Revolution's Other Histories

THE SEXUAL, CULTURAL, AND CRITICAL LEGACIES OF ROBERTO FERNÁNDEZ RETAMAR'S "CALIBAN"

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> The underlying assumption is here a relatively old one, found again and again in the conflation of literary and literal decadence, in the wild corruption of the letter and the body alike. For the revolutionary imagination, the pleasure of the text, given to dissipation and wasteful dissemination, reflects and expands the pleasure of the flesh, expands it, somewhat paradoxically, as the threat of a generalized sexual narcissism: after all, one cannot focus on the play of the signifier without being in some way withdrawn from the work of society. . . . The narcissistic, sexually driven subject has, it appears, an art of its own.
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> —Brad Epps, "Proper Conduct: Reinaldo Arenas, Fidel Castro, and the Politics of Homosexuality"[1]

Brad Epps's epigraph concludes a passage of his exhaustive study of Cuban revolutionary sexual politics, a passage that specifically analyzes statements issued by the Cuban government in the course of the revolution's first decade on the topic of the "proper" role of artists, writers, and intellectuals in a revolutionary culture. Those statements range chronologically from Fidel Castro's "Words to Intellectuals," issued in 1961, to the Declaration issued after Cuba's First National Congress on Education and Culture in 1971. In both statements, Epps argues, one can read a creeping but nonetheless virulent homophobia in the symptomatic rhetorical conflation of the homosexual and the intellectual, a conflation that functions to varying degrees of explicitness in this series of public statements. For example, in the later Declaration, Epps argues, "homosexuality" appears explicitly "on the rhetorical heels of prostitution, . . . described as a 'deviation' and as a form of 'social pathology.'" The Declaration uses this formulation in order to base its refusal to permit that, "by means of 'artistic quality,' recognized homosexuals win influence and have an effect on the education of our youth"; this proscription puts into unambiguous and specific application Castro's more general condemnation, in his speech closing that conference, of "'privileged minorities' who have 'monopolized the title of intellectual' and whose writings are useless, mere expressions of decadence." Castro, Epps is careful to observe, "does not refer directly to homosexuality" in his own speech, "but he shadows it forth in his depictions of the 'unproductive parasite' and 'intellectual rat' for whom aesthetic value is found in anything that entertains, diverts or helps to while away boredom."

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Recent and ongoing scholarly work, in which Epps's article is an exemplary moment, has already established convincingly the fact of the Cuban revolutionary government's early abuses of its queer and dissident artists and writers.[2] It will not be my intention here to repeat that work but to use its discoveries to interrogate further one of the more significant intellectual legacies of that particular moment in Cuban political and cultural history for recent critical political and cultural discourse in the United States. Five months following the April 1971 Congress, Roberto Fernández Retamar's essay "Caliban" appeared in the *Casa de las Américas Review*. In its conclusion, Retamar has occasion to quote Castro's closing remarks to the Congress, citing specifically his most general statement on the practical and ethical functions of revolutionary art and revolutionary criticism: "We, a revolutionary people," Castro told the Congress, "value cultural and artistic creations in proportion to what they offer mankind. . . . Our evaluation is political. There can be no aesthetic value in opposition to man. Aesthetic value cannot exist in opposition to justice, in opposition to the welfare and in opposition to the happiness of man. It cannot exist!" The statement sounds almost theoretical, as though Castro were making some argument about art's intrinsic function, as though by virtue of its defining characteristics the aesthetic could not be conceived in opposition to justice, welfare, or happiness. But the statement was not made in so felicitous a performative context; Castro's is more a statement of policy rather than theory, one in which the final, declamatory "It cannot exist" functionally translates into the prescriptive "It must not exist," and, indeed, into the imperative "It will not exist."[3]

Indeed, in the same month as the Congress, Cuban authorities arrested and detained the poet Heberto Padilla for "counterrevolutionary" activity consisting of preferring, in a 1967 review, the work of already exiled novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante over that of Lisandro Otero, a writer more sympathetic to the revolution, and for writing a novel, *Heroes Are Grazing in My Garden*, which, in the writer's own words, "is not a denunciation or an allegation, not even testimony which might aspire to verisimilitude. Rather, it is a text through which certain conflicts and certain beings pass like shadows."[4] Padilla's curiously indeterminate description of his novel, in a memoir written after his release from Cuba ten years after his detention, speaks rather eloquently to the subtle but lasting effects of such violent censorship. His accounts of conversations during his detention with a Lieutenant Alvarez, the officer in charge of his detention, suggest some cause for Padilla's lingering anxiety. When Padilla refuses to sign a confession written for him by Cuban authorities, declaring, "I never plotted against the powers of the state," Alvarez fires back about the international reaction to his detention: "That is what you expect. Intellectuals are untouchable. That is what you hope for. Your

friends will begin to mobilize—if they did that kind of work for the state, we would have more consumer goods than anyone else in the world." And later, as the police pressure on Padilla to sign his "confession" intensifies and turns literally violent, Alvarez threatens, "We can destroy you even though we have no legal justification for doing so. . . . Right now you represent a dangerous tendency in the nation and we have to eradicate it."[5] Cabrera Infante himself reports on the "international uproar" sparked by Padilla's detention and eventual forced public confession:

> The mail carried . . . an open letter . . . to Fidel Castro himself . . . signed, surprisingly enough, by such leftist writers and sponsors of the Revolution as Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Italo Calvino, Marguerite Duras, etc. . . . After [Padilla's] Soviet-style confession . . . there was an even more vehement and indignant letter to Castro, signed by yet more writers on the Left like Nathalie Sarraute and Susan Sontag. The undersigned were ashamed (and angry) at the outrage of a poet confessing to imaginary political crimes.[6]

The Padilla case, combined with the 1971 Congress, is the informing context of Retamar's self-declared polemic, "Caliban." Retamar himself admits this in his 1986 follow-up to that essay, "Caliban Revisited." The Padilla case and its consequent firestorm of letters of accusation, denunciation, and condemnation are, Retamar writes,

> the spark that fired the writing of "Caliban." . . . My piece was not born in a vacuum but rather at a particular time that was marked by passion, and—on our part—indignation at the paternalism, the rash accusation against Cuba, and even the grotesque "shame" and "anger" of those who, comfortably situated in the "West" with their fears, their guilt and their prejudices decided to proclaim themselves judges of the revolution.[7]

Retamar's indignation, still palpable in the later essay, energizes the earlier piece: indeed, it certainly overwhelms the "spark" provided for it by the Padilla case itself, which makes a brief, occluded appearance in the first paragraph of "Caliban" as "the recent polemic regarding Cuba that ended by confronting, on the one hand, certain bourgeois European intellectuals (or aspirants to that state) with a visible colonialist nostalgia; and, on the other, that body of Latin-American writers and artists who reject open or veiled forms of cultural and political colonialism." Later, when Retamar takes on Carlos Fuentes as one of a number of Mexican intellectuals critical of Padilla's treatment, the case reappears as "the wild vociferation occasioned by a Cuban writer's month in jail."[8] While I am not exactly certain what risks I take in plying this ground as an openly gay, hopefully progressive, North American academic critic from a working-class, Cuban-exile background, I certainly acknowledge that this is tricky, risky

ground to ply. Retamar's essay has enjoyed considerable esteem in the United States, especially on the part of progressive Latino and Latina and other academics of color, as well as by theorists of postcoloniality more generally; in fact, especially since its publication in English in the late 1980s, it has spawned a genealogy of critical and scholarly texts as rich and complex as the one it itself fashions in its own pages.[9] I do feel, however, that this very fashioning of a "Calibanic" genealogy demands further scrutiny, and that any new insights this scrutiny produces might in turn recast, especially but not exclusively in political terms, some of the work done subsequently in the United States and abroad in the name of "Caliban."

