois, too Catholic, and too conspicuously apolitical for the regime; and in the late 1970s Eliseo Diego began receiving visits from foreign intellectuals—including Cuban exiles—who were perceived as potentially threatening to revolutionary political culture. In labeling his memoirs an informe against himself, then, Alberto capitalizes on the political explosiveness of the term. At the same time, his updated informe, published in Spain almost twenty years after the original one was “commissioned,” exploits the distinctively literary possibilities of what one could think of as a genre shaped by thousands of Cuban “writers” over the years.

Employing the highly charged informe label for a text intended for mass consumption is itself a literary device insofar as it displays an ironic self-awareness, a keen attention to form, and a conscious flouting of institutional discursive norms. And the ironic gesture is made possible in large measure by the perception that literary writing and political writing are on some level incommensurable. The officials who request the informe in 1978 imply such an incommensurability: “Te será fácil. Eres escritor. Cuéntanos el cuento: puede tener final feliz” (15). The narrator recognizes in these comments the underlying assumption that the artistic or “poetic” qualities of his prose may indeed denature the informe’s political content, and he muses that perhaps it is precisely the literary qualities of his writing that eventually lead them to lose interest in the case: “Deben haberse cansado de mi prosa poética, de mi lirismo, de mis ficciones inútiles” (22).

The officials’ comments also suggest that Alberto has inherited the “sins of the father”: in the 1970s the regime considers the Orígenes literary group guilty of eliding desperate social realities in the interest of an exquisite, elitist literature, inaccessible and irrelevant to the masses. The poet-patriarch Eliseo
Diego, therefore, who by his son’s account tells stories of the “tragicomedia insular” late into the night until he falls asleep with a cigarette still burning between his fingers, represents a destabilizing symbol of nonconformity for a state that sees itself as the protagonist not of a *tragicomedia*, after all, but of a glorious epic meriting unqualified loyalty. In representing himself as caught, historically, between incompatible notions of the value and function of literature, Alberto addresses a seemingly abstract theoretical quandary from a concrete historical vantage: What has been (and what might be) the relationship between literariness and the social utility of the text? To what extent can language in general and literary language in particular be faithful to the material world? What responsibilities to the social world does the author assume when he or she writes?

Alberto’s *Informe contra mí mismo* is, most ostensibly, a kind of reckoning with the past, an effort to exorcise his demons by chronicling his own complicity, and the complicity of his generation, with the totalitarian system for which he spied on his own family. I will argue in this essay, however, that despite the obvious desire to redeem a repressed or silenced history and to expose the history of the repression itself, in foregrounding the dialectic of literary form and political ideology, the book speaks not only to the past but to a contemporary theoretical confusion as well. In other words, the text that appears, on the surface, to reject wholesale the most basic premises of socialist cultural politics and to legitimize a suppressed *Orígenes* aesthetic in fact undertakes a sophisticated historico-narrative inquiry into the art-politics dialectic itself. In the absence of cold war dichotomies and the attendant “revolutionary” certainties, Alberto challenges the “bipolaridad del juicio” (306–7) that characterizes the recent “war.” In so doing he implicitly looks to the future, articulating the questions that must be addressed in order to begin to develop a more progressive cultural politics than either the socialist state or a variety of modernisms — reacting to and working with the market — have thus far managed to bring about.

**Political Ideology and Literary Form**

The poetic energies of historical narrative and the political energies of poetry are not generally acknowledged in the larger literary culture shaped by a publishing industry that categorizes texts as *either* poetry or fiction or biography or self-help — and not two or more of these at once. It thus becomes possible for Eliseo Alberto, throughout *Informe contra mí mismo*, to play off cultural attitudes about the proper place of poetry and politics. One critic writes, “Eliseo Alberto no ha escrito un libro político, no ha tratado de analizar una época de la historia de Cuba, mucho menos se ha aventurado a pergeñar un estudio sociológico, sólo ha querido hacer un recuento de lo visto y lo convivido”
There is a sense here that politics is not the domain of literature, indeed, a conviction that it is possible—and preferable—to narrate the Cuban Revolution without being political. I will argue, however, that in *Informe* literary narrative and “estudio sociológico” are inextricable, that ethical and political dramas form an essential part of the fabric of the narrative form. The text’s internal logic compels us as readers, moreover, to consider the extent to which the same may be true for all historical narratives, including those that display little of *Informe*’s acute self awareness.

The political implications of Alberto’s updated “prosa poética” and “ficciones inútiles” are not lost on real Cuban officials in Mexico who, since the publication of *Informe*, have denied the author permission to return to the island. Alberto has, as far as they are concerned, written a political book. Yet despite the immediacy of the sociopolitical crisis Alberto writes about, despite the historical accuracy necessary to keep the text identified with a real place, with real people, with real struggles and dilemmas, the text exhibits the kind of formal experimentation normally associated with literary works. *Informe contra mí mismo* might be said, then, to challenge two polar twentieth-century modes—both the ideologically committed aesthetic of the Revolution, in which a presumably realist depiction of social struggle unambiguously serves socialist political aims, and a high modernist tradition that privileges formal innovation and sniffs at political advocacy in the arts. But Eliseo Alberto does more than choose a middle road between two extremes; the many formal deviations from the traditional memoir deconstruct the art-politics binary itself, since none of these deviations, taken individually, can be shown to answer solely, or even primarily, to either literary or political criteria. Two culturally constructed ways of describing the textual-cultural dynamic—all too loosely referred to, since the eighteenth century, as the “aesthetic” and the “ideological”—seem less distinct in practice, here, than in theory.

