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**Piñera's Politics: Writings on the New Cuba in
*Revolución and Lunes***

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Hoy por hoy el escritor cubano es una realidad tan palpable como el obrero y el campesino con todos los deberes y derechos de éstos . . . El escritor cubano, por ser un producto de la Revolución, está en el deber de reflejarla.

– Virgilio Piñera, “Nueva imagen del escritor cubano”

Hasta el treinta y uno de mil novecientos cincuenta y ocho [Cuba] era la mansa ovejita del manso rebaño; porque nos limitábamos a malvender nuestro azúcar, porque permitíamos que nuestras tierras fueran usufructuadas por los vecinos del Norte, porque nos gobernaban a través de quislings vendidos a su oro . . . Parece que los americanos desoyen las lecciones de la Historia; con mente típicamente feudal se empeñan en hacer perdurar una situación que hace rato está en el mundo puesto al lado.

– Virgilio Piñera, “Infierno Inesperado”

For the vast majority of Cuban intellectuals the triumph of the Revolution in January 1959 gave cause for great enthusiasm. The victory of Fidel Castro and his rebel forces over Fulgencio Batista not only instilled in them a concrete sense of hope that the country would finally emerge from an era of frustration, oppression, and rampant political corruption of the Batista dictatorship, but also presented the distinct possibility of a renaissance in the arts that would resuscitate Cuba from decades of cultural stagnation. In the euphoric months of the early phase of the Revolution, many Cuban authors who had experienced the cultural decay of the Batista era from home, and scores who returned from self-imposed exile, expressed their support of the new government and its sweeping social, economic, and cultural reforms through their creative works as well as in articles and editorials, which they published in various outlets. Two of the most important publications in which Cuban authors expressed their support for the New Cuba were *Revolución*, the official organ of the July 26th Movement,

and its cutting-edge literary supplement *Lunes de Revolución*, which first appeared in March 1959. The first issue of *Lunes* contained an editorial statement that perfectly summed up the view, shared by so many, that the Revolution was a liberating force that would finally make it possible for the country's artists and intellectuals to become a significant part of the life and politics of the nation: "Ahora la Revolución ha roto todas las barreras y le ha permitido al intelectual, al artista, al escritor integrarse a la vida nacional, de la que estaban alienados" ("Una posición")

Like so many of his fellow Cuban writers, Virgilio Piñera welcomed the triumph of the Revolution with open arms, and he viewed the momentous events of the opening months of 1959 as auspicious signs that the revolutionary government would bring about positive change on many fronts. Despite his consistent endorsement of the Revolution in its early years, however, Virgilio Piñera – along with many other writers from his literary generation – was often criticized for not having taken part in the struggle against Batista and for having written escapist works that eluded Cuba's political reality. This negative image of a pessimistic intellectual who had scorned politics throughout this literary career led many of his detractors to believe that Virgilio Piñera was never truly committed to the Cuban Revolution and its many campaigns.

Motivated by this false assumption that Piñera was disenchanted with the sweeping social, economic and cultural reforms of the Revolution, for instance, early critics of his masterful play *El flaco y el gordo*, which Piñera penned in early Spring 1959, erroneously read this important text as a categorically antirevolutionary work since it fails to express the exuberance of the era. However, as I have argued elsewhere, Virgilio Piñera's supposed failure to express an unbridled sense of optimism in the earliest days of the Revolution simply underscored the fact that he was a realist who knew that undoing decades of social, economic, and cultural decay and political corruption would not be easy.¹ He likewise believed – as Fidel Castro and his fellow insurgents did – that in the opening months of 1959 the Revolution still had many battles to win, and that it was under constant threat from its enemies. Through *El Flaco y el Gordo* Piñera masterfully expressed this insecurity that so many Cubans felt, and he implicitly cautioned the new government and his compatriots to steer clear of the pitfalls of the past. Those who have read the play as a fatalistic work that underscores Piñera's skepticism and his lack of confidence in the Revolution have overlooked the fact that through *El flaco y el gordo* Piñera aimed to condemn the decades of social and political ills that had plagued Cuba's past rather than to forecast the country's uncertain future.² To be sure, during the time that he was writing the play, and for well over a year after its premiere in September 1959, Piñera had great confidence that Fidel Castro would manage to avoid the corruption and the gangsterism that had brought about the downfall of his predecessors.

Those who questioned Piñera's commitment to the Revolution during its early phase seem to have judged his writings from the same period through the greatly distorted

¹ See Thomas F. Anderson. "Hunger and Revolution: A New Reading of Virgilio Piñera's *El Flaco y el Gordo*." *Latin American Theatre Review*. Spring 2005: 23-38.

² See, for example. Natividad González Freire. *Teatro Cubano*. Havana: Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores, 1961: 162; Raquel Aguilú de Murphy. *Los textos dramáticos de Virgilio Piñera y el teatro del absurdo*. Madrid: Pliegos, 1989: 31; Matias Montes Huidobro. *Persona, vida y máscara en el teatro de Virgilio Piñera*. Miami, Universal, 1973: 224; Luís González Cruz. "Virgilio Piñera y el Teatro del Absurdo en Cuba." *Mester* 5.1(1974): 55.

prism of hindsight or to have overlooked the scores of articles that he published in *Revolución* and *Lunes* between January 1959 and the early months of 1961, in which he revealed his ever-increasing contentment as a writer in Cuba, his steadfast support of Fidel Castro and the Revolution, and his growing anger with United States and its imperialistic ambitions in Cuba and Latin America. In the pages that follow I will focus on several articles and editorials that Piñera published in *Revolución* and *Lunes* during the first two years of the Revolution, which I consider to be among his most important but least studied writings.

In my recent book, *Everything in Its Place: the Life and Works of Virgilio Piñera*, I underscore the significance of the Cuban author's critical essays and editorials, which number more than two hundred, and I argue that many of them are "important keys to understanding his lifelong estrangement from both Cuban and Argentine intellectual circles." In the same study I also contend that Virgilio Piñera was "a polemicist, provocateur, and master of counterdiscourse" ("Everything in Its Place" 9) who constantly sought to go against the grain. Though I still uphold these arguments, I aim to demonstrate in the present essay that in terms of his political thinking during the early phase of the Cuban Revolution Virgilio Piñera actually fit squarely in the mainstream. As an essayist and cultural critic Piñera was certainly best known for his testy and often irreverent attacks on authors and intellectuals, hallowed institutions, and respected publications, but he also dedicated a large number of articles and editorials to political issues. Though Piñera explored many political issues in his collaborations in *Revolución* and *Lunes*, I will focus in the present essay on his praise of the Revolution and its social and cultural reforms, and his criticism of the United States, its imperialistic past, and its constant aims to derail the Cuban Revolution and to deprive the nation of its newly won freedoms.