What "Caliban" Schooled

My chief aim in closely explicating certain passages of Retamar's Calibanic manifesto is to highlight the otherwise imbedded homophobia of his rhetoric, especially in those moments when he does the direct taxonomic work of classifying who does and who does not belong in the "school" of Caliban, who does and does not speak for, or from, an "America" he opposes to that lying to the north but emanating from the west by terming it, following José Martí, "Ours." Indeed, the repeated and insistent recourse to the first-person plural pronoun, in possessive form or otherwise, begins already to mark the larger classificatory rhetorical function of the essay. On the bright side, the evocation of the grammatically plural person evokes the sense of community and solidarity among persons and groups of persons to which perhaps most of us strive; on the other, darker side, it inevitably effects that happy inclusion by some necessary exclusion, perhaps more than one, and certainly not only that of the imperialist against whom "our America" opposes itself. In his essay on Arenas (which, for all of its interest in the events surrounding the 1971 Congress, devotes no significant attention to Retamar or his essay), Brad Epps devotes strategic attention to this grammatical bind, and its sexual- and political-positional analogues. Epps initially pursues this pronomial play for its sexual corollaries:

> While the Cuban revolution seeks a surrender of the individual to the collective, a sacrifice of the ego to the (ego) ideal, it refuses what it sees as a surrender, in the flesh as in the mind, of one man to another. While the former "surrender" is understood in terms of empowerment (I surrender the I to be stronger in and as the We), the latter is understood in terms of disempowerment, degradation and abjection (I surrender to another, stronger I).[10]

This is certainly the manner in which the game of "us and them" plays itself out in Retamar's essay, which in one respect can be boiled down to a process of inventorying, of listing and categorizing, of selecting the anti-colonialist sheep from the presumably procolonialist goats (or vice versa, as the insistent gender-privileging in Retamar's essay would demand).

"Caliban"'s primary operation has been termed genealogical; Retamar devotes most of the essay to naming his forebears in the line of Caliban, from at least Martí at the turn of the last century on. At the same time, and because he wants his essay to function dialectically, Retamar sets up a parallel but opposing line, typified by though not beginning with Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó's 1900 pamphlet, "Ariel." The most consistent pattern to be detected in Retamar's treatment of those figures he rejects is, for better or worse, the femininization or hysterization of these otherwise male writers. The Ariel figure itself, rejected ostensibly for its traditional association with a willing servitude to the master, is often also figured as the "airy," obsequious feminine counterpart to the roughly recalcitrant (and potentially rapacious) Caliban.[11] This insistently gendered set of associations haunts the larger Latin American intellectual legacy of Rodó's essay, well beyond Retamar's use of it.[12] In fact, Retamar keeps a certain sympathy for Rodó in play, if only because Rodó retained a deep suspicion about the United States; Retamar takes greater issue with an analysis of Rodó by the Latin American critic Emir Rodríguez Monegal, who, from his base in Paris, had been instrumental in promoting the new Latin American fiction as it emerged in the late 1960s. Rodríguez Monegal, in emphasizing Rodó's own aestheticist, modernist tendencies over his political analyses, effectively, in Retamar's terms, "emasculates Rodó's work" and betrays the extent to which he (Rodríguez Monegal) himself was "a servant of imperialism . . . afflicted with 'Nordo-mania.'" Rodó's stance against, again in Retamar's terms, "North American penetration" was at its most "gallant" in its "exalt[ation of] democracy, moral values and emulation," and in its "defense of our values."[13] A fate similar to Rodríguez Monegal's befalls the nineteenth-century Argentine writer Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, whose famed *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* of 1845 is tainted for Retamar by its open admiration of North American culture; according to Retamar, Sarmiento's "travels in that country produced in him a genuine bedazzlement, a never-ending historical orgasm."[14] The assignment of sexualized pathologies to two such disparate writers as Sarmiento and Rodríguez Monegal at least establishes that, without serious regard for the legitimate political problems one might encounter in their work, Retamar himself is not above damning them in large part through the rhetorical use of the sexual innuendo. And why not? This was very much in keeping with the spirit of the times in Cuba, where

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the slightest suggestion of a rumor of ideological or sexual deviance, or preferably both, could prove permanently damning.[15]

Retamar treads more lightly around two other literary figures of indisputably more formidable stature, Borges and Fuentes. But both of them are open to a certain displaced form of sexualized suspicion: Retamar pauses in the course of his literary housecleaning to mention "the extraordinary vogue enjoyed by linguistics in recent years," a vogue that he associates with "the attempt at ahistoricization peculiar to a dying class: a class that initiated its trajectory with daring utopias in order to chase away time and that endeavors now, in the face of adversity, to arrest that trajectory via impossible uchronics." Literary postmodernism suffers for Retamar from its status as a symptom of bourgeois decadence, and both Borges and Fuentes, in turn, are contaminated by the same decadence to a pathological degree. Borges, "a typical colonial writer" for Retamar, is "a man of diabolical intelligence" for whom "the act of writing . . . is more like the act of reading," and this perverse, "diabolical" inversion of scriptural convention qualifies Borges to "exemplify Martí's idea that intelligence is one—and not necessarily the best—part of a man."[16] Fuentes's guilt comes chiefly by association; in addition to his inexcusable turn from social realist to more semiotically playful novelistic forms, and his collaboration with the "Mexican literary Mafia" that broke with Cuba over the Padilla affair, Fuentes also "elaborates a vision of our literature, our culture" which, according to Retamar, "coincides with that of writers like Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Severo Sarduy."[17] We already know at this point in "Caliban" what Retamar thinks of Rodríguez Monegal; from that we might surmise that Sarduy shares more with him than that they both lived as Latin American expatriates in France, or that they both had a hand in helping to promote groundbreaking Latin American fiction from there.

The Cuban Sarduy broke with the revolution early, and in the mid- to late 1960s became Latin American editor for Editions du Seuil as well as a close associate of the *Tel Quel* group organized around Roland Barthes. His only other mention in Retamar's "Caliban" is a curt dismissal of his literary and critical work as "neo-Barthean flutterings," a phrase that is no less painful in Spanish: *mariposeo neobarthesiano*.[18] Anyone familiar with Sarduy's work, or even Barthes's, will understand just how inadequate, if not inappropriate, "fluttering" may be said to describe the quality, either intellectual or stylistic, of that work; anyone familiar with either man's sexual proclivities, and with idiomatic Spanish, will certainly understand exactly how "fluttering's" translation back into "mariposeo" is to be taken. This is perhaps not the place to defend Sarduy's work against the charge of "Arielesque" flightiness, or of its curiously concomitant sin of proimperialist collaboration. This is the place, however, to establish that, for

Retamar, the figure that Caliban cuts through the tradition he wants to fashion from Martí on does little to dismantle at least one form of mastery, that of the patriarchal institution that privileges a rigid, masculine toughness. For this institution, which in its uncompromisingly oppositional, resistant stance will brook no "penetration," all signs of openness, even the most vigilant of critical engagements, translate immediately into passive, effeminate weakness. Gender positions and their symbolic counterparts thus serve Retamar here as more than effective rhetorical turns; they do much of the cultural police work required by his project, a project not only determined to condemn "the frivolous way in which some intellectuals . . . call themselves leftists," but also determined to insure that truly organic intellectuals in this proto-Gramscian, Calibanic mold will be precisely not "frivolous," not "fluttery."