**Macronarratives**

*Informe*’s macronarratives, rather than detailing the experiences of particular individuals, narrate the broader historical experience, the experience of collectivities that, while plural, nevertheless function in the narrative much in the way specific characters do. A collectivity acquires a spirit, a soul, defining personality traits, in accordance with a romantic tradition by which “se concibe . . . la alegoría de un país como persona” (Rojas, *Isla* 115). For example: “Un abismo se empezó a abrir entre el pueblo y su dirigencia, aunque la propaganda continuara afirmando que la fortaleza de la Revolución estaba fundamentada en el contacto directo con las masas” (105–6). This “pueblo” is constructed in much the same way as the individual character, the integral psyche, that experiences hope and disillusion.
These narratives implicitly counter such official narratives as, for example, the one that portrays the Cuban Communist Party as the direct political descendant of José Martí, or the one that portrays the revolutionary vanguard as the enlightened elite that rouses the masses from their slumber, or the one that affirms that Cuba was “born” on January 1, 1959. Not surprisingly, Alberto’s alternative narrative employs a wide range of literary conventions or modes. Thus, Castro’s “epopeya nacional” is countered with a “tragicomedia” and Che Guevara’s “hombre nuevo” with a “nueva generación” that borrows from a wide range of cultural sources — including the revolutionary discourse it counters, or, in a more cynical appraisal, from the language of advertising.

The scope of these macronarratives is striking. There seems to be an impulse behind Informe to chronicle nearly all of the major events of the revolutionary era. Thus, there are accounts and analyses of the failed ten-million-ton sugar harvest of 1970, the first Congreso de Educación y Cultura, the Mariel exodus, the execution of Arnaldo Ochoa, and the balsero exodus of the summer of 1994, to give just a few examples. There is even a brief narrative of the entire twentieth century, which for Alberto begins in October of 1917 in Saint Petersburg and ends with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, with the “majestuosa desilusión de esa mayoría que resultó ser la colmena de hombres y mujeres buenos del planeta” (304). The ambition to re-narrate an entire historical period can be understood in part as an effort to rewrite a history that since 1959 has been narrated for the Cuban people in an essentially univocal, authoritarian manner.

In fact, given its acute awareness of history, responsibility, and ethical drama, Informe could be read to some extent as a response to the best-known of Fidel Castro’s pre-1959 texts, “La historia me absolverá,” which, like Alberto’s text, refers directly in the title to authorial responsibility and historical judgment. “La historia me absolverá” is arguably the founding narrative of the Revolution, and its central conceit — the self-defense before the judgment of history, as well as before that of a real court — becomes the narrative paradigm against which a number of subsequent narratives position themselves. The confessional pretext for Alberto’s Informe, or Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s Mea Cuba, for example, can be positioned in terms of Castro’s paradigm. Any rewriting of the revolutionary process itself, then, necessarily contends with Castro’s official version, his command of historical drama, his persuasiveness, his grand teleological narratives.

Opposite the “true” collective hero is the overzealous bureaucrat, typically portrayed as tragicomical. Even relatively minor absurdities, related in a melancholy tone, contribute to the larger effect of tragicomedy. We are told that the “adoradores de la comunidad socialista” give enormous symbolic importance to the portrait of Karl Marx that had hung in José Martí’s office, until it is revealed that the portrait is actually of Walt Whitman. And there is the
story of the university professor from Las Villas admired in the newspapers for his sophisticated energy-saving method for climbing stairs: “Si se atacaban los escalones con un ángulo de sesenta grados y una fuerza idónea . . . este Newton aseguraba el ligero ascenso de diecisiete pisos” (213). Such minor embarrassments are recounted along with more serious miscalculations, such as the environmentally disastrous pedraplén across the harbor of Matanzas, intended to provide tourists with a shorter route from Havana to Varadero (259 ff.), or Castro’s taunting of possible North American investors, in which he appears to discredit the whole revolutionary project: “apúrense a levantar el bloqueo porque si no, cuando vengan no van a encontrar un solo metro de costa sin dueño” (211). For Alberto, however, such illustrations merely dramatize the earlier, almost unnoticed death of the Revolution, which he locates at about 1970 with the economic failure symbolized by the failed ten-million-ton harvest, the resigned dependence on Soviet aid, and large-scale Soviet-style institutionalization.³

Writing this text would seem, however, to require some degree of optimism to justify the time and energy invested in it; there is a faith, albeit latent, not only that a better world is possible but also that writing plays a role in constructing that better world. The hero that emerges in Informe, as I indicated earlier, is a collectivity of by and large anonymous individuals—diverse, unaware of their unity, and yet somehow united. Thus, the new heroes are not “adalídes, Papas o regentes, sino . . . esa mayoría que resultó ser la colmena de hombres y mujeres buenos del planeta” (304). This anonymous majority, and not the revolutionary leaders, nor even the heroes of the war for independence, are depicted as “los verdaderos discípulos de Martí” — not his “seguidores más activos en la preparación del torneo de la independencia, sino custodios de sus versos que le brindaron techo, pan y consuelo en horas de desesperación” (27).⁴

Although Alberto’s alternative hero, this “nueva generación que va surgiendo poco a poco, con virtudes y defectos” (306), begins to assert itself in the 1990s, it draws on the poetics of the beat generation. A passage of about two to three pages, for example, begins, “Yo los he visto encarar molinos de viento con la lanza de una bandera” (24). The basic linguistic structure “Yo los he visto” occurs, with minor variations, nine times in this passage. For example, “He visto cómo le sacan punta al lápiz con un cuchillo sin filo”; “los he visto dormidos en sus ataúdes, las manos en cruz sobre el pecho”; “los he encontrado con la patria al hombro en algún mesón de Madrid o Barcelona”; “los he visto darle agua al dominó bajo un farol de la Calle Ocho, en la Pequeña Habana de Miami”; “los he visto plantar una palma en la tumba sagrada de los hijos” (25–26). This prosa poética bears the unmistakable imprint of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl.”⁵ This intertextuality sets in motion a peculiar chain of associations — for example, the Revolution’s own ambivalent relationship with certain aspects of first world leftist discourse, dramatized by Ginsberg’s visit to
Cuba in which he was allegedly deported for saying he would like to sleep with Che Guevara. Yet it is without explicit reference to the Ginsberg fiasco, and instead through a formal or structural evocation of Ginsberg’s most famous poem, that Alberto alludes to the Revolution’s treatment of homosexuals and its ambivalent relationship with some of the “first-world” social movements of the 1960s.

