Padura Fuentes, Leonardo. *El hombre que amaba a los perros.* Barcelona:Tusquets Editores, S.A., 2009. ISBN: 978-8-4838313-6-6. 573 pp.

Leonardo Padura Fuentes' *El hombre que amaba a los perros* is a clear demonstration that his brilliance as a writer spans beyond Cuban investigative novels, extending into the unforeseen depths of history and the human heart. Padura's poignant descriptions of Cuba during economical and political crises throughout the investigation of a crime are not lacking in this suspenseful fictional representation of Leon Trotsky's assassination, but they are certainly not the focus.

In this fresh nuance of historical fiction, Padura places the Cuban citizen at the center of attention, giving life to a story otherwise thought irrelevant to Cuban history and dead and buried in history's vault of untold and unfinished stories. Iván Cárdenas Maturell, an aspiring writer in the 1970s, visits a deserted Cuban beach one day and unknowingly meets a professional killer, *el hombre que amaba a los perros*, a man who calls himself Jaime López. With each unexpected encounter with López, a man always accompanied by his two rare Russian greyhounds and shadowed by a tall, black bodyguard, Iván punches through the black cloud surrounding the man's past without realizing, and soon finds himself inside a dangerous circle of history unfamiliar to many modern Cubans: the detailed account of Soviet exile and enemy Leon Trotsky's death.

This unprecedented narration is told in twisting, kaleidoscopic points of view, not only placing the reader on Iván Cárdenas Maturell's shoulder in the 1970s upon meeting this mysterious dog lover, but also in the brilliant minds of the assassin, Ramón Mercader del Río, and his target, Leon Trotsky. The fictional portrait Padura masterfully draws out provides an in-depth sketch of the personal lives Trotsky and Mercader led years before the assassination was planned, demonstrating the way in which two men with seemingly isolated and meandering destinies are forced along the same path by the hands of a ubiquitous caudillo who would alter their lives forever: Joseph Stalin.

Throughout the book we see the mindboggling international power flexed by the Iron Curtain and the way in which Stalin morphs into a strategic chess player in international politics, manipulating an innumerable sum of pawns to reach his arch enemy, Trotsky. He takes advantage of the bloody situation leading up to and during the Spanish

Civil War to recruit leftist extremists willing to risk blood and bone f a better communist future. Attracted to the shiny pedestal promised them on the infamous wall of fame in the Soviet Union, Ram Mercader and his mother, Caridad, dedicate their lives to Stalin's sec plan. The only problem is they are left in the dark and shielded from t rest of Stalin's secrets, and, in the dictator's impatience to carry out t plan, they become confused as to their importance and Stalin's tr allegiance to them as his supporters.

On the other side of the barbed wire, Padura inserts us beneath t tough, politically charged poker face maintained by Trotsky to t public. Through personal recounts of his daily life as an exile, experience with him the loss of his children, the slow, dying hope change as he hops from one country to the next, and a formidal premonition felt in the marrow of his bones: that his demise is bei planned in some unknown scrap of the world. He distracts himself dedicating himself to writing and maintaining international contac always sparking up small fires for Trotskyites, and, of course, bidi his time with his dogs, Azteca and Maya.

As for Iván, a dog lover himself, for almost thirty years he wrest the memory of López and the ghost of the unfinished story of Ram Mercader that was confessed to him on a deserted Cuban beach 1977. By the arrival of 2004, manuscripts written by López during dying days have wound up on his doorstep and he realizes smoldering story cannot be ignored any longer, despite the plea fr his raconteur that he swallow the details of his secretive past and ta them to his grave. Trembling, Iván picks up his pen to deliver the s of this buried man's past, which now incessantly chases him. Looki beneath the surface, he sees that no matter how much a repress society attempts to do so, the darkest secrets withheld through generations can creep up and force their way out of history's tomb w *ganas* to stage themselves in front of the world.

