

With More Lives than a Cat

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Luck has it that at the age of 87, Walterio Carbonell is still alive and kicking. May he never die, something that in some measure depends upon all Cubans, wherever we are around the globe. If anything, it is regrettable that he never wrote a continuation of his monumental, stimulating, polemical, illuminating and also passionate essay *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional* [How the National Culture Emerged] (only he and his Egguns [deities] know if it was because he couldn't or wouldn't).

Because there are few, it is rare to find among us the kind of intellectuals this native son of Jiguaní embodies, the sort who makes sure to live in peace only with his conscience. He is the writer who receives no more reward or satisfaction than he gets from recently filling up a page; one who consecrates himself to do his work, every day, every minute, without pause or pose, spinning ideas; whose aim is not renown, “that riotous thing,” but rather the recovery of historical memory.

Many are those who have attempted to reduce him to a simple maker of uncomfortable judgments, including excessive and/or unwise ones. The best, that is, the

worse for the conservatives and foxes of all persuasions, is that Walterio Carbonell has known how to argue what he throws out there very well, based on solid knowledge and with clarity of purpose, without stopping to weigh the consequences. Thus, it should not surprise anyone that in the final stretch of his race through life he remains as intact as always: problematic for the dogmas of power in Cuba and recalcitrant in the eyes of certain exile Cubans.

For almost half a century on the island, there are many, despite their intellectual or any other sort of merit (and they are well known), who have developed at the expense of having friendship ties with those who have the proverbial bull by the horns.

In Carbonell's case, these kinds of connections barely helped him to win enemies within and even at the margin of politics. His case is unique: he dared to openly and publicly express dissent, but without declaring his sympathies for what he still considers the revolution and allowing himself to feel resentment or bitterness for reprisals. He refused to abandon the path he says he chose as a young man, although he also did not become an accessory to the



inconsistencies and chaos of his ideologically oriented comrades, much less has he allowed himself to be dominated.

As a representative of a breed of indomitable men, he has lived and lives as he pleases: in darkness, but in full control of himself; silenced, but without swallowing his thoughts; marginalized, but not letting that eclipse his good humor, curiosity, or attributes of his ardent intellect; alienated, but still polishing the jewel of his lucidity. And his work is just like him. It couldn't be otherwise, since it reflects and exposes him from head to toe.

In 1961, Carbonell published *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*, not only a radical and inciting essay (the most radical and inciting in Cuban history) but also, above

all, a text that represents an inescapable point of departure in addition to a basic tool for the review of topics and foci that are still floating around out there, in the most inexplicable (and shameful) manner, because, perhaps, as he, himself, emphatically said: "In our country national culture has been discussed in a trivial or reactionary way."¹

In this essay, written from a (Marxist-Leninist) view of history that no doubt both helped and hindered him, but that surely gave him the tools he needed to blast conventions and dethrone wimpy paradigms, Carbonell set out to judge the "founders of the Cuban nationality," who are called as such, and not only totally justifiably, because of the general nature of

the manuals published earlier (and later) than *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*. To summarize, he demanded acknowledgement for the contributions and even historical role of blacks as a primary element of transcendental importance in the formation of our country's nationality, despite the fact that it had been relegated to a secondary position by most historians (and, with disconcerting persistency, it continues to be).

There is an expression among us, "vivir la tortilla" [to live in a constant state of change], which mean to stir things up, to counterattack by attacking, and it seems that this is precisely what Walterio Carbonell intended to do upon writing this essay; an essay in which no one remains unscathed. It should be understood from the start that each time he assaults someone he does so based strictly and meticulously on their position as false idols and never because they are white idols.

Yet, far from inciting urgent, enriching, constructive debate (even more so during those times of clamorous revolutionary victories), *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional* basically did nothing more than cause unease and disappointment for its creator. In fact, even before completing the essay, Carbonell had already gotten an advanced taste of the *contratemp*s that would beset him. He said as much in the very pages of the essay: "The moment I questioned the "recovery" thesis at a meeting with celebrated writers and artists at the National Library, in which Prime Minister Fidel Castro and President of the Republic Osvaldo Dorticós, disagreed with me that there should be no recovery of past reactionary writers, the supporters of total recovery have been alluding me in the

press and on television, not even mentioning my name."

