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Mínima Cuba: Heretical Poetics and Power in Post-Soviet Cuba. Marta Hernández Salván. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015. 262 pp.

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In *Mínima Cuba: Heretical Poetics and Power in Post-Soviet Cuba*, Marta Hernández Salván studies the cultural status of revolutionary discourse in Cuba before and after the fall of the Soviet Union, with an emphasis on the post-Soviet years known since Fidel Castro's 1990 decree as the Special Period in Time of Peace.

Hernández Salván's exposition is conceptually organized in two parts, which its structural chapter sequence roughly follows. The first is specifically concerned with the utopian promise of revolution and the concepts of blood, sacrificial violence, and the birthing of a new nation through heroic death that all work to support that utopian promise discursively. In Chapter One, "Sovereignty of Violence," Hernández Salván traces these notions from the revolutionary fervor of the early sixties through the institutionalization—the Stalinization, as it is often called—of the seventies, with central discussion of Ernesto "Che" Guevara's "Socialism and the New Man in Cuba," which seminally proposed a new cultural subjectivity for a new revolutionary future, Fidel Castro's political writings and speeches, Luis Rogelio Noguerras's detective novel *Y si muero mañana*, and Mirta Aguirre's championing of the literary modality of social realism. Throughout, Hernández Salván focuses on how self-sacrificial heroic violence is posited as the foundational vehicle for the safeguarding of utopian ideals and the realization of a new nation based on revolutionary principles.

The first part of Chapter Two, "Violence and Melancholia in the Eighties and Nineties," traces these same elements of the cultural imaginary in what we might call the "orthodox criticism" of intellectuals born into Revolution who came of age in the eighties. Focusing on the recuperation of the pre-revolutionary Grupo Orígenes (Hernández Salván gives readings of Eliseo Diego, José Lezama Lima, and Gastón Baquero as representative thereof) and the Paideia Project that sought to enact a critical and corrective renewal of revolution that nevertheless affirmed its utopian ideals, Hernández Salván reads works by Pedro Marqués de Armas, Juan Carlos Flores, and Antonio José Ponte as emblematic of a new generation of cultural agents who no longer believed in heroic violence but had not yet abandoned the dream of utopia. Indeed, during these three decades, Hernández Salván argues, when Cuba's socialism was underwritten by the existence of the USSR in the global political theater, even when these children of revolution began to levy critiques against the repressive character of its institutionalization, the promise of utopia remained intact as a discursive possibility.

The second part of Hernández Salván's study begins when she enters the nineties and the Special Period in the second half of Chapter Two. Her discussion of the institutionally critical yet utopically orthodox Paideia Project and the influential literary salon known as La Azotea on poet Reina María Rodríguez's rooftop, both of which in turn witnessed a successive iteration by some of the same cultural actors under the extra-institutional aegis of Project Diaspora(s), brings Hernández Salván to the heart of her book. It is from the culturally critical and, in Hernández Salván's view, discursively minimalist poetry of these groups that the book takes its title, as she explains in her introduction: "The name of my book refers to poetic language as the less discursive and more concise expression of that which escapes the arena of civil society subsumed under state control. [...] [This poetry] represents the political violence of a failed socialist imaginary on the body of the nation" (6). For Hernández Salván, Diaspora(s) poetry registers a decisive break with revolutionary utopia, and is, in this way, "heretical," as the book's title indicates; its "[d]iscontent comes from the Diáspora(s) members' epistemological disagreement with revolutionary ideology, [...] which is what they want to 'destroy'" in order to produce what founding Diaspora(s) poet Rolando Sánchez Mejías calls "dysfunctional delight" (121).

In the remainder of the book, Hernández Salván most centrally engages with Diaspora(s) poetry as capturing the anti-revolutionary critical ethos of the Special Period—better yet, non-revolutionary, for, in Hernández Salván's view, these poetic subjects have become entirely non-participatory in the revolutionary project, not even evincing an antagonism in the sense of vying for a new politico-cultural project that would be classically constitutive of a

counter-revolutionary position. Chapter Three, “Biopolitics and the Revival of José Lezama Lima,” follows the struggle for hermeneutical control over the memory of Lezama Lima sustained between Diáspora(s) writers (Víctor Fowler is chiefly discussed) and a Cuban state that Hernández Salván analyzes as having been forced by the withering of socialism and of its own power to move in offensive defense from a politics of sovereignty (following Foucault, enjoying the right to take life—and to exile writers from cultural memory) to a politics of biopower (now exercising the right to control life—and to dictate the terms of ideologically proscribed writers’ “rehabilitation” within the cultural imaginary). In Chapter Four, “Humanism, Irony, and the End of Literature,” Hernández Salván examines the irony and humor in the poetry of Carlos A. Aguilera, Sánchez Mejías, and Marqués de Armas, the latter of whose work “underscores the important ethical nature of the writing of disaster [understood as the loss of socialism and of the possibility of utopia]” (205), and, as a collective sensibility, heralds the “end of literature as a project of social emancipation” (211).

Whereas many recent cultural monographs on Revolutionary Cuba circumscribe their inquiry to a discrete time period in its established historiography (e.g., Ana Serra studies the “New Man” in the early years of Revolution; Jacqueline Loss analyzes the “Cuban Soviet imaginary”; Esther Whitfield explores currency, capitalism, and tourism in Special Period fiction), Hernández Salván takes on the full span of Revolutionary cultural history. In her view, it is her use of psychoanalytic theory that gives her the interpretive leverage to bridge these time periods, taking as a point of departure her identification of a critical mass of voices asserting melancholy as a primary characteristic of the Special Period and seeking to delve deeper into that terrain at the juncture of emotion, ideology, and nation: “I think,” Hernández Salván avers, “that only by looking at this problem [of the nineties as an era of disenchantment and melancholia] from a psychoanalytical perspective can we understand why scholars are talking about melancholia in the first place” (77). To this end, Hernández Salván scaffolds her entire study with the exegetical armature of psychoanalysis, seated on the claim of a melancholic cycle of self-sacrificial revolutionary heroism required to fill the void of the destroyed bourgeois ego. The afterword lays out in succinct clarity the relationship between time periods and chapters in the psychoanalytic vocabulary that Hernández Salván develops throughout, moving from the Guevarian imperative to utopically reconstitute the lost ego to the cynical indifference of the Special Period where an apolitical and non-ideological search for the self seeks the lost ego but no longer quests for utopia. Devotees of psychoanalytic theory will indubitably appreciate this intricate interpretive apparatus comprised of discussions woven around the ideas of Freud, Lacan, Žižek, Abraham and Török, and Kristeva, among others. At the risk of committing heresy with respect to this Hernández Salván’s most vaunted interpretive discourse, I will, however, venture to laud most highly the plain-language argumentational through-line—which I have attempted to foreground here—in which Hernández Salván’s own voice resonates most powerfully as she deftly and surefootedly cuts through the complex cultural and literary historiography of Revolutionary Cuba in order to yield a concise portrait—*mínimo*, she might allow—of the nearly sixty-year discursive dance therein between power and utopia.