In addition to Martí and Castro, Retamar also mentions Che Guevara's contribution to the cultural police work necessary for the cultivation of a correct revolutionary sensibility; Che's "Man and Socialism in Cuba," Retamar tells us, includes an important "censure of decadent art under modern capitalism and its continuation in our society" and is remarkable for "the astonishing clarity with which he foresaw certain problems in our artistic life."[19] In a recent article, José Quiroga has made strategic use of an anecdote from Che's life as an international emissary of the revolution to clarify further the nature of Che's insight into these "certain problems": in Algiers in 1964, Che "saw a volume of Virgilio Piñera's *Teatro completo* in the Cuban embassy" and "hurled it against a wall," shouting, "'How dare you have in our embassy a book by that foul faggot?'"[20] Quiroga uses the anecdote to occasion his exploration of Piñera's own textual self-closeting, one necessitated at least in practical measure by a Cuban revolutionary sensibility that called for the cultivation of a "New [Socialist] Man" generally along unmistakably Stalinist lines. According to "El Ché," Quiroga observes, "the space of the faggot is diametrically opposed to the hygiene of the revolution."[21] Brad Epps expands on this particular aspect of the psychosexual positionings imbedded in this new socialist rhetoric; he cites a discussion of the "New Man"'s salient qualities in Roger Lancaster's *Life Is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*. "The 'New Man' and the 'New Society,'" Lancaster argues,

> are envisioned as hardworking, diligent, and studious, pure and without corruption. The aspect of machismo that the New Man embodies is the ascetic side, not the hedonistic one. The cult of the New Man, then, produced a cultural atmosphere in which homosexual practice . . . was at least publicly regarded as more suspect than before, tainted with the image of indulgence or corruption.[22]

"New Man" ideology thus walks that very fine line between overt homosexual behavior and the kind of generalized homosocial but desperately antisexual male bonding dependent on the intense repression of that overt behavior. Should any grouping, national, communal, or otherwise, of such "new men" occur, Epps concludes, "it must be clear that one of them retains, even as he puts it problematically into practice, an ideal of masculinity: assertive, insertive, invasive. . . . In fact, the desexualization of love between men, the sublimation of homosexuality en masse, appears to be part of the selflessness and self-sacrifice that the Cuban leader[ship] deems necessary to social solidarity.[23]

The jump, then, from "New Man" rhetoric to the instrumental but no less tropic invocation of Caliban by Retamar is a short one. Simultaneously in the peculiar sexual tenor of Retamar's attack of those who lose in the ¿Quien es más macho? game he plays in his essay, and in the insistent recourse to plural pronomial play, the "Caliban" essay performs precisely the exclusions and censures it praises in more practical arenas. Indeed, it may well be that in the very act of invoking the ideal of Caliban, the essay does the necessary work of keeping his presumptive Other in interpellative play. Beyond its insidious deployment of polarized gender qualities, Retamar's argument does nothing to dismantle other conventional dichotomies opposing, say, reality to representation, history to fiction, or struggle to pleasure. Cultural laborers bear a unique and anxious burden in the Manichaean system preserved by Retamar's essay, one that immediately disqualifies them the minute they dare to privilege signs over referents, or even to combine them in any inventive way. They especially suffer if they indulge at all in the pursuit of pleasure, as though that were somehow automatically incompatible with the new socialist aesthetic. Pleasure especially becomes the purview, it seems, of those recalcitrant individualists who fail to withstand its seductions, who give themselves up to temptations that stronger men, men with collective values uppermost in mind, easily resist. It is easy to see how the cultural laborer thus opens himself up so readily to sexual and other suspicions; he is always already, like the homosexual, "interpellated by the revolutionary regime as problematical and peripheral," to quote Brad Epps, confronting "the limits of society" and recognizing "the exclusionary shape of the 'we' by recognizing the 'I' as excluded."[24] This interpellation, kept in play if not created by the rhetoric in which the culture worker is simultaneously called and condemned, in turn calls attention to what remains undecidable in Retamar's essay: precisely what inhabits that tortured border space between the historical and the representational, between the material and the discursive.

While for the most part Retamar preserves the division and implicit hierarchization of the historical and the linguistic, there is also at least one

passage where, in a moment of disarming candor, he admits that often hard historical lessons are learned not in the places where history is conventionally understood to unfold (the trenches, say, or the streets) but "in the flesh."[25] This brief but telling passage suggests that Retamar at least implicitly understands the complexity of his own sexualization of the history he is in the process of helping to shape discursively. Bodies, flesh, we know, matter and signify; and in the way that the former effect relies on the function of the latter, "bodies" simultaneously comprise as they occupy one site in which they may be said to transpire both materially, as affect, and discursively, as significance.

Reschooling "Caliban"

In "The School of Caliban," the concluding section of his important historical and genealogical study of the literature of "all" the Americas, José David Saldívar has occasion to quote a familiar argument of Fredric Jameson's: "'History,' said Fredric Jameson, 'is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individuals as well as to collective praxis.'"[26] To this extent, history functions fairly analogously to the Lacanian "Real," which refuses desire by always stubbornly returning to its place; Saldívar utilizes this concept in his own attempt to "queer" Caliban by reading Cherríe Moraga's hybrid text, *Loving in the War Years*, as commensurate with Retamar's revision of the Calibanic tradition. Saldívar's choice of Moraga is strategic in more ways than one, however; by enrolling her rather than, say, a gay male writer in the "school" whose student body he gathers in this essay, Saldívar can either subsume questions of sexuality and sexual identity quite generally under questions of gender, or sidestep the question of male homosexuality and its most material practices altogether. His separate chapter on Arturo Islas's frustrations in generating interest for his first novel among mainstream publishers in the United States barely mentions Islas's modest explorations of Chicano homosexuality at all, and in the concluding essay the only writer called on, for all the familiar reasons, for rejection to the school is Richard Rodríguez. Moraga's *Loving* qualifies her for admission, however, "because she wants to deal with gender empowerment, sensuous culture, and the libidinal economy, not relations of meaning," and thus her "linguistic reality's paradigm" is, according to Saldívar, *The Tempest*: "Survival, for her, demands that Chicanas resist the master's language; after all . . . Prospero's conquest of the Americas is a male conquest, written from the male perspective."[27] While Saldívar is careful to mention that Moraga's specifically lesbian feminism takes as a chief target homophobia in Chicano culture, most of the material in *Loving* that he addresses directly

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performs this critique on the most general level of an inverted family romance: Moraga's romance of her Chicana mother in rivalrous opposition to her white father. If "history" indeed is "what hurts," what is left unaccounted for in Saldívar's otherwise sensitive account of Moraga's work is precisely the work, and play, of the bodies on whom that "hurt," that pain, is most directly inscribed; and also, not surprisingly, the "pleasure" inscribed there as well, at least when "desire" can have its say, can effect a liberatory resignification that subverts the "real"'s moribund autorepetition. This is especially evident in Moraga's extraordinary lesbian-erotic verse, none of which finds its way into Saldívar's analysis.

Saldívar's anxiety about the specifically sexual aspects of Moraga's work appears symptomatic of the larger "Calibanic" tradition's relation to what remains of patriarchy after a too limited postcolonial critique has done at least the theoretical work of dismantling the nationalist and racist vectors of empire.[28] What "discipline" one learns in the "school" of "Caliban" founded by Retamar and promoted by Saldívar might in the long run prove too ascetic, too resistant to forms of critical practice that perform their subversions in specifically sexual, and especially homosexual, spaces and modalities. In general Saldívar's strong appeal to Retamar in *The Dialectics of Our America* could use closer scrutiny, if only to put into greater relief the sexual politics contextualizing the situational specificity of "Caliban"'s composition. This will not be the place to undertake such a task; it will have to suffice here merely to suggest that if, according to Saldívar, Retamar's vision of "Caliban" negates "the master-slave relationship,"[29] it may only do so as an inversion rather than a subversion of these positions, an inversion that merely allows an exchange of places in the hierarchy rather than a dismantling of the structure of imbalance. In addition, it may well be that if "Caliban" only allows "desires either to participate in the historical process of hegemony or to resist its domination," then we, as cultural critics whose task in part is to articulate historical conditions enabling the productions of both cultural artifacts and pleasurable effects, may do well to request a fuller menu of options. If, as Saldívar argues, "Third World American intellectuals and writers in a postcolonial world . . . have a choice to make; either they can side with Prospero . . . and help fortify ruling culture and hegemony or they can side with Caliban, 'our symbol,' and help resist, limit and alter domination in the Americas"; and if, as he argues elsewhere, we can find "Caliban's revolutionary over-turning of Prospero's disciplinary techniques of mind control, repression and anxiety" in the events issuing from "January 1959—namely in the Cuban Revolution"[30]; then it may be well to "decide" for a vigilant, critical undecidability rather than accept a limited choice of nightmares.