The climax touches down with a visceral shot landing on the bu eye of history and Trotsky's recorded death. Yet Padura demonstra that as disconnected as humanity at times may seem, simple similari such as a passion for dogs can link enemies' and strangers' lives in intimate way which transcends all cultural, political, and generatio barriers. Through this surprisingly uncomplicated detail, the dedicat in taking care of man's best friend, Padura humanizes Mercad

leaving us between hesitant tides of compassion for his weaknesses and swells of anger and contempt toward his obstinacy.

Iván wants to know why he feels pity for a killer and why he, a poor Cuban during Castro's reign, was chosen as the person to carry Mercader's story. What's more, he longs to disassociate himself with Mercader but no longer can, realizing, like most Cubans during the economical and political crises that have plagued the island, he lives in constant fear. He is unable to tell his own story, let alone that of Mercader's, and with each rise and drop in the plot we wonder who is telling the story and, in its telling, who overcomes the fear inherited and passed down from generations. Iván doesn't want to write "the man who loved dogs'" story, but each chapter demonstrates that sometimes there is no choice but to speak out when our lives are embedded with the memories and loss of others. He shows that sometimes our story is their story, and without the latter ours ceases to exist.

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Rafael Rojas. *El estante vacío: literatura y política en Cuba.* Barcelona: Anagrama, 2009. ISBN: 978-84-339-6288-1: 240 pp.

Given the recent 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, the topic of literature's relationship with the Revolutionary government would seem to be very timely. While continuing the study of the Cuban canon that has been characteristic of Rafael Rojas's earlier works, *El estante vacío* acknowledges the anniversary by limiting its scope to the post-1959 era and devoting much of its attention to the production of the post-Soviet period. The title's image of an empty bookshelf, suggestive of the effects of censorship, initiates this engaging exploration of the fluctuating relationship between the Revolutionary Cuban government and Cuban writers on and off the island. Central to this study are the questions of which authors are circulated on the island, why and in what conditions, and how the rules of this game change during the 1990s and 2000s.

The work is divided into an introduction and seven chapters. In t
first chapter, "Anatomía del entusiasmo," Rojas traces the arc
enamorment and disenchantment with the Revolutionary governme
that many European and North American leftists experienced. Particu
attention is paid to the experiences of Jean Paul Sartre and Charl
Wright Mills and to the ripples that their ideas caused in Cuban literatu

In the second chapter, "Souvenirs de un Caribe soviético," Ro
studies the Cuban-Soviet alliance, its similarities to and differenc
from a colonial relationship and the extent of the Soviet footprint
Cuban culture. Alongside these concerns he effectively analyzes t
reception of Soviet literature in Cuba as a way of exploring the iron
of Cuban censorship, which found itself limiting, and finally cutti
off, voices from the socialist Metropolis.

In "Benjamin no llegó a La Habana," Rojas takes the near-to
exclusion of Walter Benjamin's texts from Cuban publishing as illustrati
of "lo poco ilustrados que son los socialistas habaneros" (112). T
third chapter argues that Benjamin's skeptical approach to institutio
alized revolutions can help today's Cuban artists and suggests ways
which second-hand influence of Benjamin has played a role in rec
Cuban literature.

Chapter four, "Después del Mesías," turns its attention to a broa
swathe of Post-Soviet Cuban literary production, studying two signi
cant and opposing narrative strategies for approaching the curr
moment: a nostalgia for the heyday of socialism, which ignores t
period's temporal distance from the present, and a fixation on t
decadence of a consciously Post-Soviet Havana. Rojas also intriguing
relates Neomarxist theories to Cuban artists' struggle for autonomo
space.

"Entre fronteras," the fifth chapter, begins with a sympathe
analysis of the cultural relevance of the short-lived postmodern proj
Paideia of the late 1980s. Rojas then moves on to a broad discussion
the diverse literature produced by the Generation of the '80s, tho
Cubans "nacidos poco antes o poco después de 1959" (162). Roja
taste for classification shows with particular clarity in this section, as
lists the names of many prominent members of this generati
Discussion of the Generation of the '80s accompanies that of t
diaspora of the '90s, as Rojas argues for a less territorial definition
Cubanness.