It is appropriate that Alberto’s construction of the “nueva generación” should draw on a variety of literary sources, since this generation’s initial victory has been on the battlefield of art—a victory of artists over government bureaucrats: “En la isla, el arte y la literatura cubana habían vencido el reto. Hoy nadie recuerda los nombres de los funcionarios. Se hizo justicia. Los condenó el olvido” (167). But one feature that distinguishes the victory Alberto describes from the much narrated revolutionary victory is the decided antiextremism of the heroes. This trait is reiterated throughout Informe, and the author is at pains to distinguish his text from those of earlier exiles who prior to the 1990s largely defined the counter- or nonrevolutionary camp. In Alberto’s view Cuban discourse since the Revolution, both on and off the island, has been characterized by “la estéril bipolaridad del juicio . . . los extremistas de un bando exigen que se hunda la isla en el mar antes que regresar al capitalismo; los extremistas del otro solicitan licencia de ‘tres días para matar’, y así resolver deudas pendientes, con tiros de gracia” (306–7). Alberto aims no less than to revitalize the dialogue that has been missing from Cuban discourse since 1959.

This brings us to the heart of the theoretical matter I examine, for there is something about Alberto’s antiextremist hero—the collectivity that emerges from a highly dialogic, highly fragmented text—that addresses competing understandings of the category of the literature’s emancipatory potential. Informe places enormous value on the freedom of concrete particulars from any one subsuming rationale—the freedom, for example, of the various voices in the text from any one ultimate narrative authority; or the freedom of individual signifiers from any one authoritative signified; or the freedom of various formal structures from subordination to any one authoritative literary genre, such as the novel or the memoir, for example. This apparent privileging of textuality, in Barthes’s sense, over any totalizing principle might be said to express a postmodernist disenchantment with grand metanarratives—such as narratives of socialist utopias for example—without articulating alternatives. And yet a Utopian impulse is at the heart of Alberto’s Informe. His “nueva generación que va surgiendo” anticipates a better, more tolerant society responsive to the needs of diverse subgroups. The anticipated society is implicitly articulable or narratable, and literature is a major player in the anticipated politico-cultural transformation; it is the artists, after all, who have triumphed over the bureaucrats.
But while Informe is simultaneously a political and a literary project, it is not a mere compromise between the art-for-art’s-sake mentality that the Revolution has associated with bourgeois aesthetics, on one hand, and the art-as-weapon metaphor so common in official discourse, on the other. Informe deconstructs the art-politics binary still palpable in both the official Cuban discourse and the discourse of popular media around the world. Strangely enough, the art-politics binary is generally presupposed by opposing camps in this debate: if socialist cultural politics calls for an art that subserves an ethico-political rationale, and high modernism calls for an art that is free or autonomous from ethico-political imperatives, both camps presuppose and reinforce the epistemological dichotomy of aesthetic and political judgment. The two camps propose a different relationship between art and politics, to be sure, but each tends to assert the integrity of the conceptual categories. Thus, in the García-Galiano article I commented on earlier, in which Informe is not a “libro político” but rather a “recuento de lo visto y convivido,” Alberto’s perceived apolitical stance goes hand in hand with his “destreza literaria” (60). Like the Cuban officials who request the informe of Alberto—and who represent the opposing cultural camp—García-Galiano feels that politics and literariness are on some level incommensurable, or that the natural tendency is for true literariness to evade or transcend political engagement.

In subordinating the artistic to the political, Cuba’s socialist government also reinscribes the integrity of the dichotomy. When, for example, Mirta Aguirre describes revolutionary art as “el combate ideológico en el terreno de las teorías estéticas,” her geographical metaphor implies that the aesthetic is a separate territory that must not be left unoccupied (77). And the art-as-weapon metaphor—poetry is an “arma de la Revolución” (for example, Fernández Retamar, 53)—similarly prescribes the subservience of art to a politics of justice. There is a weapon or tool, on one hand, and a purposeful wielder on the other. The subordination of art to a progressive politics reinforces the art and politics dichotomy, then; while the two realms may join forces, they are discrete epistemological categories. Eliseo Alberto’s artist-protagonists, however, are so clearly products of a discourse that is both literary and political that neither the autonomy of these categories nor the subordination of one to the other seems possible—even if certain characters in the text (including the narrator at times) insist on such a segregation.

Micronarratives

In discussing events or individuals that form part of the shared historical narrative—the Mariel exodus, the Arnaldo Ochoa case, Virgilio Piñera, or Nicolás Guillén, for example—Alberto does not refute, or propose radical revisions to, established events or their sequence. And yet through the micronarratives,
which relate the experiences of Alberto’s friends and acquaintances, *Informe* opens up an almost extrahistorical (or alternative historical) space in which information no longer needs to be strictly factual, nor, in some cases, even plausible. Taken together, then, the micronarratives form a sort of short story collection—for the most part consistent with the conventions of the short story genre—in which the only common denominator is the setting of post-1959 Cuba.

The micronarratives provide the particular, concrete counterpoint to the more abstract, collective macronarratives. The alternation between the collective hero (“esa mayoría que resultó ser la colmena de hombres y mujeres buenos del planeta”) and particular individuals turns out to be an effective strategy for eliding or obscuring the unrepresentable gulf between them. A collectivity does not emerge spontaneously or naturally from a set of particulars, after all; there must be an imaginative leap from individuals to a collectivity capable of making sacrifices, or of experiencing “desilusión” as if it were an individual psyche. This collectivity, in other words, is necessarily a discursive invention whose correlation to the set of all individual experiences is fundamentally indemonstrable. This necessarily imaginary correlation is made to seem self-evident in *Informe*, nevertheless, via the repeated, unproblematized alternation between the collective and the particular, and with the mediation of allegorical logic, by which, as Rafael Rojas puts it, “se concibe . . . la alegoría de un país como persona.”

