

The Political Influence of Countries on their Citizens

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The countries of Latin America are well known for their politically charged atmospheres. Throughout history, these countries have been overrun by foreign powers and internal revolutions in turn. Artists, writers, and other free thinkers operating within this atmosphere feel its influence on their work. As Guillermo Cabrera Infante puts it, "We all carry Cuba within us, like a mysterious music, like a singular vision" (qtd. in Smith). At numerous points in his life, Cabrera Infante attempted to become an accomplished author in the non-political realm, but the atmosphere of the Cuban Revolution repeatedly drew him back into the political arena. If Cabrera Infante had been born into a different atmosphere than that of politics, he could have become known simply as a writer, not as a well-known and internationally renowned political writer.

The Cuban Revolution refers to the overthrow of Batista's government by Castro and his revolutionaries and the adoption of a government based on Marxist principles ("Cuban Revolution"). During this time, a lot of the revolutionaries working against Batista's regime were merely free thinkers and that automatically drew them into the revolution. Due to the Batista regime's over art and literature, the free spirit of those artists placed them in contradiction to the government. Many writers who felt these constraints on their work chose exile over towing the "official line" of the government. These restrictions on simple freedoms created revolutionaries out of otherwise ordinary citizens. One of these citizens was Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who enjoyed writing mostly film reviews, and that fact placed him in a position of opposition to the government.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante was born in Gibrara. His parents were the founders of the local communist cell (MacAdam). In this way, Cabrera Infante was born into politics. His parents were eventually arrested for their work against Batista and his regime. Due to the blacklisting that eventually ensued from this arrest, Cabrera Infante and his family were forced to move to Havana (Smith). Since everything in Cabrera Infante's life was overrun by politics from the beginning, it is not surprising to see the heavy influence of politics later on in his life. In this way, Cabrera Infante may have come to assume that his life must be inextricably linked with politics.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante began his official career as a writer with film reviews. His first love was film, and this passion showed through in his extensive reviews (MacAdam). In this way, Cabrera Infante's original intentions as a writer were undeniably non-political. After he became well-known for his reviews, Cabrera Infante began writing a series of pieces that were based mainly in social commentary (MacAdam). His support of basic human freedoms and other ideals linked him with the causes of the Revolution. Rather than choosing the path of resistance, the resistance chose him as a member of its ranks. In 1948 he published his first well recognized short story, "Aguas del Recuerdo" or "Waters of Memory." This piece was published in response to "El Senor Presidente" and can be identified as Cabrera Infante's first piece of politically influential literature.

After that, Guillermo Cabrera Infante was made editor of *Lunes*, the Monday supplement to the underground newspaper of the Revolution, *Revolución*. As editor, Cabrera Infante gained a great position as a writer, and it was a wonderful step forward in his career. However, this career choice made him a wanted man by Batista and his

government. As editor of *Lunes de Revolucion*, Cabrera Infante became a spokesman for revolutionary change (Foster). In 1951, Cabrera Infante, along with a group of his close friends, began the Cuban Film Society. With this added fame, Cabrera Infante became known as a major film critic and was allowed to write reviews up to 2,000 words (Sullivan 15). The creation of this society once again shows Cabrera Infante's passion and talent for non-political writing. Perhaps he could have made a successful and less controversial career out of his writing as a film critic, but something interfered. The political atmosphere of Cuba had the undeniable influence of redirecting Cabrera Infante's career into the political realm.

The political interference in Cabrera Infante's career truly began with the publishing of "Balada de Plomo y Yerro" in 1952. Guillermo Cabrera Infante meant the piece to reflect the "Gangster Cuba of the 1950's" (MacAdam). However, due to the English obscenities included in the piece, Cabrera was fined and jailed by Batista's censors and forced to leave journalism school for two years (Smith). After this incident, Guillermo Cabrera Infante took up the pseudonym "G. Cain" and took a more intentionally political direction in his writing. His political intentions are exemplified in "Asi en la paz," which is considered to be a concentration of politics in his writing (MacAdam). This piece, published in 1952, reported the violence of Batista's era in blunt prose. Quite possibly, this story was a retaliatory action on the part of Guillermo Cabrera Infante due to the repression of his writing in "Balada de Plomo y Yerro" earlier that same year. Rather than viewing "Asi en la paz" as a sign of Cabrera Infante's true interest in politics, it is more accurately interpreted as a reaction to the infringement of Batista on what Cabrera Infante considered his natural rights.