In practice, one might say that Carbonell's reservations about the so-called "founders of the Cuban nationality" promised to be more defiant and revolutionary than the revolution itself (at least that is how they were received by most, if not all). Inasmuch as some of the essay's ideas had already been outlined earlier, although barely, they would be taken up later, with more and less thoroughness, particularly by Marxist leaning historians. Other notions (from the most substantial) as it were, at the present time are still hugely ignored or, if not, mentioned with hesitation.

This is without taking into account at this moment what the author, himself, claimed about another book (written precisely by one of the founders of empty notions): *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana en el Nuevo Mundo y en especial en los países américo-hispanos* [History of the Enslavement of the African Race in the New World], by José Antonio Saco, which according to Carbonell was "a book that for some strange but serendipitous reason was hardly ever cited by historians and that young intellectuals never read." Also, it may not be superfluous to mention that today such coincidences do not seem so strange, in either of the two instances.

Painful realities

The first two conclusions that Walter Carbonell draws from his essay testify to personal depth, and the equally revolutionary and extremely appropriate character of the objectives he set for himself. In the first, he confirms: "The basic thesis of this essay is that the birth and development

of the national culture is, in the first place, a product of class struggle, of the struggle between the fundamental classes of colonial society: slave owners and slaves. This tenet openly contradicts the thesis of bourgeois historians and their followers, who deduce the formation of the national consciousness and culture of the nineteenth century from the conflicts between the slave owning sugar planters and the Spanish state.”

In the second of his conclusions (there are a total of nine, all urgent and stirring) he sustains that: “Because it was the slaves, the most exploited class, who fueled the colonial economy and were the longest suffering during the nineteenth century (from 1800 till the Zanjón Treaty), it was from them that the more revolutionary classes emerged. This Marxist conclusion is confirmed by the very revolutionary actions of the Cuban slaves. Historical facts, too, also point to this. This notion contradicts the thesis posited by historians and their followers, who change the slave owning sugar barons (land owners) into the most revolutionary class.”

Today, both of Carbonell’s conclusions could be catalogued as obvious and even basic. Yet we would do well to recall that at the time these conclusions were written they landed like a ton of bricks on almost all of the Cuban historiography that had been written till then. And that is not all: in addition, for all their blatant apparentness, these conclusions are still quite commonly rejected by many, both outside and inside Cuba.

Similarly, Carbonell outlines a number of synthesized, hard truths in his essay that feel like punches, despite the fact no one repeats, few applaud and even fewer subscribe to them. Here is another exam-

ple: “In our country the national culture has been discussed in a trivial or reactionary way, so much so that it is embarrassing to view certain radicals turned apologists à la bourgeois mode of Parreño and Saco, staunch colonialists and fierce enemies of the immense majority of the population of their time, given that at least sixty percent of it was black and mestizo, while at the same time these individuals silence the name of José Antonio Aponte, the first great warrior for a nationality free of slavery and colonialism, and that of José María Heredia.”

Certain propositions included in chapter IV by Carbonell, subtitled precisely *Cómo se formó la cultural nacional* [How the National Culture was Formed] fell like a rain of fists on our history (except that they not only hurt but also enlightened). A very cursory examination of these serves to indicate that they seem to have been written in contemporary times, for example: “Under what conditions did Spaniards and Africans rescind the elements that formed their psychic and cultural makeup in Cuba? Under what conditions did they acquire the new psychic and cultural makeup to be called Cubans? One must adequately ask and answer these questions to understand how the Nation and the national culture were formed, and to know what is and is not authentically national. The still currently used patriotic innovations of those bourgeois historians have shed very little light on these topics. If the new generation of revolutionaries want to adequately solve the problems concerning the formation of the Nation and the national culture, they should avoid hackneyed approaches.”

The criticism Carbonell makes about traditionalist historians is devastating,

even just in the way they focus on the birth of the Cuban national consciousness. He is not only sharp but brilliant when he bitterly speaks of apparent ironies: “[Here is] another example of how the national consciousness was formed: in 1837 the monarchy leaves the illustrious class of slave owning land owners without representation in the courts; this is followed by shouts and protests. The ‘Criollos’ cry out in fear of the ‘terror’ introduced by Tacón. Were they ever afraid of the terror they, themselves, inflicted on the slaves?”

Carbonell attacks “the reactionary ideas of the first half of the nineteenth century, the period of the great writers who supported the annexation of Cuba by United States democracy with slavery or the repatriation of black to Africa” with proper but arduous appropriateness. And, again, let us not forget that in this sense his essay is extraordinarily relevant. As he puts it: “It is from the actions and reactions of the battling classes of the nineteenth century that the national consciousness emerges. A ‘self-destructive’ ideology affected that process and in their struggles both classes have created a place for their reencounter: nationality. What one can deduce from all this is that the national consciousness is not something that was created by a few men. That is precisely what historians did—glean the national consciousness from the activities of four slave owners who would meet at the Ayuntamiento de La Habana [the Havana City Hall], in the Consulate and in the Economic Society.

