

Bridges to Memory

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The numerous approaches to accusations that have been launched against writers who participated in the Ediciones El Puente [The Bridge Editions] project have not yet managed to liberate from the confines of ostracism and marginality dozens of authors who are still submerged in the dark waters of historical oblivion. An emerging collective literature whose ideological thematic singular underpinnings tried to destroy black skin, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and aesthetic irreverence met its match in an entire generation of highly creative intellectuals.

The more than twenty writers working with El Puente published 36 titles from between 1960-1965, representing many genres and possessing qualities and importance enough for them to be reincorporated into the nation's patrimony. Notwithstanding, the ghosts of El Puente's undertakers are still flying overhead, like vultures. Censorship's omniscient and hirsute hand is firing a warning shot as soon as anyone loiters around its unburied creators' cadavers.

The publication in *La Gaceta de Cuba* of the dossier "Re-pasar El Puente" [Re-Crossing El Puente] was a very serious examination of the intricacies of a project that was stigmatized in its own time, and is today "that chapter of the history of Cuban literature that was lost during the revolutionary period, that our most important critical and historiographic texts—read dictionaries,

anthologies, surveys, bibliographies and memoirs—silence with the greatest of ease," according to Robert Zurbarano."¹

According to poet Lina de Feria, one of the voices that was linked back then to El Puente, "*La Gaceta de Cuba* made an effort, with the polemical works it published, but a huge mess immediately ensued, and any discussion of this was carried out from a purely personal point of view. Certain individuals were victims of vitriolic attacks, the result of which was that there was no way to clear up the situation."²

What this means is that any effort to publicize the cause of Ediciones El Puente's closing will be sabotaged, not just by concealed, official censorship, but also by the ethical perversion and artistic cowardess of many creative people, whether or not they are part of said project.

Caught on the other side of this wall of silence that guards against the rescue of some realms of literary memory (such as material written and published during the time Ediciones El Puente was open), are victims of cultural politics, individuals who might be able to shed some light on causes for Cuba's current, disastrous course, but who are rotting in oblivion. This clearly explains why there are still some writers condemned to silence in this supposed era of increasing openness with regard to art and literature. This explains the persistent taboos and the silencing of irreverent voices that once dared to write freely.

Most Cuban intellectuals are fearful, not only of the ghosts who are emerging from El Puente to directly accuse them of their complicity with those in power, but also of losing privileges they enjoy, like being able to travel abroad, or remaining in Cuba as part of an officially approved group of pens for hire. No one wants to recall that the stigmatization with which revolutionary cultural politics marked Ediciones El Puente focused primarily on the blackness of most of its collaborators. When it came time to 'purify them,' race became a dominant criterion, which went far beyond just the supposedly dissolute behavior of some of them.

According to *Aquella Luz en La Habana* [That Light in Havana], by Gerardo Fullea León, "one of things that characterized those of us who worked with Ediciones El Puente was the fact that a significant number of us were black, something that had never been, seen, and was never again seen in all of Cuban literary history."³ This specificity, when combined with "another of its distinguishing characteristics...the high proportion of women, homosexuals, poor and other socially marginalized people who through it expressed their diverse literary conflicts and questions," added up to sufficient number of sins for us to be excommunicated by revolutionary inquisitors.⁴

In addition to the significant milestones and accomplishments of the press, which brought upon it one of the most criminal acts in the history of official censorship, "El Puente, in its effort to insert into the Cuban literary canon subjects and expressions seen as subaltern, is an enclave of literary challenges and contestations."⁵ All these extra-literary reasons explain why these works, which were offering new subjects, language, restlessness, and other existential conflicts in the literature that was being created at the very beginning of the revolutionary period, were rejected by

intellectuals who were mortally afraid that words from true reality might enter their very own 'lettered city.' No intellectual whose poetic diet included Mayakovsky, Lautreamont, Ballagas or Rimbaud could allow Manolo Granados, to include in his poem "Desde atrás" [From Behind] (in *El orden presentido* [The Prescient Order]) lines like this: "Blacks here want to be men / Poor blacks! / Don't they know everything is compartmentalized?"⁶

According to Alberto Abreu Arcia, "the poetic voice here is pluralized; it assumes the voice of those subjects who have been pushed aside to the margins of their raciality, those who lack a history of their own. In *El orden presentido*, being black is homologous to an animal or savage condition, or to not existing at all."⁷ In my opinion, this is the voice of the classless black person who hears what's coming and guesses he will be returning to his slave barracks, even if this time the lashing won't come from the plantation foreman but rather a censor's intolerant tongue.

Notes:

1. Zurbano, Roberto. "Re-pasar El Puente." *La Gaceta de Cuba* 4 (julio-agosto 2005): 3.
2. Álvarez, Andrés. "Como un pino cortado muy lejos del mar. Conversación con Lina de Feria." *La Gaceta de Cuba* 3 (mayo-junio 2009): 22.
3. Fullea León, Gerardo. "Aquella luz de La Habana." *La Gaceta de Cuba* 4 (julio-agosto 2005): 5.
4. Zurbano, Roberto. Op. cit. 5.
5. Abreu, Alberto. *Los juegos de la escritura o la re-escritura de la historia*. La Habana: Casa de Las Américas, 2007: 74.
6. Granados, Manolo. *El orden presentido*. La Habana: Ediciones El Puente, 1963.
7. Abreu, Alberto. Op. cit. 76.