In Praise of the Revolution, In Defense of the Self

Piñera's first contribution to *Revolución* appeared on January 15, 1959, just one week after Castro and his fellow rebels had triumphantly marched into Havana. The title of the article, "Nubes amenazadoras," could easily lead one to assume that the article presents the Revolution in its early days in a negative light – as an ominous storm on the horizon, so to speak. However, in the opening lines Piñera clearly explained that he had chosen the title in order to reflect the contents of the now famous speech that Fidel Castro had delivered – and Piñera had watched on a live TV broadcast – at the Camp Columbia military complex (which was renamed Ciudad Libertad by the revolutionary government) in Havana in the small hours of the morning of January 9th 1959. As Piñera put it, "El discurso del comandante Castro, pronunciado en Columbia ante una gran multitud, no fue otra que una llamada al orden. Si tuviera que darle título a tal severa advertencia sugeriría éste: Nubes amenazadoras" (4).

In this speech, which has been called his "first great public performance as the leader of Cuba" (Szulc 469), Fidel Castro pleaded for the unity of the Cuban people and warned his compatriots to curb their enthusiasm and to avoid complacency because the island nation found itself at a difficult crossroads in its history. "The happiness is tremendous," he noted, "but nonetheless much remains to be done still. Let us not deceive ourselves into believing that what lies ahead will all be easy. Perhaps all that lies ahead will be more difficult. . . . I believe that people must be warned against an

excess of optimism . . . Seemingly peace has been won, but we should not be too optimistic” (“Ciudad Libertad”, 1).³

Those who are predisposed to seek out pessimistic undertones in Piñera’s writings may come away thinking that “Nubes amenazadoras” is a negative editorial since the author openly admitted that he was preoccupied that the Revolution could end up failing as had so many revolutionary struggles in Cuba’s tumultuous past. It is important to note, however, that the concerns that Piñera expressed in his article actually echoed many preoccupations that Fidel Castro had shared with the Cuban people in his speech at Camp Columbia. Castro had pointed out, for example, that the revolution against Machado had failed precisely because of the prevalence of gangsterism and bickering among various anti-Machado factions, and he warned that the same would happen to the present Revolution if the Cuban people were unable to unite. As he put it, “one of the worst evils in that struggle (against Machado) was the proliferation of revolutionary groups which soon destroyed each other, and as a result what happened was that Batista came and was left master of the revolution in Cuba” (3).

Virgilio Piñera, for his part, echoed several comments and slogans from Castro’s address – which Piñera incidentally praised for being the first honest speech by a modern Cuban leader – with his own denunciation of the power struggles that emerged among revolutionary splinter groups after the fall of Machado: “¿Cómo surgió el gangsterismo político en Cuba? Pues nació de la pugna de los bandos en lucha. Después de la caída de Machado – enemigo común – todos y cada uno de estos luchadores aspiró al poder . . . [y] las pandillas se trabaron en singular combate” (4). Moreover, in order to emphasize that his own insecurities about the future reflected those of Castro himself, Piñera reminded his readers that the Cuban leader had given the people abundant reasons to be on guard during such a crucial and dangerous stage of the Revolution.

El doctor Castro habló de armas robadas, de liderillos, de ambiciosos . . . y pronunció claramente la palabra gangsterismo. . . . Y es por todo esto, y no por los conejos de España, que el doctor Castro se haya visto obligado en la misma noche de su entrada triunfal en la capital a poner puntos sobre los íes y dar a conocer al pueblo que existe de hecho una gravísima situación planteada. (4)

Here Piñera was referring, among other things, to Castro’s revelation that members of the Directorio Revolucionario, an independent revolutionary faction that had launched urban struggles against Batista, were now amassing weapons with the apparent plan of overthrowing the new government. This disturbing information, along with numerous rumors of other plots against the Revolution, certainly justified Piñera’s deep concern that Cuban history would repeat itself, and likely prompted the following question that Piñera posed toward the end of the editorial: “¿Esta [revolución] sera como las de antes?” Though he did not offer a direct answer to this question that so many Cubans must have been pondering, Piñera closed by encouraging his readers to have hope in

³ All excerpts from Castro’s speeches are taken from the “Castro Speech Database” at the Latin American Network Information Center (LANIC) website. The database homepage is located at <<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html/index.html#basic>>. The URL of specific speeches can be found in the bibliography.

Castro and his fellow rebels. While he conceded that the mistrust and disillusion that were the byproducts of decades of political corruption in Cuba could not disappear overnight, he also admitted that the Cuban people had hundreds of good reasons to expect that the current Revolution would be unlike those of the past.

The predominant tone in Piñera's inaugural editorial in *Revolución* was of guarded optimism, and it clearly reflected the words that Cuba's Commander-in-Chief had shared with the people the week before. It is important to keep in mind, then, that even though Piñera was not overly exuberant during those tense and exhilarating first days of revolutionary triumph, which he later referred to in another article as "mitad paradisiacos, mitad infernales" ("La inundación" 13), his attitude was very much in keeping with the cautiously optimistic tone of Castro's first major addresses to the Cuban people. Moreover, in this article and in many that would follow in *Revolución* and *Lunes*, Piñera revealed his deep admiration for Fidel Castro at the same time that he hinted at his confidence that the Cuban leader would ultimately fulfill what he referred to in the final paragraph as "los sacrosantos principios de la Revolución" (4).

Following the publication of "Nubes amenazadoras" six months would pass before Piñera contributed another article to *Revolución*, but by June 1959 he had a weekly column – *Puntos, comas y paréntesis* –, which was read by thousands of subscribers from all walks of life.⁴ For more than a year Piñera published at least one article per week in the newspaper and its literary supplement, *Lunes*. Given that Piñera has often been described as an author who avoided Cuban reality and who scorned national politics, it will surely come as a surprise to some modern readers that out of some sixty articles and editorials that Piñera penned for *Revolución* and *Lunes* between June 1959 and July 1960, over a dozen focus on political themes, which range from criticism of Machado and Batista, to praise of Fidel Castro and the Revolution, to condemnation of the United States and its attempts to destabilize the Cuban Revolution. Moreover, numerous other articles and editorials reveal Piñera's unequivocal support of the Revolution through his frequent exaltation of cultural reforms and his numerous references to the greatly improved lot of artists and intellectuals in revolutionary Cuba.

In "Literatura y Revolución" Piñera praised the new government's promotion of the arts at the same time that he called on all Cuban writers to commit themselves to the Revolution since it had done so much for them. In addition to encouraging his fellow Cuban authors to embrace the Revolution and extol its ideals and causes in their works, Piñera also praised what he saw as one of the greatest virtues of life in the New Cuba; that is, that writers and artists were finally free to express themselves as they deemed appropriate. He argued that an author could demonstrate his or her commitment to the Revolution in many ways, and he commended the government for not strictly enforcing what he referred to as the classic Marxist postulate: "La literatura al servicio de la Revolución."