“Regardless of how influential Parreño, Luz Caballero, Saco and Del Monte might have been through their publications and ideas, being as they were, at the center of the slave owning, colonial society, the nation could not have been born in

the thoughts of those beautiful Minervas but rather from the very essence of the society of exploiting and exploited peoples”. It could not have been said more clearly: it is likely that no one did prior to Carbonell.

And he still warns that: “There is no reason to confuse the contradictions that existed between different slave owning groups with nationality or national culture, as some leftist revolutionaries tend to do. There is no reason to exaggerate the role of these contradictions as a factor in the disintegration of the Spanish colonial system. On the other hand, if the conditions among the different slave owning groups and the Spanish colonial system prior to 1868 contributed to the formation of the Cuban nationality, this does not mean that the aforementioned gentlemen were nationalists. Contradictions within a social system are one thing; the ideas that men forge regarding these contradictions are quite another.”

The great lesson of *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional* is that the exercise of historical justice not only implies an act of redemption for the Cubans descended from Africa but also an unavoidable dilemma for understanding the culture and history of the country and a basic civilizing project. Walterio Carbonell never submits a racist thesis: his battles are not against common whites but rather for them, as Cubans. Beyond his philosophical machinations or political positions, his ideas stem from essential cultural and civilizing beliefs.

Even if there were no other reasons (but there are), these and other blunt truths I have mentioned here seem to help us enough in understanding some of the reasons why this writer has suffered intel-

lectual marginalization throughout his life. Even now, Carbonell asserts (in words I am not using in his original sense of them): “It is regrettable that the colonial conception of culture is still dominant among us.”

Emphasis: An imprint

Emphasis is an expression of identity among Cubans: there is a reason for this. It is difficult for us to do without it, to differing degrees and from the most varied points of view, although more so for some than for others. This is nothing more than additional evidence of the torrent of fire, the clash of African and Spanish heritage, caused in our veins.

Walterio Carbonell tends to be impetuous, which is often not the most beneficial aspect of *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional* (although it is also sometimes the most noticeable).

For example, if there is anything that could be criticized about his views of the supposed “founders...” it is precisely the passionate and daring, and even kind of absolute tone with which he attempts to seal his argument. One proposition of his (a very laudable one, for its calm and equanimity) is to put preeminent figures of the exploiting class such as Arango and Parreño, Luz y Caballero, José Antonio Saco, Agustín Caballero and Domingo del Monte, who despite all their unquestionable historical merit have been given the ill fitting, ostentatious and exclusive title of founders of our nationality, in their proper place. But another (impetuous) goal of his is to disqualify them as founding agents of Cuban history. Carbonell devotes many pages of his essay to this topic. It is not possible to go into great detail about this

in the space allotted to me here: it might even try the readers’ patience. What is left to me is to examine this idea and reiterate the enormous importance of a thesis that caused and continues to cause so much consternation among prudish historians.

Other times Carbonell allows himself to be carried away by his pronouncements. Upon elaborating a well-documented and reasoned thesis, he sometimes ends it with a fierce flurry that hurts its purpose and obscures its goal, which sometimes causes a dilemma.

As an example of this, we have him first reasoning that: “Way before the Revolution, the bourgeoisie was already quite compromised by imperialism, not only in terms of economic power but also in terms of cultural power, too. In addition, its cultural values had been undermined by black traditions and practices. This is how African musical rhythms, considered savage by the bourgeoisie until 1930, the very same musical rhythm of the colonial slave quarters, rhythms that garnered slaves a hundred lashes from their owners, in punishment, became the bourgeoisie’s preferred and most entertaining dance beat.” Who could doubt the truthfulness, the preciseness of these declarations? Yet, in the end he obliterates them with a much too heavy hand: “The white population’s music during the colonial period disappeared,” he concludes, “and the void was filled with black music.”

Much could be said about the unparalleled rhythms of the music that was brought by African slaves, and the musical void they filled on our island (and in the universe), but that does not excuse going so far as to claim that the white population’s music “disappeared.” What is true, what is rigorously historical, and also fortunate

for the annals of our culture, is that the African rhythms in the Americas intermingled with European music and produced a current cultural phenomenon that is seen with awe and is the never ending source of studies and influence all around the world.