In one passage, for example, the narrator speaks of that group of friends and acquaintances who, despite their diverse histories, serve a common purpose for him: “Ellos van conmigo a todas partes: los llevo en el hueco de mi mano como un poco de agua limpia, y me lavan la cara cuando lloro y me calman las penas y la sed” (62). These friends and acquaintances seem to collaborate spontaneously, without any conscious awareness, toward a common social and spiritual end. Immediately following this characterization, the narrator tells the story of one of these individuals, a physical education instructor named Ruy López, whom Alberto would bump into from time to time and with whom he once played a game of chess. In naming this character after a famous chess player, Alberto invites the reader to question the veracity of the account: Is this a bizarre coincidence, has the author given a real individual a fictional name, or has he invented a fictional character? Although Ruy López is evidently not one of Alberto’s closest friends, and may not even be a real person, the narrator is more distraught when López is run over by a turistaxi as he pedals his Chinese bicycle than when closer friends have died fighting in Angola, for example, or from AIDS. Alberto explains that unlike other friends, Ruy López “ha fallecido por gusto, sin penas ni gloria, arrollado por un desorden de cosas” (63).

Alberto’s reaction is possible because the individual is read allegorically.
There is a transcendent, ominous meaning (*ominous* in the original sense of being an omen) in the fate of one physical education instructor who rides a Chinese bicycle—associated with international socialist solidarity and material sacrifice—and who is killed by a symbol of the neocolonial order—a turistaxi that signals the end of a socialist dream and the capitulation to global market realities. Echoing Lautréament’s phrase so celebrated by the surrealists, Alberto writes, “El encontronazo entre un turistaxi y una bicicleta en una oscura calle de la Habana es el símbolo de una realidad fatigada que asumimos en silencio” (64). Ruy López, in other words, is an allegory.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is in the space of these extrahistorical micronarratives that characteristically literary conventions such as allegory, irony, or omniscient narration are most freely developed, and it is in this space that the premise of historical accuracy comes into direct conflict with certain literary conventions—such as the assignment of a famous person’s name to a character whose historical existence thus becomes dubious. Some claim to historical accuracy cannot be dispensed with, for example, in the story of Paella, “un gordo inexplicable que llenaba su panza con mangos verdes” (49). The tragi-comical nature of this character and his story is balanced with the narrator’s skepticism, which serves to reassure the reader that historical faithfulness has not been jettisoned in the farcical setting: “Mi amigo acababa de vivir una aventura difícil de contar y por supuesto de creer” (50). Further on, Paella says “No me lo vas a creer,” and Alberto admits, “En un primer momento no le creí: así de loco resultó el cuento.”

Having assured the reader the far-fetched story is true, Alberto goes out of his way to make the story as implausible as possible, not by making statements that are historically inaccurate or impossible, but by exploiting language’s figural or rhetorical properties—hyperbole, irony, parody—which we tend not to associate with journalistic or historical writing. His friend Paella had been chosen, on the basis of his academic merits, to form part of a group that would inhabit the newly founded communist paradise, the village of the future: “El gobierno había ideado un plan audaz: adelantarse a sus similares de Europa Oriental en la carrera de la fama y fundar el Primer Pueblo Comunista del Mundo, justo en un caserío perdido de la isla: San Andrés,” which Alberto has dubbed the “Disneylandia de la clase obrera.”

Alberto’s own sarcasm is supplemented with outlandish, unverifiable quotes from the *conferencista*, according to whom San Andrés, “cual célula cancerosa . . . irradiaría su ejemplo a los poblados vecinos hasta abarcar el planeta.” But this cancerous mini-utopia will not spread, it turns out, as it is fenced in with barbed wire and surveyed from observation towers. The barbed wire, as the *conferencista* explains, is used to incarcerate not the inhabitants “sino al mundo.” In this parody of the traditional *locus amoenus* (which draws on the dystopias of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell), “el poderoso caballero...
don dinero” — again in the words of the conferencista — “había sido abolido.” Thus, the inhabitants’ material needs are to be provided free of charge by butchers, farmers, and bakers living on the outskirts of paradise, who are instructed never to question the needs of the pioneers of communism, since “los hombres y mujeres del porvenir eran, por reglamento interno, incapaces de decir una mentira.”

The crowning moment of this parody is set in a toy store, where at the close of their first sojourn participants are allowed to choose the memento they had been promised at the outset — a conspicuously material incentive for the socialists of the future. Unfortunately, Paella is not permitted to keep the doll he has selected as a gift for his sister, because “los varones no teníamos derecho a muñecas” (52). What I want to stress about the Paella story is its subversion of documentary or journalistic rigor through the use of narrative and rhetorical devices. The intense irony, for example, is incompatible with what we think of as historically objective narrative, and by introducing the unverifiable quotes of the unidentified and possibly fictional conferencista, the narrative can be said to forfeit a measure of journalistic authenticity while simultaneously alluding to the fictive dimensions of journalistic discourse in general.

At certain moments Informe contra mí mismo goes so far as to introduce omniscient narration. Such is the case of the story of Angel and Francisca. This is the story of two elderly, lonely neighbors. Angel’s mother Dolores has died recently and Angel finds himself alone, nearing the end of his life, without family or friends. Francisca has been alone since her daughter left the country for Miami, and since then Francisca has surrounded herself with pets — wounded or abandoned animals she finds on the streets. One sweltering summer night Angel and Francisca leave the doors of their apartments open to catch some breeze. Francisca falls asleep watching a Brazilian soap opera, while Angel sits in his dark apartment, reflecting bitterly on his life, on lost opportunities and unbearable humiliations. One of Francisca’s cats chases a cricket into Angel’s apartment and scratches Angel’s leg. Angel gets up and clubs the cat to death with a baseball bat. Awakened by the noise, Francisca goes to find out what is going on, and when she sees what has happened she collapses and dies.