La Revolución ha prestado un grandísimo servicio al escritor: lo ha sacado del impasse esterilizante en que se encontraba para colocarlo en un plano de confrontación inmediato consigo mismo y con su propio pueblo.

¿Quiere decir esto que el escritor cubano tenga, de hoy en adelante que escribir sus libros según consignas? ¿Que reciba órdenes perentorias, que tenga que amoldarse a

⁴ The revolutionary government's official newspaper had a circulation of nearly 100,000 by the end of 1959, and topped 250,000 in the final months of 1961.

los temas que le señale la Revolución? Para evitar malentendidos (¡y cuántos no se originan día por día!) diremos que la propia Revolución no ha pensado por un momento dar pautas al escritor, en consignarlo a escribir lo que ella quiera. La revolución quiere más y más tractores pero no ha dicho el escritor que haga odas al tractor o que escriba una novela sobre la R. Agraria. (2)

Though they may seem highly ironic in light of the severe crackdown on intellectuals and artistic expression that would materialize in mid 1961, Piñera's words must be read in their proper context. To be sure, they reveal frequently ignored reality of the first phase of the Revolution; that is, that Cuban authors did indeed enjoy liberties and saw possibilities that they could only have dreamed of before January 1, 1959. Moreover, Piñera's comments illustrate like few others just how much faith he had in the Revolution in its early years, and his appreciation for the drastic improvement in his own status as a writer in the New Cuba.

In many articles Piñera combined praise for the Revolution with advice as to how Cuban artists and intellectuals could best express their indebtedness to it. In "El arte hecho Revolución, la Revolución hecha arte," for example, he applauded the revolutionary government for replacing the image of a dilapidated and fragmented nation with one of strength and soundness, but he focused his attention on the ever-improving lot of artists and intellectuals in Cuba. He marveled at the fact that writers were no longer viewed as eccentric oddballs with nothing to contribute to society, and he gave thanks to the Revolution for having liberated them from what he called "las cien humillaciones cotidianas." Piñera insisted that since the status of artists of every ilk had improved drastically – he argued, for example, that a poet now occupied the same level as a government minister or a member of the working class – they all needed to pay their dues by defending the Revolution, committing themselves to it, and, most importantly, by expressing its strength and beauty in their work.

el nuevo escritor de nuestro momento debe y tiene que vivir en peligro, comprometerse mañana, tarde y noche y . . . expresar en su obra la hermosura viril de la Revolución. Esa hermosura está allí, todavía intodaca, inexpresada. ¡Pero si es un cuerno de abundancia!: nuevos mitos, nuevos símbolos, la montaña, el llano, las barbas, el clandestinaje, los héroes, las torturas, los chivatos, los planes de invasión, los contrarrevolucionarios, las asechanzas del exterior, las incursiones aéreas y hasta esos nuevos peligros y esas nuevas esperanzas que están por nacer. (2)

It is, of course, ironic that in his ardent call on authors to express the "virile beauty" of the Revolution in their works, Piñera inadvertently called attention to the fact that in his own writings – with the exception of his articles and editorials in *Revolución* and *Lunes* – he largely failed to celebrate the type of images that he referred to in his article. This apparent inconsistency between Piñera's words and actions provoked criticism from his detractors and played an important role in his eventual fall from grace.

For as long as he felt that he was in good standing with the Revolution, however, Piñera spoke out against those who continued to criticize Cuban intellectuals for their supposed lack of commitment to it. In "Aviso a los escritores", for example, he complained that "a diario se nos dice que no subimos a la Sierra, que no tenemos derecho a nada . . . El asunto es muy otro" (2). While he bravely conceded that he and many of his fellow intellectuals had done little for the Revolution before its triumph in

1959 – “es muy cierto que muy poco o nada hicimos por ella en su período contrabatistiano” (2)—, he also pointed to his own situation as a regular collaborator in *Revolución*, which was the official organ of the July 26th movement, as an example of how many intellectuals who had not taken up arms were by now steadfast supporters of and contributors to the Revolution.

In the same article Piñera insisted that there were still far too many authors who had not decided where they stood in terms of the Revolution. Echoing the increasingly popular slogan “con Cuba o contra Cuba,” he closed the article with the following call to Cuban writers:

La Revolución nos dice: me tomas o me dejas, pero acaba por definirte. Y no definirse, andar por las ramas, estar en la cerca y otras cositas puede, y de hecho hace, grandísimo daño a la Revolución. Aviso, pues a los escritores que concluyan por definirse, y aquellos que ya se han definido que pongan en evidencia a los que coquetean con al Revolución y con la Reacción. Será el único modo de saber cuántos somos, por qué luchamos, y a qué enemigos debemos enfrentarnos. (2)

Though Piñera’s appeal was certainly motivated by a sincere desire to convince irresolute writers to embrace the Revolution and to recognize all that it had accomplished in the arena of Cuban culture, one gets the impression that he was also trying to bolster his own image as a supporter and promoter of the Revolution. Just over a month later, on January 29, 1960, Piñera published a follow-up editorial to “Aviso a escritores,” the predominant tone of which is somewhat defensive. Though the principal aim of “Milicia de trabajadores intelectuales” was ostensibly to pay homage to a group of Cuban writers for unequivocally defining their commitment to the Revolution by forming their own militia unit, Piñera seems to have been equally interested in underscoring his unwavering commitment to the Revolution. As he had in previous editorials, Piñera conceded that he and many of his cohorts had not participated in the armed struggle against Batista or otherwise actively taken part in the Revolution until after its triumph in January 1959: “Hasta ahora no habíamos sido otra cosa que personas privadas ... sin consciencia revolucionaria . . . Vale decir que vivíamos sumergidos, inmersos en el Arte, con total indiferencia a esos problemas nacionales aludidos” (2). However, he went further this time by suggesting that writers like himself – who had remained detached for so long or who had not joined a militia unit – were not wholly to blame, since prevailing attitudes in Cuba had made them feel unfit for the tasks required of so-called true revolutionaries:

A diario oímos decir “Pero un escritor está para escribir y no para hacer política, y mucho menos para coger un fusil.” Si por años hemos tenido ante la vista esa deformación, si ahora los malintencionados o los ingenuos nos soplan en el oído que debemos permanecer aislados, como si estuviéramos hechos de puro pneumatismo, no es inconcebible que muchos de nosotros nos sintamos ineptos para coger ese fusil que puede defender y salvar la Revolución. (2)

What makes this article especially interesting is the fact that through it Piñera inadvertently called attention to his own inaction, so to speak, in the current Revolution by applauding writers’ militia – “la presencia de un escritor en las trincheras representa un doble servicio, es decir, la misma mano que coge la pluma para escribir un poema, también coge el fusil para defender la causa de la libertad” (2) – but never expressing

interest in joining a militia unit himself. He did imply, however, – as he had done in many previous articles – that his own commitment to the Revolution could no longer be questioned since as a writer he had contributed his services both to *Revolución* and to Cuban culture in general.