Popular music and, in general, all Cuban music (and music from the U.S. and Brazil, and other musical giants of this continent) would never have surpassed being considered much more than a feeble European copy if not for the overwhelmingly vigorous, imposing and rich contributions of African slaves. Yet, if that musical communion was possible, it is precisely not because one group destroyed the other, but that they both created something through a miraculous process of symbiosis, in extraordinary harmony.

A similar example, in which a valuable statement is undone by exaggeration, can be found in the following claim, on the same subject: "The evidence that the conflicts of the Spanish colonial era were not just economic and political is that after the end of Spanish domination the musical and religious habits and customs of the white and black populations continued to be at odds. During the republican period the struggle between the black African and white Spanish cultures continues. The dialectical conflict between Spanish culture and African culture in Cuba has ended in a victory for black music over the music of the old colonizers, even a victory of the collective psychology of blacks over the social psychology of the Spanish."

What Carbonell calls "victory," both in the case of the music as well as in that of the collective psychology, might more appropriately be deemed as having been the result of "determining influence"; when he says that the conflict between the Spanish

and African cultures "has ended," it might be useful to see if it really has ended, that is, if it is over or if—luckily—it still has the potential to keep enriching us dialectically.

On the other hand, I would like to express a shadow of a doubt upon considering this new declaration, in which Carbonell really pushes the envelope: "If the Cuban bourgeoisie had resoundingly triumphed in 1898, with aid from allied imperialists, and they had really ruled in the republic, their power would have overwhelmed and crushed African religions and mythology. And then their persecution of the proponents of African religions would have garnered the results the bourgeoisie wanted: an extermination of old African beliefs. With burgeoning and unilateral omnipotence, the bourgeoisie would have created an industry and a scientific culture against which surviving African religious practices would not have survived."

If we examine observations by serious scholars (with Carbonell at the head of the list, since in his own essay he correctly asserts that Spanish power and culture, from their powerful position, were not able to erase African religion and culture), it is really very difficult to accept the hypothesis of the extermination of beliefs of African origin in our country, much less in the twentieth century, not for any lack of desire or disposition towards attempting it, on the part of the bourgeoisie, but because at this point in history any such attempt would be a forgone failure. It is also necessary to say that in 1898 (before and even after), beliefs of African origin and, of course, their myriad followers on the Island were already an intrinsic part of our national culture. Moreover, it is

extremely difficult to exterminate a culture by decree or force.

Nevertheless, if the reasoning I just presented is not sufficiently persuasive, I will add to it something that is both revealing, symptomatic, and that Walterio Carbonell, himself, sets forth (although this time calmly and taking perfect aim): "Another symptom of weakness in the bourgeois culture is the way in which it allowed itself to become contaminated by black religious beliefs. The savage deities who ate children, Changó, Obatalá, Yemayá, got civilized and took over the spirits of wealthy people not to devour them nor live with them but to try to solve their romantic problems, help them in their aspiration to occupy high governmental positions, or get them out of difficult business situations."

It seems that there is nothing more to say about this viewpoint. But if there is still anyone who doesn't see it this way, Carbonell definitively ratchets up his argument just a bit more, despite the staunchly rigid Marxism of its first words: "It is precisely at the moment that the bourgeoisie begins to be fettered by the American monopolies that it loses confidence in its own destiny, in its authority to rule and its ability to rationally resolve its own economic problems. Thus, it turns to religion, to its own religion, and that of the stranger, to the very same religion of blacks of the colonial period and the first third of the republican era that it condemned. The bourgeoisie did not find enough magic in its own religion to solve its economic problems: the more the country's economic instability grew, the more African beliefs took hold in the minds of the dominant class. This is an interesting phenomenon that shows how an element of

the old superstructure of the dominated class, in this case black religion, becomes a superstructural element of the dominant class, that is, the enemy and exploitative class."

What Carbonell maintains about the fact that our culture is not "thought" but "borrowed" is equally sensitive to this controversy. Viewed simply, it seems a rather aged concept, since despite the fact that at some point in the past our culture might have been "borrowed" (in which case it was never really ours), this is in no way the case today, nor was it, of course, in 1961, when Carbonell published the first edition of *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*.