It is possible that Alberto is able to narrate this story with what he has learned directly from Angel. Alberto and Angel meet, in fact, at Francisca’s funeral, and Angel feels the need to explain what has happened: “Tú me conoces, Lichi. Por amor de Dios, no sé qué pasó, lo juro, pero no soy un asesino” (124). But this story also includes private dialogues between Angel and Francisca too detailed for Alberto simply to have overheard or to have had described to him afterwards. The reader needs to be willing at this point to suspend disbelief and accept that the narrator, otherwise closely identified with the author himself, exercises moments of omniscience. Perhaps the most strik-
ing example of this omniscience takes place when Alberto describes Francisca waking to the noise of Angel bludgeoning the cat: “La escandalera despertó a Francisca. Abandonó el yate de sus sueños, donde el timonel de la telenovela estaba a un suspiro de besarla, corrió desde Río de Janeiro hasta la casa de la difunta Dolores, y a la luz de la vela que llevaba en la mano vio, alzada la sombra de Angel entre los movedizos espejismos de la noche” (123). Moments later Francisca realizes what has happened, collapses, and dies. It is impossible for her at this point to share her experience with Alberto or with Angel; the author must allow himself to imagine this episode in Francisca’s psychic history, an episode that is in reality lost forever. In fact, at precisely this moment in the story, when Francisca enters Angel’s apartment, the narrator presents us with the surreal or magical real image of Angel, “petrificado en el centro de la sala, con el rostro escondido entre las manos, pero su sombra en la pared . . . golpeando con el bate el cuerpo del gatito.” In passages such as this, the identity of the narrator with the author, easily taken for granted for much of the text, becomes logically impossible.

The narrator’s radical adaptability, which allows him to oscillate, depending on the desired narrative effect, between political history and omniscient narration, journalistic realism and magical realism, brings us back to the relationship between historical and literary discourse, back to the “ficciones inútiles” that constitute Alberto’s political informe. By consistently collapsing the categories of history and literary fiction, Informe contra mí mismo not only draws into the realm of historical discourse the “crónica de emociones” Alberto announces, but also makes explicit the imaginative faculty that makes it possible for us to postulate communities and historical periods in the first place.

This does not amount to a claim that history and fiction are the same thing; while Informe contra mí mismo can admit omniscient narration from an autobiographical narrator, or the image of a man’s shadow that has broken free of the man, it could probably not admit, for example, invented military skirmishes or popular protests without sacrificing its status as historiography. What can be said, however, is that as Informe collapses the formal, rhetorical distinctions between the two discourses, it also draws the subjective, imaginative experience more boldly into the range of historical discourse than convention dictates.

Letters

Informe contra mí mismo includes four letters from real or fictional friends (we cannot be sure) who have read Alberto’s manuscript prior to publication. These four letters, presented in eight fragments and inserted at seemingly arbitrary points throughout the book, comment on Informe itself, and at least one letter comments on an earlier letter. In order for these letters to occupy a believable space, the reader must imagine a historical, extratextual narrative in which
Alberto has distributed to his friends not only the manuscript of Informe but also, as he receives them, the letters he intends to include. Such a narrative is entirely plausible, in fact, and does not in itself compromise Informe’s believability.

Like the extrahistorical micronarratives, however, the letters insistently collapse the distinction between history and fiction, leaving the reader in doubt about what may or may not be true or authentic. The first letter to appear in Informe is preceded with a note from the author: “Quiero advertir a tiempo que soy el único autor de todo lo escrito en este libro. Las cartas de mis amigos son de mi entera responsabilidad, aunque yo les agradezca que me hicieran llegar sus verdades al corazón, de puño y letra o de viva voz” (42). This is a highly ambiguous—and perhaps deliberately ambiguous—statement. The letters printed in Informe are based upon the comments of real friends, Alberto says, some of whom really wrote him letters, but the published letters are not the ones friends have written. The author himself has written these letters, although he also says, “son de mi entera responsabilidad,” which might lead us to suspect that the author’s note is intended merely to protect his friends, the true authors, from exposure.

This last possibility is further hinted at by the fact that the letters are signed only with initials, never a full name, presumably to preserve the writers’ anonymity. Within the letters themselves, some friends and acquaintances are referred to by their full names and others by their initials; in a letter from Dr. AAR, for example, the speaker refers to his wife as DL, but he uses first names for friends he and Alberto have in common. The sense that Alberto is protecting the anonymity of the letter writers is further hinted at by friends’ comments such as “Si decides publicar [Informe] te autorizo a que incluyas esta carta” (268), or, in a letter from Alberto to a friend named Juan, the promise to accede to Juan’s request: “que [yo] borre tu nombre de la incompleta y quizás arbitraria lista de conocidos que aparece en el último capítulo de mi libro y que, en consecuencia, no publique la carta que me enviaste de Caracas” (194). In other words, Informe itself is positioned, by means of these references, in a real historical space that is never explicitly narrated.

These references to the historical reality behind the letters do nothing to resolve the letters’ ambiguous historical or fictional status; they merely make the ambiguity more vivid. Are AAR, ENC, AMD, and FG Alberto’s heteronyms (as suggested by Juan Villoro in his review of Informe in Encuentro) or actual friends whose identities Alberto chooses not to disclose? If the use of initials instead of names is simply a device to give the heteronymous fictions the appearance of sensitive historical documents, then another question arises: Why are full names used for the characters in the narratives? Many of the characters in the narratives are more politically compromised by information that comes out in the stories than the writers are by their letters. In fact, only
two of the letters Alberto includes have been sent to him from Cuba, and one of these letters — the one from Dr. AAR — passionately and eloquently defends the Revolution and rebukes Alberto for not depicting in *Informe* the Revolution’s many triumphs. Dr. AAR comes across as a committed revolutionary compared, for example, to “Paella,” the character who visited the “Disneylandia de los obreros” in San Andrés de Caiguanabo. After leaving San Andrés, Paella attempts on several occasions to leave Cuba by raft and spends years in jail for these attempts. Yet we are given not only Paella’s full name, Jorge José Candamir Llanes, but also the name of the neighborhood where he grew up, “el barrio de Vieja Linda, un caserío engafado en los traspatios del Hospital Infantil Angel Arturo Aballí” (49).