In "Nationalizing Sissies," a provocative essay that claims to offer an alternative to the residual master-slave structure characteristically imbedded in postcolonial discourses like Retamar's, José Piedra argues that sexualizing that structure by translating it into terms of a "sissy/bully" relation might provide us "with a libidinally tainted counterpoint to the colonialist takeover," one that provides especially for the colonized "sissy an avenue of anticolonialist subversion and for both sissy and bully a form of postcolonial compromise."[31] This model of the power struggle may indeed improve on the standard master-slave model to the extent that it allows for a greater articulation of gender difference, as well as for a certain greater psychic complexity by virtue of the greater degree of intimacy characterizing the sissy/bully dynamic. In no way, however, should Piedra's elaboration of this alternative power dynamic be taken merely to substitute one rigid dialectic for another, on either Piedra's part or mine in using him. Piedra's model succeeds where others fail precisely because of his insistence that there is nothing so stably "oppositional" about the sissy/bully exchange; it borrows especially from theories of sadomasochism an appreciation for the deep structural ambiguities of such relationships.[32] "In the sissy-bully exchange," Piedra argues,

> it is difficult to tell who was whom, in what way, and to what extent. Whether symbolically or actually, passively or provocatively, anally, orally, or any other way, for a challenging or passionate instant or forever, the sissy bullies the bully. This type of reversible behavior relates to the theory and practice of sadomasochism, viewed as a willful alternative to the will-crushing colonial pact.[33]

Piedra's "sissy" manifesto exemplifies a larger movement not to reject notions like those in Retamar's "Caliban," but to relax and expand the possibilities for critical and practical subversions of mastery in all colonizing exchanges beyond the restrictive parameters of the "bully" confrontation with "bully" suggested by "Caliban." Piedra describes his as a project to "upgrad[e] the notion of the receptive cultural agent of colonialism, presumably passive females and males, into a subversive force capable of transforming libidinal traps into political trenches with a touch of nationalism."[34] Piedra is careful, however, not to relax his model so much that it collapses back into "instances in which the sissy action smacks of being merely a powerless reaction, [or] even a cynical accommodation, to invasive bully techniques"[35]; instead, Piedra envisions new communal configurations, emergent antinationalist proto-nations composed of "desperate and disparate nationals who breach singly or together through traditionally subjugated, critically secondhand and/or second-

class identities built from within, against and beyond the borders of dominant nations and national paradigms."[36]

In some ways, Piedra's work constitutes a complicating deviation, a salutary ambiguation against the conventionally polarized models of subaltern political behavior as either exclusively resistant (if it's "active") or reactive (if it's "passive"). His may, in fact, constitute one productive attempt to develop further what Judith Butler has in other contexts described as the limited, albeit difficult, possibility of an "agency without mastery."[37] In one respect, Piedra offers a necessary corrective to Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's assertion, in *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*, that the general Cuban American example of immigration and cultural assimilation somehow speaks in favor of models of cultural and political engagement he describes as receptive, accommodating "biculturation," operating more in the spirit of "apposition" than "opposition," of "collusion" rather than "collision," of "contiguity" rather than "conflict."[38] Pérez-Firmat should, I think, be congratulated for "sissifying" his own critical demeanor enough to position himself on a bicultural-libidinal "Desi" chain that conjoins him bisexually to both Desi Arnaz and the North American Lucy he loves. In general, however, *Life on the Hyphen* tends too readily to embrace not so much hegemonic U.S. culture, even as embodied in Desi's embrace of Lucy,[39] but the pleasures of a deviance that precisely and strategically deviates (and distracts) from the complex scenarios of pain in which not only the Cuban, but all, histories of displacement, dislocation, and dispersal transpire.

Piedra's insistence on the sadomasochistic complexity of the sissy/bully engagement demands the active and critical remembering of historical "pain." To this extent, Heberto Padilla's memoir *Self-Portrait of the Other* may be said to perform this engagement more fully, because more ambivalently, than Pérez-Firmat's admittedly provocative sexual performance in *Life on the Hyphen.* Curiously spare in style, Padilla's memoir nevertheless explores in considerable, intimate detail the complex psychological dynamics of the tyrant/subject relationship. After a passage describing an interrogation culminating with a beating that put him in a hospital, Padilla recounts the following scene:

> While I was in the Military Hospital, Fidel Castro came to see me. I remember the clanging of iron doors and the panache of the escort making way for him in a place where even inanimate objects would have dropped to their knees to let him pass. I remember . . . he waved a dossier, pacing back and forth with giant steps, and never looking me in the eye. "We two are the only ones who have to be here. Today I have the time to talk to you; and we have a lot to talk about." . . . Yes, we had time to talk—time for him to talk his head off, to heap scorn on the literature of the world, because "getting revo-

> lutionaries to fight isn't the same as getting literary men to fight. In this country, they have never done anything for the people, neither in the last century nor in this one. They are always latecomers jumping on the bandwagon of history." . . . He must have seen himself as an impressive leader standing majestically before a no less impressive adversary dressed in a faded uniform, scar still fresh on his forehead, his body still aching from the kicks of history.[40]

Padilla, who is not gay, exhibits in this passage a striking willingness to observe and record Castro's person and demeanor more intimately than their actual closeness in the scene would compel. To this extent, he shares with Reinaldo Arenas, who was gay, and in whose own memoir the record of persecution at the hands of the same authority is more explicitly homosexualized, a tendency to be, as Brad Epps puts it,

> so shadowed by political reality, by all kinds of plots and misalliances, that the work that bears his name is the work, figuratively speaking, of others as well. It is in this sense, that the more he [Arenas, but also, I'm suggesting, Padilla] is against Castro's Cuba, the more he is in it, even in exile. . . . One might even say . . . that Arenas's is an extreme case of the revolutionary infidel and in-Fidel.[41]

Padilla would hardly blink at the suggestion that he bears a similar homoerotically ambivalent fascination with Castro as Epps argues for Arenas; he might bristle at the terminology of the characterization of his relation to Castro as one of sissy to bully, but in his memoir he certainly exhibits an admirable openness to the sexuality of his queer comrades in letters, such as Piñera, Sarduy, and José Lezama Lima, as well as a clear understanding of his own abjected position vis-à-vis Castro.

In addition, from reading either of their memoirs, no one could confuse either Padilla's or Arenas's "deviations from correct revolutionary opinion," in either their work or behavior, as in any way symptomatic of bourgeois decadence or as collusive with the interests of North American cultural or political hegemony. Indeed, as exiles in the United States, both writers have had opportunities to testify, in work they could only have published in the West, against the worst excesses of expanding Western capitalism, Western bourgeois liberalism, and even the very cultural and commercial decadence that the revolution itself decries; often their testimonies ring with the same indignation one hears not only in Retamar, but in Martí before him, who, unlike his revolutionary disciple, indeed lived in the belly of the same beast as Padilla and Arenas.[42]

In addition to Piedra's essay, an equally provocative study of the early revolutionaries' function as homosocial fantasy projection, this time not for Cuban society itself but for middle-class North America's restless

It is perhaps the strong impression I have of this "rigidity" in Retamar's essay that makes me question its viability, if overly revered and then left unrevised, as an instrument in the larger contemporary project of politically liberatory critical and cultural practices, a project I understand "Americas" Studies to claim for itself.