When reading Piñera's contributions to *Revolución* and *Lunes* it becomes clear that he believed that cultural reform was at the forefront of the revolutionary agenda, and that as an author he was on the front line of one of the Revolution's major campaigns. He often argued that while writers were virtually useless to Cuba during the reign of Batista, under the new regime they were indispensable citizens with much to contribute to the Revolution and its causes. In an article published in the final issue of *Ciclón* in early 1959, for example, Piñera noted that "El buen escritor es, por lo menos, tan eficaz para la Revolución como el soldado, el obrero o el campesino" ("La inundación" 13). It is important to stress that Piñera's ideas about the role of the writer in the Revolution were not altogether inconsistent with official government opinions on the matter in the early phase. In the first anniversary issue of *Lunes*, published on March 28, 1960, Fidel Castro himself had replied to a survey that sought influential readers' opinions about *Lunes* with 200-word response in which he made the following remarks:

La Revolución abre un doble contacto: el pueblo comienza a descubrir la cultura, la cultura comienza a descubrir al pueblo . . . Los intelectuales juntan al libro el rifle. Uno es instrumento de cultura, el otro de defensa de nuestra Patria. *Lunes de Revolución* es un buen esfuerzo en las necesidades de expresar tres cosas similares: revolución, pueblo y cultura. ("¿Por que me gusta o no me gusta Lunes?" 2)

Unfortunately for Piñera and most of his cohorts at *Revolución* and *Lunes*, the Revolution's appreciation of the intellectuals and their supposed responsibility as combatants in the battle for cultural reform in Cuba would be short lived. Indeed, just over a year later Cuba's Cultural Council would be under the direction of uncompromising Marxists and Castro, who by then "was no longer a romantic [and] had publicly chosen a dogmatic ideology," would condemn *Lunes de Revolución* as a publication that did not belong in revolutionary Cuba (Szulc 565).

Piñera the Anti-Imperialist

Among the politically oriented articles and editorials that Piñera contributed to *Revolución de Lunes* those that reflect the ever-increasing anti-American sentiment in Cuba during the early years of the Revolution are at once among the most compelling and most reflective of mainstream political opinion. The Revolution was in constant defiance of the United States, and as William Luis has pointed out, the writers for *Revolución* and *Lunes* took an active role in the defense of the nation against the forces of American imperialism (259-60). In several pieces Virgilio Piñera echoed popular sentiment that Cuba had become a victim of a relentless terrorist campaign that was organized by the United States and ostensibly aimed to destabilize the Revolution and to destroy the Cuban economy. One of Piñera's most passionate political commentaries is his editorial "Llamamiento a escritores," which appeared in *Revolución* on October 23, 1959. The article was written in response to an alleged terrorist attack in Havana, which was the culmination of a series of events that the Cuban government

and the vast majority of the people came to view as a part of larger US-based conspiracy.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, October 21 Pedro Luis Díaz Lanz, a former air force commander and personal pilot for Fidel Castro, flew over Havana in a B-25 bomber, which he had piloted from southern Florida. On his first pass over the city, which brought him directly over the Hotel Nacional in the Vedado district, Díaz Lanz dropped thousands of leaflets that were signed by him and claimed that Castro was a Communist. Though experts do not all agree on the details, Díaz Lanz and co-pilot Frank A. Sturgis, a CIA special agent who later would become infamous for his part in the break-in at the Democratic headquarters at Watergate, allegedly made a second pass during which they machine-gunned the streets and dropped hand grenades or small bombs (Cannon 122, Szulc 505-506). In his recent biography of Fidel Castro, Volker Skierka goes so far as to refer to the attack as a “spectacular operation” and a “kamikaze-style bombing and strafing raid” (90).

However the events actually unfolded, the result was that two civilians were killed in the attack and forty-seven were injured. Despite claims by some Cuban officials that no bombs had been dropped and that the casualties had actually been caused by Cuban anti-aircraft shell fragments (Quirk 268)⁵, Fidel Castro and most Cubans were convinced that the attack was part of a carefully planned conspiracy against the Revolution through which the United States aimed to demoralize Cuba and to keep the nation in a state of economic vassalage.⁶ On the evening of October 22, Castro made a four-hour television appearance during which he referred to the bombing as “an attack from abroad on a nation at peace without precedent in history” (“Four and a Half Hour TV Appearance” 1). Accusing the United States of an act that was even more egregious than the sinking of the battleship Maine in 1898, Castro argued that other recent attacks – including an October 9th explosion of an incendiary bomb on the Central Niagara, and a similar explosion at the Central Punta Alegre ten days later – as well as the official resignation of Huber Matos earlier that day, were clearly linked to this latest “terrorist” incident.

⁵ In *Cuba, the Pursuit of Freedom*, Hugh Thomas also expresses his doubt that the bombs were dropped from the plane, and he suggests that the casualties were actually caused by fire from a Cuban frigate that tried to down the plane (1244).

⁶ It is important to note that the incidents of October 21 coincided with a major tourism convention attended by hundreds of members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA), to whom Castro was set to speak that evening in Havana. As the leaflets were dropped near the Hotel Nacional, where many ASTA member were lodged, and the alleged bombing took place nearby, many of them visiting American travel agents had a clear view of dropping of the leaflets and the subsequent explosions. As Robert E. Quirk explains, hundreds of ASTA members, “who earlier had applauded Castro enthusiastically, now left Cuba convinced that tourism was a lost cause. The revolutionary government had wasted millions of dollars preparing for the convention” (268-69), which was organized to reestablish tourism as a major boon to the Cuban economy. In a radio address made early on October 21 even before the bombing had occurred Castro, referring to the recent resignation of Huber Matos and other former revolutionaries over Communist infiltration in the government, made the following remarks, which would take on even greater meaning later in the day: “And what time did they choose for this? They did it just as Cuba was obtaining one of the greatest economic triumphs, while more than 2,000 delegates of tourist agencies from all countries were here, when a new era of tourist trade is about to begin that may mean hundreds of millions in foreign currency every year” (“Speech at Camagüey” 3)