It is possible that Alberto has not given us the real names of characters in the narratives, or even that he has invented these characters (we have met a Ruy López, after all, with whom the narrator has played chess), but still the question remains as to why the narratives and the letters use two different systems for identifying individuals. Are the letter writers more real and thus more in need of protection? And if the narrative characters are less real, what does that do to Alberto’s status as autobiographical narrator who appears to give us evidence of a real historical drama? As simple a detail as the use of initials to identify letter writers has now taken us beyond the missives and forced us to reevaluate the historical status of the narratives, or their historical status relative to the letters. The overarching narrative strategy seems to be to keep the reader at all times suggestible, sensitive to the book’s ambiguous status as history or fiction, yet ultimately undecided, unable to determine which individuals are real or fictional, or to what extent they are real or fictional. In *Informe contra mí mismo*, then, the conventional interdependence of history and literary fiction is laid bare.

A male friend, identified as ENC, writes from Bogotá, Colombia, to object precisely to this discursive contamination. Over the course of his long letter, which spans eight or nine pages of *Informe*, ENC makes an impassioned case against the distorting, destructive properties of poetry on historical experience. “La nostalgia y la poesía han acabado con tu pasión y tu razón” (89). He goes a step beyond the Cuban officials who originally request the *informe* from Alberto, for whereas they seem to perceive poetry or literature as a neutralizing force that renders Alberto’s *informe* useless, ENC sees poetry as an actively distorting force, a spell that induces false, dazzling visions: “Hasta que no dejemos de pensar así, no saldremos del maleficio poético de la nación, del laberinto patético de una nostalgia sentida, por supuesto deber de la sangre, en términos de crioilismo, de relativo folklore sentimental” (114). ENC aims to deconstruct the myth of national identity, the “imposiciones poéticas” that he feels have handicapped Cuba, and for which such poets as José Martí, Agustín Acosta, and Nicolás Guillén “tienen buena dosis de la culpa, porque nos han
venido a complicar la existencia, y de qué manera, con una visión de la realidad absolutamente parcial, por no decir irresponsable” (89). “La verdad de los poetas,” ENC says, “es verdad para los poemas. Para qué pedir otro milagro” (90).

ENC positions himself here in opposition to Mirta Aguirre, who, as mentioned earlier, envisions true art, revolutionary art, as “el combate ideológico en el terreno de las teorías estéticas” (77). ENC is arguing precisely against the alliance, or intermixing, of what he perceives to be pure, separate categories. He says, for example, “Hacer ideología de las ideas poéticas es comercializar la poesía con retórica de alabanzas” (112). Nevertheless, Aguirre and ENC base their radically different conclusions on a similar grounding premise, namely, that poetry and history, and aesthetics and ideology, are indeed distinct epistemological categories that are joined or kept autonomous according to the agenda of the individual writer, artist or politician.

Both ENC and Mirta Aguirre posit, therefore, the existence of a real history, independent from literature, that unfolds at a remove from aesthetic territory. There is an objective, nonpoetic language capable of conveying that history, which literary language may either dramatize (Aguirre) or contaminate (ENC). But no such language emerges in ENC’s letter. In fact, far from approaching journalistic realism, or the socialist realism Aguirre advocates, ENC’s language is poetic in a more obvious sense; that is, it draws on such characteristically poetic or literary conventions as metaphor—often jarring, ambitious metaphor—and the dense, “superfluous” imagery typically associated with poetry. Thus, while rejecting the relevance of poetry to a concrete historical situation, and stating, for example, “Me niego a hablar de Cuba con nostalgia o añoranzas estériles,” ENC cultivates an alternative aesthetic that might be described as a poetics of demystification (91).

At one point, for example, ENC implicitly includes Alberto’s father, Eliseo Diego, among the poets guilty of irresponsible romanticizing, by quoting almost verbatim from Diego’s poem “En la Calzada de Jesús del Monte”: “La demasiada luz de la Calzada más bien enorme de Jesús del Monte, forma nuevas paredes con el polvo en los versos conmovedores de tu queridísimo padre” (90). He points out, however, that the street has not borne that name for over fifty years, that now it is called Calzada de 10 de Octubre, and he goes on to render the street as he sees it, rewriting it according to his own, less romantic aesthetic: “Una calle sucia, escoltada por caserones ruinosos, que huele a orina de vieja con cistitis” (90). Even such a short passage betrays ENC’s debt to a realist, antiromantic literary tradition. The smell of “orina de vieja con cistitis” is literary in the realist tradition, as it adds to the description of the real street the entirely imaginary elderly woman, whose function is essentially suggestive. A smell that is unidentifiable, strictly speaking, is now attached to a particular and pathetic—and highly evocative—personage.
ENC’s poetics draws on an identifiable Cuban poetic tradition that runs counter to the more prevalent “tradición afirmativa del ser cubano.” Rafael Rojas has said, in fact, that Julián de Casal himself—a poet ENC cites repeatedly—is probably “el primer testimonio de una escritura que se regodea en el déficit ontológico de la condición cubana” (Isla 110). “En vez de una subversión del metarrelato identificatorio,” Rojas elaborates, “el discurso de la cubanidad negativa efectúa la reversión de la síntesis” (111). Like Casal, ENC generally inverts or negates established tropes or icons. Thus we have “Ni los helados Coppelia son los mejores del mundo, ni las cubanas las reinas del Edén, ni Varadero la Capilla Sixtina de las playas del Caribe, ni Martí, como crees, Dios” (112). Alberto would probably describe these lines (which borrow heavily from Casal’s poetics) as “prosa poética,” with their verselike rhythms and rich imagery. ENC attempts to occlude a whole dimension of his own discourse, but it seems that in matters of language, both poetry and politics are inescapable; the linguistic medium, these letters suggest, is inevitably figural and polyvalent, on one hand, and inevitably caught up in networks of power, on the other.