On the other hand, his ideas about pure culture, something he claims is more authentic the less "contaminated" it is by other influences, is also very subject to doubt nowadays: "...we should ask ourselves," Carbonell asks and answers emphatically, "if we have created an authentic culture. Are we radically different from Africa or Spain...? No. Our culture is more Spanish and African than authentically our own. Even in our music, the greatest achievement of our Cuban national culture, the African contribution is greater than what we have given to it. Of course, there are new musical and poetic elements in said music, which did not exist in the social psychology of either the Spanish or African cultures; that is why there are new cultural elements and we say we have a national culture. But it is a national culture in an embryonic stage, that is far from being an authentic culture."

What is strange and curious is that Walter Carbonell arrived at conclusions as controversial as those expressed above from a position as correct as: "One must have a

clear understanding of colonial history to comprehend the process through which our national culture, our national consciousness and our very Nation were created; this process is the product of class struggle, of a crisis in the nation's equilibrium. One must also undertake an analysis of cultural conflict, which is indispensable for understanding all the processes that led to the formation of the national culture."

What is important? That is what is essential in this matter. In addition to this, although not always for the worse (not even in most cases), one must consider the sometimes overwhelming weight of the political economy and the theory of class struggle: "And on the other hand, Lenin asserted that all national cultures subsume two traditions: one reactionary and other progressive, and that this last one is the one that should be saved."

Is it necessary for us now to add the possibly annoying and superfluous point that what should be saved, certainly, is Culture, with a capital 'C,' which is the aggregate of the best and most authentic creations of a people, whatever the class or social group membership of the creators might be? Must we repeat that the destiny and worth of a culture should not be, cannot ever be ruled by political criteria, power and/or factions, no matter the nobility of their purpose?

Just as in History, itself

Contradiction is at the very essence of history. Walterio Carbonell says as much in his essay. He also asserts that history has more lives than a cat. But he doesn't stop there: he goes on to demonstrate this in his analysis as he has always done in his personal history. Thus, no one should be too

upset if he or she encounters some or another paradox in *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*. A few sharp notes do not a concert make. As for the rest, who, in his or her entire existence, is not contradictory?

Apropos this essay, some time ago, Carbonell told a Cuban journalist that at the time he wrote it his ideas were plagued by a sense of urgency: "...they were the first years of the Revolution," he said, "and the internal ideological struggle was at its boiling point. I wanted to contribute to the success of the revolutionary ideas. I should have gone back over what I wrote, develop the ideas further, go deeper into more than one area, but later it was not possible."

This declaration of his leaves us with a persistent question on our lips: why was it not possible for Carbonell to patiently and conscientiously review his book, knowing then, as he surely does now, that although it is a historical document of great testimonial value and very current relevance, it has yet to find the opportunity to make its greatest contribution?

Many are the years between the publication of its first edition, in 1961, and the version reissued in 2005 by Ediciones Bachiller, at the José Martí National Library, in Cuba. Thus, it could not have been due to a lack of time [that he didn't revise it]. Ultimately, in the words of an old slave quarters' adage: only the knife knows what is at the heart of the yam.

In any event, what is most important is to keep in mind that this essay exists and is out there, available to specialists and researchers, or any eager reader. It offers, invites and demands debate on a series of subjects that have yet to be reasonably unraveled, although at the current rate it might take an eternity for this to happen.

In fact, even today, as much of Carbonell's work remains unknown, and unresolved mysteries exist about what he wrote forty-six years ago, enough new questions continue to arise to fill a similar book, or a continuation of the old one, whose writing this particular author will not be able to undertake (and it is a shame).

A very simple (and quick) example of this comes to mind regarding the subject of Cuban religions with roots in Africa. It is not a secret to anyone that at the time of his essay's publication, in the height of the revolutionary period, these religions were being marginalized on the Island, as they would continue to be for several more decades. In fact, if they are tolerated today and have even begun to be publicly promoted by certain sectors of those in power, it is more as folkloric elements that attract a great many tourists, i.e., to make financial profit. Those in power, from the colonial period to now, have more or less always felt a secret weakness and sympathy for these religions. But the truth is that very few of them have embraced them. If they do embrace them, they do it for what they are, authentic manifestations of our national culture, above and beyond anything else.