In his own vitriolic response to the attack Piñera reflected the general consensus that it was part of a US-backed terrorist campaign against the Revolution and the newly won freedoms of the Cuban people. Seething with indignation, Piñera condemned the violence, which he had witnessed as a city bus that he happened to be traveling on in the Vedado district of Havana passed by the scene of the attack. His description of the chaos captured perfectly the indignation that so many Cubans felt in the face of what was assumed to be an unprovoked attack on the nation's sovereignty by the United States:

Pues me ocurrió que a las seis de la tarde viajaba en una guagua de la Ruta Diez. De pronto, y como el vehículo se encontraba detenido por la luz roja, empecé a sentir el estallido de lo que podrían ser bombas, balas o granadas de mano . . . e inmediatamente pude ver un anciano que se apretaba el vientre y doblándose caía en la acera sobre su propia sangre. Pero no era él la única víctima. A dos pasos caía una mujer que llevaba un niño en brazos . . . ¿Cuál fue mi reflexión, cuáles fueron mis pensamientos en medio de tal espanto? Pues vi el espectáculo agigantado, vi un bombardeo en masa, vi cientos de muertos y heridos y, sobre todo, vi la pérdida de nuestra libertad. Y también pensé que era necesario defender dicha libertad a toda costa. (19)

Moved by the events but also by his fear – which was shared by many Cubans to be sure – that the alleged attack was just a precursor to something much greater, Piñera made use of his privileged position as a columnist in the official newspaper of the July 26th movement to call on the Cuban people, but especially all writers and intellectuals, to join with Fidel in his condemnation of the United States government, which he characterized as a pack of hunting dogs in search of prey:

Y ahora, cuando presenciamos salvajadas como las del miércoles, cuando vemos a los perros de presa olisquear su elemento natural: la sangre humana . . . ¿qué menos podemos hacer si no poner nuestra columna al servicio de la Revolución y hacer un llamamiento a todos los escritores? Es por eso que me permito, en nombre de todos los escritores cubanos, protestar por el salvaje atentado a la ciudadanía y a sus libertades, y lo que es aún más importante: ponernos, sin reservas mentales, junto a Fidel. (19)

In addition to containing one of Piñera's most vehement defenses of Fidel Castro and the Revolution, "Llamamiento a escritores" reveals once again Piñera's conviction that his own commitment to the Revolution was clearly visible through his regular contributions to *Revolución* and *Lunes*. At one point in the article Piñera firmly rebuked his detractors for alleging that he was more committed to art and literature than he was to the Revolution. Referring to himself in the third person and by his penname, "El Escriba," he made the following remarks: "A primera vista, y visto lo corto de vista de ciertos sujetos, El Escriba, cuya función estaría limitada a la crítica literaria, no tendría por qué "reseñar" lo ocurrido en La Habana. ¡Cuán equivocados están!" He went on to insist that a good writer was like a sponge that absorbed everything from the mundane to the momentous, and he implied that he would continue to take advantage of his column in *Revolución* to reflect on both the daily occurrences and the watershed events of the Revolution, such as the attacks on Cuban sovereignty that he had just witnessed.

After the events of October 21, 1959 Fidel Castro called on all Cubans to unite in a mass gathering on October 26 to support the Revolution and condemn American imperialism. On that date a crowd that government officials claimed was nearly one million strong gathered to hear Castro's denunciation of the counterrevolutionary plots.⁷ One of the central messages the hours-long address was that despite attacks from abroad, and counterrevolutionary plots from within, the Revolution was stronger than ever. As Castro put it, "When I see a million ardent fellow citizens here, I realize that the Revolution is stronger than ever, and that the stab in the back just received, far from weakening the Revolution, has strengthened it" ("Loyalty Rally" 12). Piñera responded to the speech in "La Revolución se fortalece," an article published the following week in *Punta de mira*, the editorial section of *Lunes*. In this ardent political editorial Piñera reiterated several of Castro's slogans and echoed the major points of his speech; namely that the Revolution was clearly under threat, that the United States was behind the counterrevolutionary plots, and that by trying to sabotage the Revolution the Americans were only making it stronger. Referring to the October 21 "terrorist attack," and other recent incidents Piñera made the following remarks:

Que la Revolución está amenazada , que la Revolución vive una etapa difícil es cosa de sobra sabida. Sin embargo, de esas amenazas, de tales dificultades se van haciendo los cimientos incommovibles sobre los que descansará firmemente la estructura revolucionaria . . . el bombardeo de ayer, el atentado de mañana . . . fortalecen la Revolución. (15)

During the October 26 rally Castro also addressed the issue of land reform, which had been at the forefront of the revolutionary government's agenda of sweeping social, economic and cultural changes during the opening months of 1959. "Are you in favor of Land Reform?" – he asked as the crowd responded with enthusiastic shouts of support – "Do you approve of our having given land to the farmers? . . . Were you in favor of the old system of rural police at the service of the big landlords and monopolies?" ("Loyalty Rally" 6). Responding to this pressing issue, Piñera argued, as Castro had, that the Revolution was under constant threat in large part because its enemies – he specifically referred to Batista loyalists and the United States Government – had come to realize that with the passing of the Agrarian Reform Law in May 1959 they would no longer be able to exploit the land and the Cuban people as they had done so wantonly under previous administrations. Out of desperation, then, they had resorted to sabotage of sugar plantations and other elaborate counterrevolutionary plots in order to destabilize the Revolution. As Piñera put it, "hacen cuanto está en sus manos porque vuelvan los para ellos dorados días de la explotación" (15).

Echoing the immense popular support for the Agrarian Reform Law, which according to Louis Pérez was "by far the most sweeping measure enacted in the first year" of the Revolution (320), Piñera praised Fidel Castro for divvying up the land among Cuban peasants: "fue Fidel quien repartió las tierras . . . fue Fidel quien tocó en el corazón de esos guajiros como se toca a una puerta amiga" (15). He then expressed his conviction that even if every last one of Cuba's revolutionary heroes were to fall in a

⁷ In his speech Castro proclaimed several times that a million Cubans were present, and the same number was quoted on the front page of *Revolución* the day after the address. However, reliable foreign observers put the figure at less than 400,000 (see Quirk 269).

battle against the United States, the land would still not return to the hands of their enemies: “suponiendo que cayera Fidel, Raúl, Camilo, Guevara, Almeida, Almeijeiras, en fin la flor y nata: suponiendo que cayera hasta el último soldado rebelde, las tierras seguirían en poder del campesino” (15).