Inventories

Possibly the most distinctive formal feature of Informe contra mí mismo are the lists or “inventories” (Rojas “Neblina” 228) that catalog revolutionary slogans, city landmarks, artists and their works, fragments of typical conversations, and the names of Cubans living in exile. Like the letters, the inventories seem to suppress Eliseo Alberto’s narrative authority by introducing the voices of others. In fact the lists can give the impression of subverting all narrative authority, or of turning the author into mere archivist or documentarian, since the individual items in these inventories are not of his creation, and since no connecting syntax is employed to establish relationships among the items. Names of people, names of places, and revolutionary slogans come already “authored,” for the most part anonymously, by slogan writers, or by the parents who named their children, the artists who named their works, or the people who named bars, theaters, and streets. Thus, the items in the inventories function like found objects that the archivist collects and compiles. Although the relinquishing of narrative control is illusory to the extent that authority is asserted in the selection and organization of items, the inventories do nevertheless underline the degree to which language is always already collective practice rather than an individual author’s creation. In fact, by casting the author as archivist, these inventories indirectly raise a question about the degree to which an author ever entirely controls the meaning of her writing, when she must always work, after all, with found objects, selecting and arranging the existing words or phrases of an authorless language.
The lack of any connecting syntax, or of an expressed narrative logic, does not prevent the lists from taking on their own implicit rationale. In the first inventory of the book, for example, we are presented with five or six pages of revolutionary slogans inserted at an apparently arbitrary point in an analysis of the figures of José Martí and Fidel Castro. This analysis is interrupted by a physical separation on the page, a couple of blank lines, after which we have “Independencia o muerte. Fidel, ésta es tu casa. Una Revolución más verde que las palmas. ¿Armas para qué? ¡Paredón a los traidores!” (33). After several pages of slogans, the analysis of Martí and Castro resumes. This simple grouping of slogans cannot be subsumed by traditional narrative logic. The slogans exercise their own logic, taking shape as a sort of necrology, or as an index of rallying cries that, positioned as they are in a larger narrative of disillusionment, seem to reconstitute one dimension of a period that has now definitely slipped into the past.

Implicit in this inventory is the intimate connection between the Revolution’s slogans and the informe apparatus itself, which is both the repressive agent and the generative principle of Alberto’s book. Thus, the slogans originally conceived in order to shore up the univocal, official narrative of the Revolution become an integral part of Alberto’s metainforme so that, even quoted verbatim, their significance is radically altered. Those slogans that might be said to embody the noblest, most justifiable aims of the Revolution are situated in the same matrix as those more explicitly connected to the kind of repressive apparatus Alberto contends with. As an index of a particular discursive history, then, this inventory represents the emancipatory and the repressive elements as coexistent. Without any apparent intervention from the author, without any connective syntax or commentary, this inventory lays bare a discursive reality in its emancipatory and repressive ideological dimensions.

In the larger narrative of disillusionment, which subverts the state’s informe “genre,” the disturbingly repressive function of idealistic, ostensibly emancipatory slogans appears to expose itself: “Primero muerto que de rodillas. . . . La calle es para los revolucionarios. . . . La universidad es para los revolucionarios. . . . Primero se hunde la isla que renunciar a nuestros principios. . . . En cada cuadra un comité. . . . Silencio: el enemigo escucha. . . . El deber de todo revolucionario es hacer la Revolución. . . . Nada es más importante que ser buen revolucionario. . . . En la unión está la fuerza. . . . Elegir a los mejores. Los mejores al Partido. . . . El que no salte es gusano. . . .” (34–39). In slogans like “Silencio: el enemigo escucha,” the vaunted solidarity appears unmistakably censorial, and “El que no salte es gusano” rings of ideological terror, yet it is a terror in which the voices of the majority—“esa inmensa mayoría que resultó ser la colmena de hombres y mujeres buenos del planeta”—are perfectly audible. This ambiguous recasting of the standard slogans can
be thought of as a sort of rewriting-without-rewriting, accomplished by situating quoted material in the larger narrative of disillusionment.

The sandwiching of this particular inventory between parts of an analysis of the figures of José Martí and Fidel Castro situates the slogans in a more specific project of demystification, in which Martí and Castro, the undisputed apóstol and the much more controversial contemporary politician, are positioned in the same discursive context; both figures are revealed as flawed, unable to carry out the monumental tasks they have assigned themselves. The slogans are thus situated in a meditation on the failures and limits of utopian visions and of onetime inspiring social projects. This positioning maximizes the slogans’ ideologically repressive quality while appearing to offer unaltered linguistic evidence. To be sure, the same slogans can be read as repressive when they are situated in an official speech in Cuba, or in an official publication, or when they are emblazoned on walls in Havana or on billboards along the highway. In such settings, however, the prorevolutionary message is overdetermined; there is no effect of distancing between the speaker and the utterance. In Alberto’s informe these same slogans, presented in the form of a list, take on a retrospective, documentary quality that distances the documentarian from the utterance and prevents the reader from taking the slogans at face value.

The retrospective mode of the inventories is not always an expression of disillusionment, however. In fact Informe’s ambivalent, oscillating position with respect to the past distinguishes it from the standard counterrevolutionary or prorevolutionary narratives according to which the island is either paradise lost or paradise regained. The inventories of places and foods and streets spanning several pages in chapter 5 are positively nostalgic: “No había mucho, pero si buscabas por aquí o allá, había. . . . Había caramelos en el zoológico de 26. Galletas con queso crema en el Parque Almendares. Coctel de ostiones en San Lázaro e Infanta. Panetelas borrachas en el Ten Cent” (134). This nostalgia may not idealize the past it longs for, but it poeticizes that past nonetheless. Hardship is acknowledged in this “metafísica de la escasez,” this “categorema de la pobreza” or “filosofía del naufragio”; and yet the individual, almost mundane items in the catalog link like verses. What could be considered evidence of scarcity reads like a litany of small miracles in Eliseo Alberto’s “prosa poética”: “Yoghurt de sabores en la cafetería de la Universidad. Refrescos de naranjitas en el Coliseo de la Ciudad Deportiva. Quesos azules en la calle muralla. Chiviricos en La Pelota. Pizzas en La Piragua” (134).