male adolescents in the mid-1950s, has recently appeared. Entitled *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the New Left*, Van Gosse's book argues that, at the time Castro's troops were organizing in the Sierra Madre and became the subject of a famous 1957 CBS news special, the ensuing "Yankee *fidelismo* was [grounded in] the extrapolitical world of spontaneous action for its own sake," and that "Fidel became [liberal, intellectual] America's Rebel With a Cause on a grand scale, but his popularity in the U.S., especially among young men, exceeded expectations. In this context," Gosse goes on, "the collapse and reinvention of traditional boyhood and manhood provided the raw material for behavior that was not subversive or oppositional in any sense, but simply nonconformist."[43] Gosse's study, therefore, exemplifies in yet another respect the complex interrelation between the historical and what might yet be called the aesthetic; the televisual projection into North America of glamorized, bearded rebels in the Cuban mountains marks "the beginnings of a cult of Fidel [in] desire in its rawest forms, both in its politics and its lack of politics." According to Gosse, "the [Cuban] bad boys, with their millions of admirers and imitators, portrayed variants on an outlaw sensibility keyed only to the recovery of pleasure, and a rejection of the fierce will to repression with which American men in the postwar period had become identified."[44] The space dividing the U.S. cult of Fidel from the nearly simultaneously emerging postcolonial critical-discursive "school" of Caliban (that which, Retamar tells us, begins with the publications of O. Mannoni's *Psychologie de la colonisation* in 1950, and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in 1952)[45] might in fact not be so great; if, as Gosse argues, "the recovery of desire" in the U.S. instance "through pleasure and the body, whether the kind of teenage sexuality dormant since the heyday of the young Frank Sinatra, or that which had always been unseen, like Ginsberg's homosexuality, was crucial to the watershed of the mid-1950's,"[46] then perhaps as crucial on the postcolonial scene, but perhaps for historical reasons not explicitly articulated, were the beginnings of a male homosocial fascination, one Retamar would probably disavow, with the unquestionably homo- and gynophobic figuration of "Caliban."

On the other hand, in "Caliban Revisited" Retamar actually indulges in a little boys'-club fantasy work of his own, constructing a scene of odd historical reconciliation and redemption that not only suggests marked homosociality but that indeed crosses the line between the historical and the literary with a curious but unmistakable "flutter":

> There is just one world, in which the oppressor and the oppressed struggle, one world in which, rather sooner than later, the oppressed will be victorious. . . . The tempest has not subsided. But *The Tempest*'s shipwrecked

> sailors, Crusoe and Gulliver, can be seen, rising out of the waters, from terra firma. There, not only Prospero, Ariel and Caliban, Don Quixote, Friday and Faust, await them, but Sofia and Oliveira, and Colonel Aureliano Buendía as well, and—halfway between history and dream—Marx and Lenin, Bolívar and Martí, Sandino and Che Guevara.[47]

Quite a party, to be sure; this is an oddly utopian moment for the rigidly anti-idealist Retamar, one that exposes in the nonspace "halfway between history and dream" a figure of undecidability analogous to the one "in the flesh" Retamar lets slip by, even as the place where the hardest historical lessons are learned, in the earlier essay.

If I've clearly not come to praise Retamar in his analysis, neither, I should clarify, have I come to bury him. I'd like to understand my position in relation to him and other key members, like José David Saldívar, of at least one school of Caliban as analogous to the one Edward Said assumes toward them in *Culture and Imperialism*.[48] There I think Said actually misinterprets something of the spirit of Retamar's invocation of Shakespeare (if not of his character) when he terms it an "affectionate contention . . . for the right to represent the Caribbean," which is, however, motivated by "an impulse to contend [that is] part of a grander effort to discover the bases of an integral identity different from the formerly dependent, derivative one."[49] Said acknowledges, I think correctly, that "Retamar's choice of Caliban over Ariel signals a profoundly important ideological debate at the heart of the cultural effort to decolonize, an effort at the restoration of community and repossession of culture that goes on long after the political establishment of nation-states."[50] But even Said tempers this praise with a corrective, one that strategically employs Fanon to caution that, while becoming "aware of one's self as belonging to a subject people is the founding insight of anti-imperialist nationalism," the ensuing "nationalist consciousness can very easily lead to frozen rigidity."[51]

It is perhaps the strong impression I have of this "rigidity" in Retamar's essay that makes me question its viability, if overly revered and then left unrevised, as an instrument in the larger contemporary project of politically liberatory critical and cultural practices, a project I understand "Americas" Studies to claim for itself. Said warns us and, perhaps more gently than I've done, cautions Retamar that "the dangers of chauvinism and xenophobia remain very real," even in movements of anti-imperial resistance and liberation driven by nationalist configurations; it may well be "best when Caliban sees his own history as an aspect of the history of all subjugated men and women, and comprehends the complex truth of his own social and historical situation."[52]

The question I hope to have put to Retamar (and his disciples) at least implicitly in the preceding discussion is the role of the writer and critic in revolutionary and postcolonial projects larger and more complex than those taking place on his island, or in any one national space, whose response is commensurate to that scope, and to that complexity. In the rest of this essay, I hope to suggest briefly how the "Caliban" model of subversive creation and intellection might be manipulated and opened enough to include, for example, openly queer and queer-identified U.S. Latino writers like the novelist Arturo Islas and the poet Rafael Campo, both of whom combine questions of ethnic and sexual alterity in their work in trenchant subversion of that which passes for normal on both counts, but who also perform much of that subversion through a playful and even solicitous engagement of canonical forms and canonical writers, not the least of whom is Caliban's "creator," William Shakespeare.

Such an analysis not only challenges the limits of Retamar's vision but interrogates more fully the myopia of a "revolutionary imagination" that, returning to the epigraph by Brad Epps with which this essay began, too easily assumes that "the pleasure of the text, given to dissipation and wasteful dissemination, reflects and expands the pleasure of the flesh, [and] expands it, somewhat paradoxically, as the threat of a generalized sexual narcissism," since "one cannot focus on the play of the signifier without being in some way withdrawn from the work of society."[53] This last assertion seems to me not only conceptually lazy but strategically conceived to police cultural and critical work, and workers, in the manner I have been outlining here. I hope at this point to relax considerably as well my own "policing" correction of Retamar, his "Caliban," and their school; there are other scenes of instruction to enter here, spaces in which alternative disciplines may produce alternatives to discipleship, and in which some more serious and open attention to aesthetics may in turn generate a more responsibly historicized and politicized understanding of the experiences of pleasure.

To this end, Ramón Saldívar's argument concluding his own influential study of Chicano narratives rearticulates the relation of historical discursivity to the "realness" of events in a manner that lends itself well to the analysis at hand. There Saldívar defines "the 'Real' [as] an outer limit that the subject approaches in the anxiety of moments of truth—moments of personal crisis, of the loss of identity, or of the agonizing polarizations of revolutionary situations such as those experienced by the subjects of contemporary Chicano narrative. The make-up of 'history,' he goes on to conclude, "is not so much the empirical events of the world as the self-inscription and symbolization in texts of those events and in our thinking

about them."[54] Saldívar's terms, I think, can bear some slight modification and translation: the "outer limit" of the "Real" against which discursively constituted subjects collide and collapse can be read as a rim, a site of discontinuity to be sure, but one where the intense experience of an extremity that cannot be reduced to an opposition of irremediably polarized terms nevertheless holds the possibility if not the promise of some "give" to that limit, of some "beyond" to that border; and to this extent certainly the quality of this confrontation is not at all exclusively characteristic of Chicano narrative, or even of Latino discourses most broadly conceived. If anything, I'd like to mime Saldívar's analytical moves in this passage, a critical point in a chapter he entitles "The Reconstruction of American Literary History," to demonstrate their susceptibility to a collusive critical queering, one might say a sissification, that in turn not only may allow for a more representative enrollment policy for an alternative school of Caliban, but also will significantly reconfigure whose "America," and whose "literary history," such a school would reconstitute in its study.