The fact that the redistribution of the land had apparently given the US government great cause for alarm was a source of delight for Piñera who believed, as most Cubans did, that the United States had taken advantage of government corruption and political instability in the past to turn the island nation into its economic vassal. Perhaps emboldened by Cuba’s newfound sense of nationhood and by the revolutionary government’s constant defiance of the United States government, in the final paragraph of the editorial Piñera boasted the days of that country’s domination in Cuba were over:

Hoy, ¿quién lo negaría?, las cosas han cambiado, al punto que los Estados Unidos no se atreve, so pena de alterar el equilibrio mundial, a proseguir despachándose a su gusto. Y esta limitación estadounidense, este freno que le ha puesto la actual circunstancia histórica, resulta para nosotros, pequeña nacionalidad, seguridad efectivísima. Dicho en dos palabras: ya no estamos solos ni aislados” (15).

Though it is probably fair to say that even during the euphoric early months of the Revolution Piñera was still more concerned with cultural reform than he was with other more pressing items on the revolutionary agenda, it is important to stress that articles like “La Revolución se fortalece” were not mere lip service. Piñera was an enthusiastic supporter of the Revolution during its early years, and even when he began to sense that his own understanding of artistic freedom of expression in the New Cuba differed greatly from that of the revolutionary government, he did not completely lose faith that his status as an author in Cuba would continue to improve.

Another of Piñera’s most politically charged and anti-American editorials appeared just a few months after “La Revolución se fortalece.” Published in the March 7 issue of *Lunes*, “Infierno inesperado” was written in response to an incident that vastly increased the indignation that Piñera and most Cubans felt toward the government of the United States. On March 4, 1960, a French freighter called *La Coubre*, which was carrying seventy tons of weapons and ammunition that the Cuban government had purchased from Belgium, exploded in the Havana harbor killing nearly one hundred and injuring almost three times that many. According to Tad Szulc, the incident, whose cause has never been fully determined, at once destroyed any “chance for accommodation between Fidel Castro and the Americans,” and “rallied the Cuban masses around Castro at a time when he was beginning to face growing international political problems and there were signs of erosion in his popularity” (514-15). In the aftermath of the explosion Castro immediately blamed the United States of sabotage and masterfully exploited the tragedy to whip up anti-American sentiment.

On March 5, an emotional Castro delivered a now famous speech at the funeral for the victims at the Colón Cemetery in Havana. In it he declared that the explosion “could not have been an accident” (“The Revolution Will Not Stop” 3), and added with conviction that “on the basis of very careful analysis . . . [and] detailed conversations with all of the port workers and stevedores who were there at the time, we have arrived at the conclusion that this act of sabotage could under no circumstances have been carried out in Cuba (4). His conclusion, then, was that an explosive device had been

planted by “officials of the United States government [who] have repeatedly tried to prevent our country from getting these weapons” (6).

Virgilio Piñera denounced the explosion in “Infierno inesperado,” a 1,500-word article that appeared in *Lunes* along with an inflammatory statement from the editors, articles penned by Guillermo Cabrera Infante and José Baragaño, and a nine-page excerpt from Fidel Castro’s speech. In his article Piñera echoed many of Castro’s comments and he accurately reflected the mounting tensions between Cuba and the United States. Though he did not initially give a name to the enemy, Piñera’s provocative remarks at the beginning of the article were clearly aimed at Cuba’s neighbors to the North: “Nos han declarado la Guerra, una guerra que por encubierta es “si cabe” más cruenta que las declaradas ... Me refiero a esa guerra dirigida contra la población civil” (15). As the article progressed, Piñera directed his ire over the explosion of *La Coubre* ever more specifically at the US government, which he denounced as a “gang of butchers”, “sneaky reptiles”, and “inscrutable criminals”. As Castro had done in his emotional funeral eulogy, Piñera initially posited several possible scenarios for the bombing – perhaps it had been carried out by a lone counterrevolutionary, a madman, or a demented pyromaniac – only to dispel them as practically impossible in light of several factors concerning the increasingly precarious relationship between the US and Cuba. He cited, for example, recent attacks on Cuba by planes from the United States, decades of economic exploitation, American support of the Batista regime and the harboring of his cronies in the US, and recalled the solid evidence cited by Castro in his March 5th address that the United States had gone to great lengths to prevent the Belgian government from selling arms to Cuba.

In the closing paragraphs of his article Piñera intensified his tirade against the Americans, first by making reference to that country’s bombing of Hiroshima and implicitly comparing it to the recent bombing of the *La Coubre*. He argued that the while the nuclear attack was condemnable, it was at least backed by the supposed justification of having saved humanity by ending a World War. On the other hand, he argued that the present attack on *La Coubre* would go down as one of the greatest crimes of the century since there was no conceivable rationalization for an unprovoked attack on the civilians of a nation at peace. As he saw it, the US had blown up the freighter in attempt to derail the Revolution and to deprive the nation of its sovereignty.

Echoing the general sentiment in Cuba in the days following the explosion, Piñera berated the United States for its long history of exploitation of its vulnerable island neighbor and for its obvious determination to take away the freedoms that the Cuban people had won since the triumph of the Revolution. The passage that follows contains what is at once one the Piñera’s most ardent defenses of Cuban sovereignty and vehement denouncements of US imperialism:

Una nación pequeña, que acaba de sostener una lucha cruenta contra un tirano, que desea vivir en términos de paz con el resto de las naciones, una nación que quiere labrar su propio destino, que quiere tomar libertad de acción, vida económica propia, es objeto de los más despiadados ataques, de las intrigas más tenebrosas, de los crímenes más tremendos . . . ¿Es posible que prosigan estos ataques? Porque si el crimen de estado es progresivo, entonces mañana o pasado podremos tener en el cementerio Colón cinco o diez mil cadáveres. ¿Qué son, para gente dedicada a lo peor, cinco o diez mil cubanitos muertos? Pensarán que la posesión del azúcar, de la tierra cubana vale más que unos cuantos miles de cubanitos muertos. Y si el mundo no se ha convertido en una

horda de matones, entonces tendrá que protestar, que poner coto de alguna manera a ese Armagedón velado que los americanos nos hacen. (15)

Putting the Enemy in Its Place

In my recent book on the life and work of Virgilio Piñera's I argue on various occasions that Piñera was something of an expert at putting things in their proper place. Though I focus primarily on his penchant for criticizing everyone from intellectuals to politicians, and everything from hallowed institutions to respected publications, I would like to add here that one of the frequent targets of Piñera's attacks that I failed to mention in my book was the United States. To be sure, Piñera often strove to put the colossus to the North in its place, so to speak, by gloating over the fact that the country that had controlled Cuba politically and economically for so long had finally been trumped by the Revolution. In some articles in *Revolución* and *Lunes*, jabs at the US took the form of subtle references or brief commentaries, while in others, such as "Espíritu de las milicias," "Señales de los tiempos," and "26 de Julio de 1960," Piñera made a concerted effort to expose the weaknesses of the United States and to knock it off its pedestal of supremacy.