However, in 1956 Cabrera Infante made the first truly politically motivated move of his career. Cabrera Infante attempted to turn The Cuban Film Society (Cinematoteca de Cuba) into an Anti-Batista organization (MacAdam). His attempt failed, and the society was taken over by Batista and eventually shut down. This attempt shows the beginning of Cabrera Infante's true commitment to political involvement. Also, the shutting down of Cabrera Infante's beloved film society inextricably linked his love of film with his distaste for Batista and his government. This link contributed to Cabrera Infante's trek further away from non-political writing and into the more controversial role of a revolutionary writer.

After the Revolution, Guillermo Cabrera Infante once again took up a publicly acceptable role. With Castro taking over the government, Cabrera Infante gained significant fame and prestige in Cuba. He continued to work as the editor of *Lunes*, which was now the official newspaper of the new government. Cabrera Infante was also given a position as the Chairman of the National Cultural Council and was once again placed in charge of the New Film Institute (Caistor 41). However, shortly after he gained these positions, a film made by Cabrera Infante's brother came under fire by Castro's censors (MacAdam). Cabrera Infante defended his brother's film and was then expelled from all his positions by Castro. Once again, Cabrera Infante had almost gained a life based on writing non-politically charged literature, only to have it snatched away from him. This time, however, his move against the government was motivated by fraternal love and not by any inner motivation to defy the government.

After Cabrera Infante's move against the government, Castro felt that he needed to be quietly removed from Cuba and from his position of influence over the Cuban people (Saxon). In 1961, Cabrera Infante was named Cuban cultural attaché to

Belgium. This move was seen by Castro as an effective method of removing Cabrera Infante from the country without huge opposition (Smith). In 1965, Cabrera Infante returned to Cuba for the first time for his mother's funeral. When he reached Havana, Cabrera Infante found himself disgusted with the deteriorated state of the city (MacAdam). Unable to stand what had become of his country, Cabrera Infante chose exile and left Cuba for Brussels, taking his family with him. Later, Cabrera decided to move again to Madrid, Spain, in an attempt to completely isolate himself from any influence of Cuban politics. However, the Spanish had extensive trade relationships with Cuba and wished to remain on the good side of Castro. In 1967, Cabrera Infante was expelled from Spain for his articles against the Spanish dictator Franco, which had been previously published in *Lunes*.

After being exiled from Spain, Cabrera Infante moved his family to London, England. In 1968, Cabrera Infante formally denounced Castro in *Primera Plana*, a paper from Argentina. After this, Cabrera Infante was officially declared a traitor by both Castro and his fellow Cuban citizens (Caistor 41). Finally, in 1979, he officially became a British citizen. In this same year, he published *Infante's Inferno*, which would become one of his most famous works (Eaude 27).

Along with *Infante's Inferno*, *Tres Tigres Tristes (Three Trapped Tigers)* would bring great fame to Guillermo Cabrera Infante. These two novels would be his ticket to fame in the field of political novels. *Three Trapped Tigers* is a novel which expresses feelings of betrayal. The feeling expressed in the novel can be paralleled to Cabrera Infante's own feelings of betrayal by his fellow citizens of the Cuban Revolution. The novel can also be seen from a historical perspective to represent the Cuba that Cabrera Infante wished had existed (Foster). A short story related to these novels is "Bites from the Bearded Crocodile," which is a more straightforward attack on Castro's regime and denounces it for its "cultural renaissance" (MacAdam).

Guillermo Cabrera Infante is known internationally as a great writer, both for his political and non-political works. However, it is the politically influenced writing that has brought about his true fame. MacAdam puts it best when he says "[Guillermo Cabrera Infante] may have been embittered by the disastrous intervention of politics in his life, but without the experience of exile, he might still be editing magazines in Havana instead of writing novels abroad" (1390). However, the intervention of politics in Cabrera Infante's writing can be seen as positive instead of disastrous, as MacAdam suggests. The political atmosphere of Latin America steered a wonderful writer trapped in a small country into the larger world of political criticism. A writer who has been described as "lucid" and "examining the liberating potential of language" became one who also worked on deciphering the liberating potential of language as a force in politics (Smith). As he pursued the idea of "inadequacies in language," he also pursued the idea of changing his inadequate government through revolution and reform (Mention). His life became one that would lend itself to inspiration, instead of normalcy. All this was made possible by the overruling force of politics so prevalent in the atmosphere of Latin American countries.

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