Briefly, then, let me turn to recent texts by two openly gay Latino writers in order to begin the process of revising the policy of enrollment in such a school. The first, Arturo Islas's novel, *La Mollie and the King of Tears*, was completed but unfinished at the time of his death from AIDS complications in 1991; it concludes with a chapter entitled "Just Like Romeo and Juliet," a chapter that simultaneously resolves the novel's narrative conflicts and dissolves its textual and linguistic elements.[55] By any aesthetic standard *La Mollie* is deeply imperfect; the author saw his story line through to its end, but much of the local work of developing character, constructing anecdote and scene, and polishing language remained to be done. Nevertheless, *La Mollie*'s ambitions are as much about its own status as a work of art, and as a linguistic construct, as they are about the cautionary tale it tells about cross-cultural and transsexual communication, and it can therefore be legitimately analyzed accordingly. *La Mollie* plays aggressively with its Anglo and non-Anglo genealogies and, in frequent sparkling moments, manages impressive effects. Islas's novel consists of a first-person narrative performed as an impromptu monologue by Louie Mendoza, a Texan Chicano who comes to San Francisco and finds love with a wealthy Anglo woman named Molly; Louie is interviewed in a hospital waiting room by a silent interlocutor, a student collecting human interest stories, as Molly lies in a coma after taking a serious fall. Louie's story covers his entire life, culminating in the extraordinary set of events that keep him from getting home to Molly before her accident.

Louie's language represents an impressively sustained exercise on Islas's part in working-class Chicano street language, a dialect he rarely dared reproduce in his earlier novels. The risk pays off more than occa-

sionally for Islas, as in this crucial digression in the last chapter on the untranslatable names of Mexican *pan dulces*, literally "sweet breads":

> I wish I could tell you the names of them sweet breads in Spanish, man, 'cause changing em to English makes em lose their flavor. Don't get me wrong, neither. I think everybody needs to know English to get by in this country—the real English, not that liar's language the businessmen, lawyers and politicians use. Don't even get me started on those dollar-bill words and sentences we're supposed to learn 'cause it ain't English. . . . I even like Shakespeare's language better than that gobbledygook. . . . I don't want everybody to speak like me—that would be boring—but I don't want nobody telling me I can't talk this way neither. And all this caca about which is the real mother tongue—our language is accents, man.[56]

This last declaration, in a Chicano novel that makes frequent loving nods to the British literary tradition, from Shakespeare through the line of ribald novels featuring lustful Molls and Mollys, counters almost directly the use of the first-person plural in the discourse of "our" America championed by Retamar. Who, for Islas, is the "we" who can claim that "our language is accents"? Few readers would accuse Islas of anything like an unreflective or cloying Anglophilia after reading *La Mollie*, but neither would one find in his text a simple nationalist solution to the Chicano community's political and cultural trials in the United States.

His relationship to queer culture is just as complex and ambivalent; one of the transformative scenes in the last chapter of *La Mollie* takes place in a gay South-of-Market leather bar called the Mind Shaft, where the injured and desperate Louie has gone in search of his gay brother Tomás. Louie's descriptions of what he observes there betray both the author's intimate knowledge of, and deep ambivalence toward, such scenes:

> The guy that's standing next to me['s] . . . all naked except for a pair of boots, a cowboy hat, and about a dozen clothespins clamped onto different parts of his body, even down there, where I never dreamed I would see one. . . . We used to have some pretty crude initiation ceremonies in our gang, man, but nothing like this. We only pretended we were gonna hurt guys where it hurt the most—but we never actually did it. This dude made me thinka them stories about Indian tribes and the kindsa rituals they put young bucks through before they'd make it into manhood. He made me forget all about my own pain just thinking about what it must feel like to be pinched in the you-know-what. . . . I'm telling you, man, what them sissies can take is more than any straight guy I ever know could take or would want to. I gotta hand it to them fruits—they can handle pain better than me.[57]

The Mind Shaft, a wildly alternative scene of discipline than the "school" of Caliban imagined by Retamar, certainly still has its lessons to

teach us about the relationship between power, the practices we term either erotic or aesthetic, and the complex of sensations they produce, a complex that bears no simple conceptualization into the binaries of pleasure and pain. Islas, certainly an expert handler of "literary" English, could not from these or any other passages in *La Mollie* be said to have been taught "the master's language" but to "curse" him in turn; instead, Islas's language, his "language of accents," provides him with an opportunity to forego the whole dynamic of mastery without ignoring the historical legacies of power. If anything, I think, he can be said to engage in a practice that is equally his as it is Shakespeare's; the practice of a comic, and comically subversive, discourse, one not without precedents but always in the process of transformation, one that never loses sight of pleasure even as it puts itself through the rigors, not to say the pains, of its chosen rituals, the disciplining rehearsals of form and convention.[58]

In the two collections of poems he has thus far published, Cuban American poet Rafael Campo makes what are simultaneously more and less explicit nods to Shakespeare and his various legacies than those by Arturo Islas I've just discussed. The earlier collection, *The Other Man Was Me: A Voyage to the New World*, begins with a section entitled "Learning the Language," signaling rather readily Campo's willingness to invoke certain Calibanic (and other Shakespearean) echoes.[59] These "first" of his collected works comprise even as they explicitly perform a kind of literary apprenticeship on Campo's part. By undertaking this poetic voyage to a "new world" Campo means in turn to undergo a process of education that neither rejects nor surrenders to the precedents of Western literary tradition; indeed, Campo's new world invites the retention of old forms by breathing new life into them via a radical process of what can only be called strategic resignification. "Learning the Language" begins with a poem, "Camino Real," that signals ironically that the "royal way" in which these poems are directed leads to no resuscitated golden land but to ever sharper and more refined forms of verbal expression at once literary and critical. "I speak by cutting ruts in air," the poet declares, "cutting" at once to rupture and route a line and a lineage, combining in a single verbal gesture the violently institutionalizing inscription of a whole colonizing history *and* the legacy of critical cultural reactions to it. This poet's inheritance bears all the complications of its doubleness, from its inherent dialectal bilingualism to its intrinsic dialectical materiality. "The Spanish that I never knew at all," he confesses, "My heritage and punishment, the walls/At once too sharp and weak to lean upon," nevertheless generates quite a productive tension with the English out of which these lines are spun; a tension productive enough to land the poet "In the Form" (literally, the sonnet) by the end of this first section.

These notions recur in a number of the poems comprising the body

of "Learning the Language"; often Campo personalizes the larger literary, cultural, and political histories into which these poems fit by translating them into the terms of his own filial relations. Spanish is both his father's language and the language of a particularly hispanic patriarchy; it is the language that, having been learned literally from the father, becomes the instrument of both the son's indenture to and liberation from paternal and patriarchal authority. "I write to you in English, Father," the poet-son explains in "San Fernando," "Because I am evolving. I'm freer/Than I was before. My hairy chest/Contains a thumping drum, some resolving/ Process, a demand to be loved." One can almost imagine these as softened sentiments from, but certainly still potentially assignable to, a Caliban learning in his own way to demand his freedom from Prospero, and certainly the insistence of island images in Campo's explicitly Cubanized work reinforces this association.[60]

In "San Fernando" the poet goes on to accuse, "When you/Fooled me, it was like I'd been to Cuba," and in so doing confesses to an illicit fantasy that combines his own projection of his father's perhaps misplaced desire to revisit or even return to his home with his own desire for his father. "Cuba" for the poet takes the place of the passive objectified woman in the conventional homosocial triangle, but in this case she is explicitly identified with masculine elements that conventionally go repressed in such a scenario: "The dark men. The inaccessible island,/ Like the parts of you I couldn't see/Beneath your towel." The poet's strategic perversion of his father's otherwise conventional exile desire for return develops further in the following poem, "Belonging," which elaborates the fantasy of return, this time on the son's part, but never without some attention to the displaced desire of (and for) his father: "I went to Cuba on a raft I made," he tells us, "It felt so sleek and dangerous, like sharks/Or porno magazines or even thirst." Though he discovers there "nothing but the same damn sun,/Indifferent but oddly angry, the face/My father wore at dinnertime," still the poet feels a compulsion to stay, so he "stripped," he tells us, "And sat there naked in an effort to attract some cannibals, but no one came." What positive or negative fantasies the poet held, and the extent to which they were borrowed from his father's own store of fantasies, give way at poem's end to a desire for "a book/That told the history of my lost people"; and while a conventional reading of such a wishful declaration might reinforce a conventional understanding of history's privilege over fantasy, that is, over fiction, and over literature and art in general, such a reading would disrespect the unconventional poetic imagination from which this declaration issues.