One of the central arguments of "Espíritu de las milicias," a five-page article with a dozen photos of newly trained soldiers, was that Cuba had become more prepared and determined than ever to fend off a seemingly inevitable American attack by forming militias of armed citizens. Piñera conceded in the article that the US was the most heavily armed nation on earth – and added that Cuba possessed very little in terms of military might – but pointed out with apparent pride that Cuba's defiance of the US was finally putting the latter on the defensive. He concluded the article by declaring, as Castro had in a speech a few days earlier, that the Cuban militias were poised for action and would not surrender at any cost: "En una palabra, el miliciano sabe muy bien sus objetivos . . . y como bien decía Fidel la otra noche, está demostrando que aquí, llegado el caso [de una invasión estadounidense], se peleará sin tregua y sin cuartel" (38).

In "Señales de los tiempos" Piñera's intention seems to have been twofold. First, he aimed to show that the United States of modern times was a far cry from the country that had sparked the revolutionary struggles of the Americas in the 18th century. Piñera pointed out that it was an historical paradox that the tiny nation that had sacrificed so much to win its freedom from the British, was now the superpower that denied to other nations the very liberties it had fought for. To the detriment of the entire world, but especially to Latin America, the colony had turned into the colonizer. As he put it, "la imagen de la libertad . . . va adquiriendo la faz de la opresión. El país que dio la última gota de su sangre por salir del estado de colonia, instaura un imperio colonial, contempla al mundo entero sub especie colonia" (2).

Piñera went on to blame the United States for the political instability and economic underdevelopment that had plagued Cuba and so many other Latin American nations – he specifically mentioned Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela – during the first half of the twentieth century. What most bothered Piñera about US involvement in Latin America, and here he certainly found himself in the mainstream, was the fact that the nation that trumpeted the personal freedoms of its citizens to the world seemed so hell bent on depriving the citizens of Cuban and Latin America of their autonomy. In a masterful manipulation of a popular image, Piñera

contended that the United States government had turned into the ultimate exploiter of Lady Liberty: “El State Department tenía la receta para hacer abortar los vientres preñados de la libertad”

Piñera’s second objective in “Señales de los tiempos” was to demonstrate how the tides had turned in the relationship between Cuba and the United States since the triumph of the Revolution. He noted, for example, that the cards were finally stacked against the United States, which no longer held the advantage in what he referred to as “el bout imperialismo versus nacionalismo” (2). As he had in several previous editorials, Piñera relished the fact that Cuba, a tiny nation with minimal military and economic power, was finally standing up to its neighbor to the North. With an air of defiance that a once echoed the accusatory rhetoric of Fidel Castro and the revolutionary discourse of José Martí, Piñera concluded the article by suggesting that it was only a matter of time before all of Latin America exploded in revolt against the United States:

Saben [los estadounidenses] de sobra que Latinoamérica es un barril de pólvora, y saben también que el estallido se producirá. Las revoluciones, como los átomos, se producen en cadena.

Claro, el State Department tiene su estrategia . . . en última instancia esa salida desesperada que es un acto de fuerza, pero nosotros tenemos algo mejor, tenemos las señales de los tiempos: voluntad de ser libres, concurso de otros pueblos que se han emancipado, tensión internacional que nos favorece, descontento popular dentro y fuera de Norteamérica contra el concepto imperialista de la vida. Más tarde o más temprano la enfermedad hará crisis, y cualquiera sea el resultado, los pueblos de América tendrán propia determinación. (2)

Several weeks later Piñera turned to the 7th anniversary of the assault on the Moncada barracks as a source of inspiration for one of his most compelling political editorials: “26 de julio de 1960.” In this lengthy article (just under 2,000 words), which was the first that Piñera had published in *Revolución* using his own name for nearly a year, Piñera traced the political history of Cuba from the time of his birth in 1912 to the present, and he demonstrated how in that relatively short period of time the country had gone from a hopeless semi-colony of the United States to a major player in world affairs.

Piñera began the article with a brief description of his generation’s bleak vision of Cuba’s destiny: “para nosotros, nacidos entre los años diez o doce, el destino de Cuba, es decir, semicolonialismo, dictadura, gangsterismo, era un hecho consumado de cual existían pocas o ningunas posibilidades de un cambio de frente saludable” (17). By the time his generation had reached the age of twenty, Piñera explained, they had nothing to look forward to – despite the vigor of their youth – since they had seen how Cuba’s public figures had systematically dedicated their careers to turning Cuba into a colony of the United States.

According to Piñera, when Fidel Castro finally appeared on the scene, the members of his generation (read Piñera) admired him – “pensamos de Fidel: he aquí un hombre puro. Es de la raza de un Mella, de un Chibás, de un Pablo de la Torriente, de un Antonio Guiteras” (17)–, but had little faith that he would get very far in his fight against Batista. However, by the time Fidel disembarked from the Granma in 1956, Piñera

conceded, it became clear to the so-called brainwashed cynics of his generation that a time of hope and positive change had finally come:

¿Qué ocurrió entonces en los cerebros lavados? Pues que la hazaña de Fidel les volvió a meter ideas constructivas en las cabezas. Al año de ese desembarco todos estábamos confiados que la balanza se inclinaría por Fidel y que la Revolución se haría más y más pujante. A tal punto que el primero de enero de 1959 Cuba era libre, totalmente libre de [Cabo] San Antonio a [Punta de] Maisi. (17)

In the final section of the article Piñera celebrated Cuba's newfound sense of nationhood at the same time that he put the United States in its place by underscoring how dramatically that country's relationship with Cuba had changed since the triumph of the Revolution. He revealed his great pride, for instance, in knowing that in just a matter of decades Cuba had essentially gone from an anonymous semi-colony of the United States to a sovereign state and a showcase of revolution for all of Latin America. "Es vertiginoso," he observed, "el abismo que se abre entre la Cuba semicolonial de los Batista y compañía y la Cuba revolucionaria que nos ha dado Fidel" (17).

