

Ángel Esteban. *Madrid Habanece: Cuba y España en el Punto de Mira Transatlántico*. Madrid: Vervuert Verlag, 2011. 276 S. \$29.80, paper, ISBN 978-3-86527-631-5.



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**Published on** H-Soz-u-Kult (March, 2012)

Since the 1990s, the cultural and commercial contacts between Cuba and Spain, which had been many since the independence of Cuba from Spain in 1898, have increased exponentially. This is due to the end of Soviet subsidies and the onset of a prolonged economic crisis, which led to changed laws that made it possible for writers, musicians, actors and artists to work directly with Spanish publishers, directors and other institutions. The crisis of the 1990s also led to the increased emigration of Cubans of all backgrounds to Spain.

This collection of essays and testimonials by fourteen academics, singers, actors, and writers adds new perspectives to the known history of Cuban-Spanish relations, with an emphasis on the period since the 1990s. As the editor Ángel Esteban points out in his introduction, the approach relies on Julio Ortega's theory of transatlantic studies, according to which, in Esteban's words, "transatlantic crossings offer a crucial element in the processes of identity formation in the former metropolis as well as in American countries" (p. 13, my translation). In other words, according to

the editor, since Cuba's independence in 1898, Cuban notions of identity have continued to be impacted by Spanish culture and vice versa, Spanish culture has been informed and shaped by Cuban intellectuals, writers and artists.

In the first section of the book, titled "Aproximaciones históricas", Pablo Guadarrama González discusses the relations between Cuba and Spain from a socio-historical point of view quoting the long tradition of contacts between Cuban and Spanish scientists and intellectuals. The second section focuses on literary visions of Cuba. Rafael Rojas's illuminating essay, "El mar de los desterrados" continues a thesis proposed in his book "Motivos de Anteo" about Cuban intellectual discourse of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century preoccupied with notions of blood and earth. Rafael Roja, *Motivos de Anteo. Patria y nación en la Historia Intelectual de Cuba*, Madrid 2008. Since the crisis of the 1990s and the wave of emigration it brought with it, Rojas notes that the motif of the sea has become more prominent than the preoccupation with the earth. This demonstrates, according to Rojas, the growing distance

between a globalized Cuban culture of the present and the Cuba of the past. Virgilio López Lemús analyzes the history of a unique genre of Hispanic poetry, the *décima*. It was brought from Spain to Cuba and the other Spanish American colonies in the 16th century and has survived until today, especially in Cuba, where the genre gained great popularity among Cuban poets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries like Nicolás Guillén, Eugenio Florit, Cintio Vitier, Severo Sarduy, Roberto Manzano, Orlando González Esteva, among many others. This study of a poetic genre suggests that perhaps the most basic and powerful reason for the continuing literary affinities between Cuba and Spain is its common language and shared literary tradition. Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera's article on the poetry of Federico García Lorca and Nicolás Guillén takes an intertextual approach, arguing that even though there are no direct references in either poet's lyrical output, there are relations of mutual "sympathy" in their work. Finally, Estéban's and Aparicio's article analyzes Cuban writer Miguel de Carrión's novels and the Cuban fin de siècle society's obsession with Spain in them.

The third and fourth sections of this book are less academic in character, and more focused on the stories of important personalities in today's and yesterday's Cuba and in Spain. In the section dedicated to "Cine y música de ayer y de hoy", Luciano Castillo writes about Luis Buñuel's father's long stay in Havana, where he made his fortune, and its impact on Buñuel, who worked at different points in his life on film projects, set in Havana, which unfortunately he never finished. An interview with Jorge Perugorría, arguably one of Cuba's greatest actors today, discusses his work experience in Spain after the movie "Fresa y chocolate" (1994) launched his career there. The Cuban collector Emilio Cueto presents his impressive archive of hundreds of titles of music written by Spanish composers about Cuban themes, and finally, the Spanish flamenco singer Diego "El Cigala" talks in his interview with Estéban about

his collaboration with Cuban pianist Bebo Valdés in their 2003 album "Lágrimas negras". In the section titled "Testimonios" finally, Cuban writer Leonardo Padura tells the fascinating story of the evolution of the Cuban literary market in the twentieth century, correcting some misperceptions about Cuban publishing houses before the revolution of 1959 and putting in perspective the Cuban literary boom of the 1990s in Spain, by telling his own success story as a bestselling novelist in Spain with the publishing house Tusquets. The two texts by Luis Manuel García Méndez and Alejandro González Acosta have a vindictive tone at times, even though understandably so given the plight they tell of. Luis Manuel García, the editor in chief of the Cuban journal edited in Madrid, "Encuentro de la cultura cubana" (1996-2009), tells the story of the brilliant run of the journal despite the accusations leveled against it by Cuban authorities as a CIA-financed enterprise and in 2003 the arresting of several contributors to the journal for having collaborated with the journal. González Acosta tells yet another history of frustration, that of the Academia Cubana de la Lengua, founded in 1927 and one of the few institutions in Cuba that preserved its independence until the early 1990s and remained in close contact to the Spanish Real Academia de la Lengua. González Acosta recounts the back maneuvering necessary to nominate Cuban poet and president of the Academia Dulce María Loynaz for the Premio Cervantes, which she received in 1992. He also recounts the exclusion from the Academia of some of its life members because of their leaving the country, as well as the recent controversy between the Cuban Academia and the Spanish Real Academia on account of the latter's invitation of Cubans considered dissidents by the government to a congress. Last but not least, the poet and editor Manuel Díaz Martínez, speaks in a brief communication about the importance of the Spanish poetry of Gustavo Bécquer, the Golden Age poetry, and that of the Spanish avant-garde for his own writing.

Even though largely anecdotal, this book gives some precious insights into the history of Cubans' intensifying contacts with Spain. If anything, it marks the multiplication of contacts since the 1990s between Cuban and Spanish writers, historians, musicians, artists and intellectuals, and also the many ways in which Cubans residing in Cuba and those residing elsewhere have been converging in Spain. Historian Manuel Moreno Fragnals in his "Cuba/España, España/Cuba: historiacomún" has written superbly about the history of Cuban-Spanish relations. Manuel Moreno Fragnals, *Cuba/España, España/Cuba: historia común*, Barcelona 1995. This book instead presents case studies and testimonials, and in this way draws an entirely different, informal cultural history of the polemics and tensions that have marked Cuban-Spanish relations, especially in the last decades.

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**Citation:** Anke Birkenmaier. Review of Esteban, Ángel. *Madrid Habanece: Cuba y España en el Punto de Mira Transatlántico*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. March, 2012.

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