Indeed, Campo's decision to answer the wish in "Belonging," and to conclude "Learning the Language" with a Shakespearean sonnet as fastidious and playful (at once) as "In the Form," articulates as it performs

precisely the complex, ambivalent relationship to genealogy, tradition, and even heritage that perhaps only a queer Caliban could assume. The key to the text may be held in the observation that the sonnet, and perhaps all formal verse, derives its energy from negatives and absences ("Tension. Words withheld. A rhyme/Where memory has left its watermark."), but if the poem is an answer to "Belonging"'s wish for "a book/That told the history of my lost people," the keys to "In the Form" are multiple and various: Campo can claim various configurations of a "lost people" to whom he might belong, not least among whom are those who know intimately that no discussion of genealogy can take genealogy for granted as the neutral, not to say natural, result of any particular kind of sexual, textual, or cultural reproduction. This sonnet's critical turn is a parenthesis about parenting occupying lines 4, 5, 6 and most of 7, a grammatical disturbance of the coherence of the first and second quatrains, and a celebration of the phonetic and syntactic perversions imbedded in the failure of "stork" to rhyme with "work," and of the stork's work to correspond in any simple way with Shakespeare's: "(My parents" the poet remembers once "arguing about the stork,/And whether it appears in Shakespeare's work:/'Let not the marriage of true minds—'/'That's enough, dear!')" The aborted quotation of *one* Shakespearean sonnet does nothing in this instance to prevent the successful iteration of *the* Shakespearean sonnet, however; instead, it demonstrates rather convincingly what remains possible beyond the limitations of any restrictive opposition of the historical and the aesthetic.

What Campo's meticulously Shakespearean sonnet performs is indeed the rediscovery of a "history," that of a people "lost" not *from*, but *in* the Shakespearean sonnet, at least as it has been traditionally received and officially reproduced; "In the Form" reclaims a history in literary texts for homoerotic desire without choosing to sacrifice either history or literature, and it is perhaps this refusal to choose between them that marks most eloquently the depth of the poem's political insight and commitment. In this respect it also performs most explicitly the work of a revolutionary artist who knows better than to sacrifice either of the drives implicated in that complex term; history may indeed be "what hurts," but pleasures have their histories too, and there is nothing either politically irresponsible or simply, narcissistically self-indulgent about a well-crafted sonnet that acknowledges its origins in "A passion gone berserk" and that likens its work to that of

> A whetstone where the ax of language grinds
> Until precision is its point, until
> The carving out of one's own heart is fine
> And painless as a summer's breeze.

That both Campo and Islas solicit Shakespeare openly, perhaps defiantly, says as much about their desire to announce their own queerness as it does to challenge the restrictive Anglophobia (often masking an insidious homophobia) of what often passes for U.S. Latino critical discourse in the wake of Retamar's "Caliban"; Spanish, we know, is no less the colonialist's language than English, and no more the mother tongue of historically marginalized communities than English. Writers like Campo and Islas thus provide us with both a challenge and an opportunity to put more fully into practice critical procedures that acknowledge the transnational movements and multilingual forces shaping cultural production in spaces increasingly loosely termed *American*. The challenge to practitioners in both "American" and "Americas" Studies may indeed be to return to one of Retamar's own cherished sources, José Martí, who devotes considerable attention in "Our America" to the role of the "American" versus the "European" university, and to ask ourselves anew, some hundred years after the publication of that essay, and at a moment when the possibilities for cultural and intellectual exchange between Cuba and *all* her "American" neighbors appear likely to expand, what the cultural critic's role should be in the ongoing process of shaping truly representative "American" Studies in truly representative "American" institutions.

Notes

This essay owes a significant debt to groups of people too numerous to mention here individually who have generously responded to it on the several occasions I have had to present it publicly. These include a workshop group at the 1997 American Comparative Literature Association Conference, a Humanities Seminar on the Futures of American Studies conducted at Dartmouth College during the summer of 1997, the Harvard Center for Literary and Cultural Studies (special thanks to William Handley), and the Dartmouth College Humanities Forum.

1. Brad Epps, "Proper Conduct: Reinaldo Arenas, Fidel Castro, and the Politics of Homosexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6 (October 1995): 231–83. See especially the discussion on pages 255–58, out of which all the passages I cite in the main text are taken.

2. In addition to texts cited in this essay by Heberto Padilla, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, José Quiroga, and others, see Marvin Leiner's *Sexual Politics in Cuba: Machismo, Homosexuality, and AIDS* (New York: Westview, 1994); Ian Lumsden's *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1996); and Allen Young's *Los Gays Bajo La Revolución Cubana*, trans. Máximo Etlis (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1984). I want to stress here that the revolutionary abuses of queer and dissident writers documented in these texts are rarely merely proferred to anger and outrage; Leiner, Lumsden, and Young all situate these practices in contexts that can explain without necessarily exonerating them. Certainly there were compelling historical rea-

sons to link especially male bourgeois homosexual tourism to some of the more decadent and exploitative practices of Cuba's former colonizers; but in the revolution's hands this link became a full and uncompromising identification, one that excused any sort of suppression of criticism of the regime as both ideologically and libidinally collusive with those colonizers.

3. Roberto Fernández Retamar, "Caliban," in *Caliban and Other Essays*, trans. Edward Baker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 42–43. See also generally the Spanish text of Retamar's essay, "Caliban: Apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra América," (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Diogenes), 1972.

4. Heberto Padilla, *Self-Portrait of the Other: A Memoir*, trans. Alexander Coleman (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1990), 132. A detailed account of his experiences and the international controversy they inspired appears on pp. 128–89.

5. Padilla, *Self-Portrait*, 134, 165.

6. Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Mea Cuba*, trans. Kenneth Hall (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1994), 74–78.

7. Retamar, *Caliban*, 52–53.

8. Ibid., 3, 30.

9. The list here is necessarily incomplete, but direct and indirect echoes of Retamar's work may be detected in, for example, Hortense Spillers's introduction, "Who Cuts the Border? Some Readings on 'America,'" to *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1–25; in Gayatri Spivak's "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 262–80; and in Coco Fusco's "El diario de Miranda/Miranda's Diary," in *English is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New, 1995), 3–20. Perhaps not surprisingly, these three critics raise at least obliquely the question of gender politics in any invocation of Caliban, but mostly apologetically; see Spillers's forced identification of Caliban with his mother, Sycorax, in her attempt to feminize his symbolic function in postcolonial discourse (6–8), and Fusco's own benign attempt to recast Caliban as Miranda's "seducer" rather than rapist before taking on the role of Miranda herself (6) in order to report on recent cultural and political relations, mostly failed, between Cuba and the United States. My essay will take up the work of at least three additional critics, José David Saldívar, Ramón Saldívar, and Edward Said, who also make strategic use of Retamar's "Caliban."

10. Epps, "Proper Conduct," 234.

11. The gender complexity implicit in the Ariel/Caliban pairing is aptly summarized in Stephen Orgel's introduction to the *World's Classics* edition of *The Tempest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984): "In contrast to Caliban's elemental sameness," Orgel argues, "Ariel is volatile and metamorphic. He is male, the asexual boy to Caliban's libidinous man, but (in keeping with his status as a boy actor) all the roles he plays at Prospero's command are female: sea nymph, harpy, Ceres" (27).