Even more importantly, Piñera revealed in the fact that Cuba had suddenly become a focal point of world attention and a major source of preoccupation for the US government, which was quickly losing control of its political and economic clout on the island:

No bien empezamos con la Reforma Agraria vimos cómo los Estados Unidos empezaban a su vez a inquietarse a tal punto que al día de la fecha constituimos para ello un problema más agudo que el de Berlín Occidental o el de su declinante influencia en Asia y África. Ahora pregunto, ¿cómo no sentirse orgullosos ante tamaña prueba de soberanía? . . . El mundo entero nos tiene entre sus labios y esto se carga de mayor trascendencia si pensamos que no hace todavía dos años Cuba sólo era . . . una mera referencia Geográfica, una azucarera . . . Y el mundo entero está asombrado ¡y con razón! Lo que por más e cincuenta años se tomó por feudo norteamericano es hoy la nación de la Reforma Agraria, que interviene en compañías petroleras, que se sentará mañana, lunes 18 [de 1960] en la Asamblea de las Naciones Unidas para formular acusaciones contra el coloso del Norte. ¡Quién se lo iba a decir a Eisenhower y camarilla! Seis millones de habitantes y ciento veinte mil kilómetros cuadrados dando jaque a más de cien millones de habitantes y millones de millas cuadradas de territorio. Estas son las imprevisibles lecciones de la Historia. (17)

To a certain extent "26 de julio de 1960" can be read as a compendium of the political themes and revolutionary motifs that Piñera addressed with frequency in his collaborations in *Revolución* and *Lunes*: the hopelessness of life in semi-colonial Cuba, condemnation of Batista and his cronies, praise of Fidel Castro and the Revolution, defense and celebration of Cuban sovereignty, condemnation of United States imperialism, etc. The modern reader who wishes to see a side of Virgilio Piñera that has largely escaped the eyes of contemporary critics need go no further than this vast body of cultural and political essays that he published in *Revolución* and *Lunes* during the early years of the Revolution. What we learn from this immensely important body of texts is that despite Virgilio Piñera's reputation as an author of evasion who resisted political themes in his creative writing and consistently strove to go against the current, so to speak, in terms of his views on the Cuban Revolution during its romantic phase, Piñera was very much swimming in the mainstream.

In the May 1962 issue of *La Gaceta de Cuba* Virgilio Piñera –who by then had been labeled as a troublesome critic, nonconformist, a violator of revolutionary morality and been demoted from his position as a highly visible and regular contributor to *Revolución* and *Lunes* to a much less prestigious post as translator and editor for the Editora Nacional – published what fellow Cuban writer Roberto Fernández Retamar later referred to as an “auto-criticism,” in which he openly admitted the lack of political content in his writing.⁸ In “Notas sobre la vieja y la nueva generación” Piñera conceded categorically that the writers of his generation – he was really referring more precisely to the group of authors associated with *Orígenes* – were turned off by political issues to such an extent that to become embroiled them was tantamount to being contaminated by the plague. He acknowledged, moreover, that looking back from a perspective of revolutionary Cuba he realized that his own distain for politics and his nearly total elusion of Cuba’s political reality from the 1930s to the triumph of the Revolution had actually helped perpetuate the regimes in power: “Por huir de la realidad atroz contribuíamos, sin percatarnos de ello, a perpetuarla . . . estábamos ayudando al régimen dictatorial en turno” (2). Likewise, with the benefit of hindsight Piñera had come to understand that his apolitical philosophies were, as he put it, “tan monstruosas como el crimen que se cometía día a día” (2).

Despite his self-reproach, however, Virgilio Piñera also pointed out that he and his cohorts had many good reasons for their systematic evasion of politics – “Con todo lo que pueda acusarse a un grupo de escritores desentendidos de la política, teníamos motivos de sobra para adoptar tal actitud” (2) –, and he insisted that their conscientious decisions to scorn the political system instead of fighting it and to seek refuge in Literature instead of using it as a weapon, were at least partially justifiable. In the final paragraphs of his article, Piñera implied that if his formation as a writer had coincided with the momentous events of the Cuban Revolution, his own works might have been much different. He implied, however, that that was precisely what separated the old generation of Cuban writers and the new one:

Pues bien, para la nueva generación . . . ya no amenazaba y negativizaba el viejo dualismo Política–Literatura. A ninguno de ellos se le iba a ocurrir hacer la literatura por sí sola, ninguno de ellos caería en la trampa de la literatura tomada como refugio porque esa trampa ya no tenía razón y los tramperos habían sido barridos de plano. Nosotros hicimos literatura de refugio porque vivíamos en un país sembrado de trampas; nuestra obra, a pesar de su posible calidad, era pesimista porque se vivía en términos de pesimismo y frustración.

La nueva generación, si sabe aprovecharlos, tiene los triunfos en su mano. Tienen como escritores, los mismos derechos (y, por supuesto, deberes) que los dirigentes políticos. Conscientes de que la política y la literatura están profundamente relacionadas y compenetradas, están en magníficas condiciones para expresar la realidad de la vida que bulle en torno a ellos. . . . Ni hablar de la literatura panfletaria. . . . En esta [época] de la Revolución, basta con la literatura por sí misma. ¿Y por qué por sí misma? Porque

⁸ In a well-known response to Piñera’s article, Roberto Fernández Retamar took issue with several of his fellow author’s observations. In “Generaciones van generaciones vienen...” Retamar argued, for example, that Piñera was wrong to insist that all Cuban writers of his generation were characterized by their total evasion of political issues, and he cited many examples of authors who proved the contrary. Moreover, Fernández Retamar questioned Piñera’s insistence that writers of the Revolution had to reject “literatura panfletaria” in favor of what the former had dubbed “literatura por sí misma.”

ahora la Literatura es un apéndice de la Revolución, una rama más del árbol revolucionario. (3)

I have chosen to conclude the present essay with a brief discussion of “Notas sobre la vieja y la nueva generación” because I think this article epitomizes just how complicated the relationship between literature and politics was for Virgilio Piñera. While Piñera was obviously comfortable with the idea of writing articles and editorials with strong revolutionary content, for instance, he seemed to be loath to fill his creative writings with political ideas or pro-revolutionary slogans. Likewise, from the pages of *Revolución* and *Lunes* he had consistently encouraged the so-called writers of the new generation to turn to the many triumphs at hand as inspiration for their own work, yet he apparently assumed that he did not need to follow his own advice in order to maintain his good standing with the Revolution.

In “Notas sobre la vieja y la nueva generación” Piñera implies that from his earliest days as a writer he had decided that quality literature and overt politics simply did not mix, and felt that as long as he expressed his genuine support of the Revolution or denounced US imperialism from the pages of *Revolución* and *Lunes* – or in the periodicals that came later such as *Casa de las Américas*, *Unión*, and *La Gaceta de Cuba* – he had no reason to focus on similar issues in his creative writing. But Piñera, like so many of his literary cohorts, did not have a clear view of what the Revolution expected of him. Perhaps William Luis’ astute observation about the downfall of *Lunes* best reflects Piñera’s own situation following his fall from grace in the early 1960s. Much like *Lunes*, which according to Luis “did not see, or was not able to perceive and assess, the changes taking place around it” (264), Piñera seems to have failed to comprehend during those troubled times that the Revolution that he had so ardently defended since January 1959 had closed its doors to him as quickly as quickly as it had opened them.

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