In chapter 11 the inventories are used to their greatest antiauthoritarian effect. The slogans, citations, popular sayings, and fragments of songs or of conversations from earlier parts of the book no longer respond, in this chapter, to the kind of organizational logic apparent in the earlier inventories; all of these elements are mixed, together with more or less readable narrative pas-
sages: “Un millón de cubanos en la manifestación, reafirmando su lealtad al proceso revolucionario. La cerveza fría se la toma cualquiera, el problema está en tomársela caliente. La vida es un teatro, asere, no jodas: el teatro de la vida. Candela. ¿Y cuándo me aplauden?” (286). If there is an organizational principle in such passages, it is neither thematic nor narrative. At most there is an associative logic, whereby the connection between successive elements may satisfy a wide range of conceptual links. The sequence of elements in the litany, however, often appears arbitrary. In the space of a page, for example, we encounter a propagandistic slogan, “El futuro pertenece por entero al socialismo”; the refrain of a popular son, “Bota la muleta y el bastón y podrás bailar el son”; fragments of a conversation from earlier in the book, “Buenos días, Francisca”. . . . “Buenos días, Angel”; and a quote from José Martí, “El espíritu despótico del hombre se apega con amor mortal a la fruición de ver de arriba y mandar como dueño” (285–86).

This multiplicity of voices, not subordinated to any authoritative, organizing narrative, can be thought of as a radical instance of what Bakhtin describes as the “carnivalized literature” of Rabelais or Dostoevsky (Problems 107). But this chapter is also a literature of carnival in the most immediate, literal sense because Eliseo writes the chapter in Cuba, in his father’s studio overlooking the Avenida de los Presidentes in Havana, as he watches “medio millón de habaneros y habaneras, con vasos de ron en la mano, chancleteando” (269). Ironically, however, the subversive, antiauthoritarian energies of carnival circulate in what is officially considered a popular demonstration of solidarity with Cuba’s socialist government: “Van rumbo a La Punta, en el malecón, donde se ha organizado una gran pachanga. Para que el enemigo aprenda de una vez que con Cuba no se juega, coño. Para celebrar el triunfo. ¿Cuál triunfo? ¿Quién ganó? ¿Qué? Una pachanga no: un acto de reafirmación ideológica” (270).

Like the half million marching Cubans, Alberto capitalizes on the structural homologies between the ideologically incommensurable progovernment political demonstration and the carnival—the depersonalizing effect of the multitude, the shared enthusiasm, the sense of oneness with a larger force. Thus, in this “prueba de la unidad del pueblo combatiente” — which includes “cantantes y agrupaciones musicales de moda” — “Se respiran aires de carnaval. Aires de libertad. Es un carnaval” (270–71). The superimposition of the manifestación on the carnaval, or of the carnaval on the manifestación, results in a discourse in which antithetical ideological signifiers coexist seamlessly: conga and political slogans, rum and “reafirmación ideológica,” Rosa “la guaguera,” from a conga lyric, and la Juventud and el Partido. “Socialismo o Muerte” is set, almost literally, to the rhythm of a comparsa.

The fact that antithetical signifiers share the same new discursive space does not imply, however, that a reconciliation has been brought about. No social or ideological contradiction has been resolved. Plurality wins out over
univocality, contradiction and conflict win out over narrative and logical resolution. The apparently unregulated multiplicity of voices, then, can be thought of as a challenge to the more univocal narratives of Cuban history, or to the more synthetic readings of a Cuban cultural essence, that have prevailed on and off the island since 1959. Whether by parodying specific historical narratives or by restaging ideological contradictions without resolving them, Eliseo Alberto’s inventories implicitly challenge the existence of an objective perspective of events, or of an authoritative source of historical narration—premises on which the existing teleological discourses depend.

Conclusion

Eliseo Alberto’s intensely dialogic, ambivalent, and antiheroic Informe contra mí mismo responds to a cultural dynamic in which the antithetical epics of exile and revolution—of paradise lost and paradise regained, for example—appear to have exhausted themselves, or in which they are no longer felt to address the complex realities of post-Soviet Cuba. Informe responds to this sense of confinement, to a historical moment in which the existing, polarized discursive practices persist in the real world but seem to lose the explanatory power necessary to galvanize intellectuals on either side of the political spectrum. The self-assured grand narratives thus give way in Alberto’s text to more complex, uncertain ones. Informe offers the reader something akin to what Rafael Rojas, describing the contemporary Cuban essay, calls “un mirar suave . . . un saber débil, autolimitado, en el mundo posmoderno” or “la ética intelectual de una edad sin certezas” (Isla 222–23). In its historico-narrative reexamination of the relationship between history and fiction, propaganda and art, politics and poetry, Informe contra mí mismo lays some of the discursive groundwork upon which alternative narratives and cultural praxes may emerge.

NOTES

1. Page numbers for all citations of Informe contra mí mismo are placed in parentheses in the text.
2. Alberto’s “nueva generación” may remind some U.S. readers, for example, of Pepsi Cola’s “new generation,” as used in the slogan “The taste of a new generation.”
3. Marifeli Pérez-Stable advances essentially the same thesis: “sociologically speaking, Cuba is no longer in revolution because the social transformations that changed the basis of political power occurred during the 1960s” (11).
4. This passage is consistent, incidentally, with a tendency throughout Informe to privilege artistic expression over political practice.
5. “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix, / angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night” (Ginsberg, Howl 9).
6. My source for this account is Cabrera Infante’s *Mea Cuba*, page 90.

7. Although *Informe* treats the issue of homosexuality in the Revolution more directly on other occasions (such as in chapter 3, with the story of Rolando Martínez Ponce de león), I focus my discussion here on the formal strategies of the text.

8. Lautréamont referred to “the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing machine and an umbrella!” (*Les Chants de Maldoror*). The reappropriation here of a celebrated protosurrealist image to describe contemporary Cuban realities — “una realidad fatigada que asumimos en silencio” — is significant in light of official pronouncements on surrealism, such as Mirta Aguirre’s pronouncements that “surrealismo y realismo socialista son raigalmente incompatibles” and “[es] inaceptable el surrealismo para todo materialista” (78–79).

**WORKS CITED**