12. See, for example, Carlos Fuentes's prologue to Margaret Sayers Peden's translation of *Ariel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), which apologizes almost embarrassingly for the author's interest in a text that so "irritating[ly]" embodies salient qualities of Latin American *modernismo*, a movement that, according to Fuentes, "sought a cosmopolitan atmosphere for Latin American poetry, cultivated art for art's sake, and affected an accompanying languor,

elegantly settled into the semirecumbent position of turn-of-century [*sic*] ennui"(13). Fuentes's thinly veiled associations of modernist aesthetic sensibility and a too-relaxed (presumably for men . . .) semirecumbent sensuality buttress much of his discussion of Rodó's legacy, especially among Latin American public orators, young men obviously so seduced by Rodó's rhetorical "excesses" that they were compelled to rehearse them in public performance. Even Fuentes has to confess that he "went to hear them out of some kind of educational yet sensual need: a warning to myself, with a dash of masochism. It was rare," he goes on,

> for the tremulous orators of our youth not to quote Rodó in their speeches: the topics of the spiritual versus the utilitarian, blithe Latin American Ariel fighting off brutish North American Caliban, beauty confronting ugliness, followed by a whole parade of simplistic dualisms . . . were facile, tempting devices. . . . And Rodó had wrapped *Ariel* in such a glowing sycophancy of youth! Bathed in virtue, the young orator appeared to prolong the puzzling fame of José Enrique Rodó.

Certainly the nature of Fuentes's intimately detailed, obviously fascinated account of such openly if rhetorically performed homoeroticism might strike a contemporary reader as equally "puzzling"; what remains too depressingly predictable is Fuentes's equally obvious need to distance himself from such scenes. See also Oscar Montero, "*Modernismo* and Homophobia: Darío and Rodó," in *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, ed. Daniel Balderston and Donna J. Guy (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997), 101–17.

13. Retamar, *Caliban*, 15.

14. Ibid., 24–25.

15. At no point in this discussion do I mean to suggest that nothing has changed in Cuba since 1970 with regard to official policies or unofficial attitudes toward homosexuals. Both of the texts by Leiner and Lumsden referenced in note 2 above trace many of the advances made on both levels in Cuba in the past three decades. I also refer to these advances in my discussion of Senel Paz's novella *El Lobo, El Bosque y El Hombre Nuevo* in my "Docile Bodies, Volatile Texts: The Political Erotics of Cuban-Exile Prison Writing," *Annals of Scholarship* 12 (fall 1998): 91–112. The "spirit of the times" in Cuba in 1970 was, of course, characterized by more than a repressive anxiety about alternate sexualities and their relation to alternate cultural practices; 1970, as a representative group of historians concurs, was a political and economic watershed for Cuba and for the revolution, one fueled primarily by a disastrous, and disastrously overprojected, sugar harvest, which led in turn to both political and cultural retrenchments on the part of the government. See, for example, Herbert Matthews's mostly sympathetic analysis of Cuba in the early 1970s in *Revolution in Cuba: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: Scribner's, 1975), esp. chap. 1 on "The 1970 Watershed" and chap. 14 on "The Cultural Revolution"; and Marifel Pérez-Stabile, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

16. Retamar, *Caliban*, 28.

17. Ibid., 30–34.

18. Ibid., 36 (p. 75 in the Spanish text cited in note 3).

19. Ibid., 44.

20. José Quiroga, "Fleshing Out Virgilio Piñera from the Cuban Closet," in *¿Entiendes?: Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings*, ed. Emilie L. Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 168. Quiroga's work

is generally as exemplary as Epps's in its intelligent critique of Cuban revolutionary culture's homophobic sensibilities and practices; see also his fine reading of the recent Cuban film *Strawberry and Chocolate* in "Homosexualities in the Tropic of Revolution," in Balderston and Guy, *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*, 133–51.

21. Quiroga, "Fleshing Out Virgilio Piñera," 169.

22. Epps, "Proper Conduct," 249.

23. Ibid., 252.

24. Ibid., 256.

25. Retamar, *Caliban*, 42.

26. José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 139.

27. Ibid., 143–45.

28. This, I think, is the point missed by such otherwise comprehensive analyses of the Calibanic call for a radical reconfiguration of postnational, postcolonial cultural (and specifically "American") studies as Carolyn Porter's "What We Know That We Don't Know: Remapping American Literary Studies" in *American Literary History* 6 (fall 1994): 467–526. Porter praises what she calls the "critical synthesis" Saldívar's work "performs by bringing 'the school of Caliban' to the forefront of an American cultural studies that is . . . radically reconfigured as a field" (504). But while Porter emphasizes what she calls the "historical location" of "the school of Caliban . . . as the latest version of an anticolonialist politics that achieved its first victory with the Haitian Revolution" and can can count among its subsequent moments the 1959 Revolution in Cuba (510–11), nowhere in her essay does Porter actually specifically "locate" the essay by which Saldívar's is fired in its own specific (and, as I have tried to argue, troublingly complex) historical moment.

29. Saldívar, *Dialectics*, xvi.

30. Ibid., 15, 10.

31. José Piedra, "Nationalizing Sissies," in Bergmann and Smith, *¿Entiendes?*, 372.

32. See, for example, Gilles Deleuze's analysis of the sadomasochistic contract in his essay "Coldness and Cruelty" collected alongside Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* in the volume *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: Zone, 1991).

33. Piedra, "Nationalizing Sissies," 374.

34. Ibid., 387.

35. Ibid., 386.

36. Ibid.

37. See Butler's most recent work, especially her introduction to *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), and *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997).

38. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 6.

39. Ibid., 23–45.

40. Padilla, *Self-Portrait*, 144–48.

41. Epps, "Proper Conduct," 268.

42. It is also worth noting briefly here that even Martí has not been immune to a little "queering"; in a novella by Reinaldo Arenas called *Trip to Havana* and in two recent articles by Benigno Sánchez-Eppler and Sylvia Molloy, explorations

of Martí's curious tendency to overcelebrate father/son filial love, and of his anxious fascination with Walt Whitman's "Calamus" poems, have already begun the work of queering Retamar's own revered paragon, the model of the Calibanic intellectual of "our" America. See especially Sánchez-Eppler's article on Arenas's novella, "Call My Son Ismael: Exiled Paternity and Father/Son Eroticism in Reinaldo Arenas and José Martí," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 6 (spring 1994): 69–97; and Molloy's elegant and erudite "His America, Our America: José Martí Reads Walt Whitman," in *Breaking Bounds: Whitman and American Cultural Studies*, ed. Betsy Erkkila and Jay Grossman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 83–91.

43. Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America, and the New Left* (London: Verso, 1993).

44. Ibid., 53.

45. Retamar, *Caliban*, 12.

46. Gosse, *Where the Boys Are*, 53–54.

47. Retamar, *Caliban*, 55.

48. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), chap. 3, sec. 2.

49. Said, *Culture*, 213.

50. Ibid., 213.

51. Ibid., 214.

52. Ibid. In her analysis of Retamar in "Who Cuts the Border?" (see n. 10 above) Hortense Spillers has occasion to cite Fredric Jameson's Foreword to the English translation of "Caliban" published in the United States by the University of Minnesota Press. There, Spillers tells us, Jameson calls for a more vigilant "situation-specificity" in the work of locating cultural products in their historically specific moments—this, I think, is also what Said calls for in his discussion of Retamar and the uses, good and bad, to which his essay may be put.

53. See n. 2 above.

54. Ramón Saldívar, *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 211.

55. Arturo Islas, *La Mollie and the King of Tears* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

56. Ibid., 136–37.

57. Ibid., 141–42.

58. In work on Islas I plan to pursue further elsewhere, I hope to develop what I see as his simultaneous deployment of a Chicano dialect(ics), which keeps his work tethered to the historical "real" as Ramón Saldívar would have it, and a queer dialogics that engages in precisely the kind of open, comic Bakhtinian play that never loses sight of the traditionally subversive potential intrinsic to a "novelistic" discourse, which Bakhtin might argue could include Shakespeare. Islas even comes close to the language of Rabelais in Louie's brief mention that one of the more memorably named of the Mexican sweet breads was the *pedo de monja*, or nun's fart.

59. Rafael Campo, *The Other Man Was Me: A Voyage to the New World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) and *What the Body Told* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996). I discuss here only the poems in "Learning the Language," the first section of *The Other Man Was Me*, 13–27.

60. At the same time, "Fernando" is the Spanish translation of Ferdinand, and thus might just as readily apply to the son Prospero hopes to acquire through Miranda.