In 1961, Carbonell insisted: "I have said that religious organizations played a progressive role in the political and cultural aspects of our nationality. This might surprise many because the opposite notion has heretofore prevailed, i.e. that black religions are a manifestation of savagery. Nevertheless, this is the thesis that was espoused by colonial ideologues and their followers, the reactionary bourgeoisie. The silence with which certain revolutionary writers have met the question of the political or cultural role of religious beliefs of African origin is a bit suspicious. Are they

afraid to touch these subjects for fear of offending the black population? All we can ascertain from their writings, as far as religion is concerned, is that Catholicism served as an instrument of the dominant class. Yet, on the subject of African religions they offer no opinion: we cannot know from their work where they stand or whether these beliefs played a progressive or reactionary role in the social conflicts of the nineteenth century."

To this I would like to add that if we have hardly been able to know the opinion of "revolutionary" historians and intellectuals on the progressive role said religions played in history prior to 1959, we know even less about the role they may have played afterwards.

It seems that the best explanation for this continues to be the one we can extrapolate from another of Carbonell's affirmations: "The religious organizations of the Africans in Cuba were not only the most efficient instruments for the preservation of traditional black cultures; they also functioned as political organizations that combated slavery. The clandestine and religious nature of these organizations obscured their true political role. They had no written manifesto, but in practice they served like underground political organizations. Aponte created no special organization; his most efficient revolutionary tool for fighting Spanish colonialism and the slave owning regime was none other than these religious organizations."

Another example of something that would be a great topic for a book, as a continuation of *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional* or not, is that Carbonell mercilessly (and assuredly) attacks the Cuban intellectuals of the colonial and republican periods for their historic complicity or

collusion with racial discrimination. Is there, perhaps, nothing to be said today about a large (numerous and well fed) group of Island intellectuals who before, during and after have kept silent, supported, justified, distorted and excused new (old) forms of racial discrimination?

I have always held that approaching this topic is a useful start beginning with Carbonell's own wisdom. Thus, we could begin by searching for an explanation for our contemporary situation as regards to its now, nearly fifty year old, inveterate lamentations: "...because the bourgeoisie based its authority not only on economic and political power but also on the power of the lies propagated by their learned men. And, also because many of these lies are still taken as truths, today, even by those revolutionaries who contributed to the liberation of our country from bourgeois domination, but have been unable to free themselves from the ideological power of that bourgeoisie."

In what could be a sudden, final, malicious insinuation, it might be no less interesting to weigh in our own era, the relevance of the Marxist-Leninist perspective that Walterio Carbonell uses to analyze the origins of Cuban nationality. No doubt it will be a difficult but in no way useless, or much less boring task, first, because we should not (nor perhaps could we) begin this analysis of Carbonell's work using foggy philosophical notions, and secondly, because he, himself, reviews on more than one occasion, the very theoretical underpinnings of his own work.

It would not, of course, make sense (or be of any value) to blame Marxist-Leninism, itself, for the insufficient progress that has been made in Cuba, over the last forty-eight years, regarding the

social and economic claims of black people. Perhaps the worse thing one could blame on Marxist-Leninism (and it is really not its fault) is that it placed a very functional restriction on political power via its classic sermon about theoretical equality, which was ideal, in fact, for obscuring vast inequalities.

"We are now all equal," we keep repeating, through inertia, although it is well known, and uttered behind closed doors, ad nauseum, that some are and always have been more equal than others. It is also common knowledge that at its core (no matter if it is adorned in red) that equalizing, conforming leveler that Carbonell denounces, is a reflection of a truly bourgeois mentality. It is the one that says that the problems of the poor, of the oppressed, shackled and discriminated masses, with no right to complain, are one and the same: that they are primitive, simple, psychologically uncomplicated people, and that complex minds and existential conflicts are the exclusive purview of civilized people, of the bourgeoisie and of the big shots.

Walterio Carbonell, an educated man with a vast knowledge of Western culture and a keen mind, instead chose to live stubbornly faithful to his roots, his class and his principles. And, it has cost him dearly, if we consider all the obstacles he has faced, as would be the desire of the kind of intellectual he is not. His friend Juan Goytisolo has defined him as "The cimarron of the revolutionary order, the heir of the rebelliousness of his Mambi ancestors."

We, his readers and unapologetic admirers in Havana, have already begun to miss him. He has not come to light up his usual corner of the Cuban Room of the

National Library for some months now. The years, the plagues, and the bandy of hurricanes have begun to hollow out the heart of the oak. But he is still here with

us, with more lives than a cat, clinging to a revolution he loved and loves with no conditions or resentment and it appears, also with no hope.

Notes

1. All of Walterio Carbonell quotes are from his book, *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*, Ediciones Bachiller (Colección Escribanía, Segunda Edición Corregida, 2005, José Martí National Library, La Habana, Cuba.