

The New York Times

Cuba: A Reading List

[“Before Night Falls”](#) by Reinaldo Arenas

Mr. Arenas was persecuted in Cuba for his writings and for being gay, and eventually fled to the United States. He committed suicide in New York in 1990, at 47. “Before Night Falls,” his autobiography, was later made into [a film](#) starring Javier Bardem. In The New York Times Book Review, Roberto González Echevarría wrote: “Anyone who feels the temptation to be lenient in judging Castro’s government should first read this passionate and beautifully written book.”

[“Dreaming in Cuban”](#) by Cristina García

Ms. García’s first novel tells the story of three generations of women in one family, and how staying in Cuba or fleeing the country affects their lives. Reviewing the book in The Times, Michiko Kakutani said that Ms. García had “produced a work that possesses both the intimacy of a Chekhov story and the hallucinatory magic of a novel by Gabriel García Márquez.”

[“Paradiso”](#) by José Lezama Lima

This novel by Mr. Lima, a major Cuban poet, is about a boy’s coming of age and his search for his dead father. In the Book Review, Edmund White wrote that Mr. Lima “not only has the power to create absorbing and memorable images, he has also placed these images into a vast network of philosophical and mythical significance.”

[“Three Trapped Tigers”](#) by Guillermo Cabrera Infante

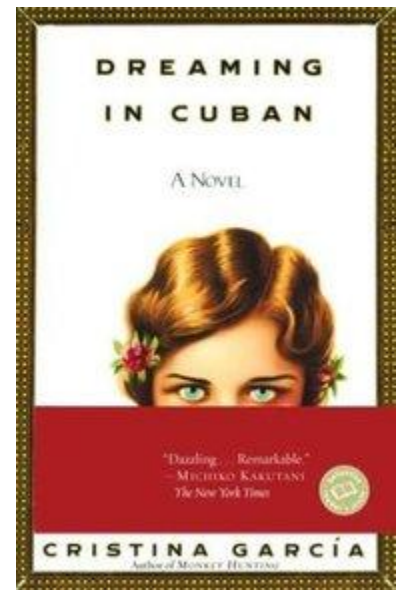
In the Book Review, Charles Wilson wrote that Mr. Infante’s most celebrated novel “borrows from the playfulness and form of James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’ and ‘Finnegans Wake’ as it describes the decadent life of young people who explore Havana’s cabaret society during the Batista era.”

[“Explosion in a Cathedral”](#) by Alejo Carpentier

Set in Cuba and elsewhere, Mr. Carpentier’s novel revolves around the story of Victor Hugues, a colonial administrator during the French Revolution. In the Book Review, Abel Plenn said the book’s images “succeed each other with cinematic speed and often hypnotic daring.”

[“Waiting for Snow in Havana”](#) by Carlos Eire

Mr. Eire’s memoir about his boyhood in Cuba and eventual exile won the National Book Award for nonfiction in 2003. The author [told The Times](#) that the book was about “what’s precious in childhood and how that can be corrupted and blown up and destroyed by political circumstances.”

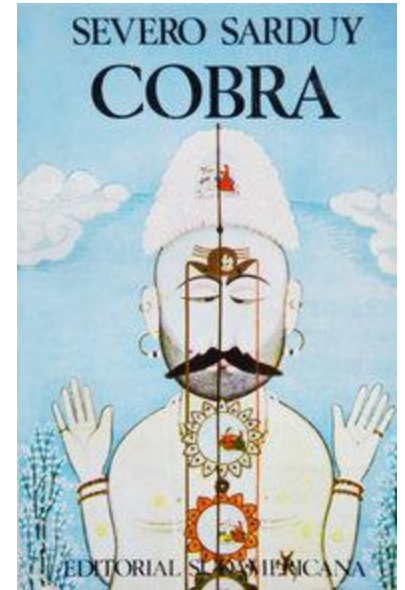


“Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life” by Jon Lee Anderson

Mr. Anderson’s book, published in 1997, was the first major biography of the revolutionary. In the Book Review, Peter Canby wrote: “Mr. Anderson does a masterly job in evoking Che’s complex character, in separating the man from the myth and in describing the critical role Che played in one of the darkest periods of the cold war. Ultimately, however, the strength of his book is in its wealth of detail.”

“Cobra” and “Maitreya” by Severo Sarduy

These two avant-garde novels, one about a transvestite completing her transformation and the other about a cook who becomes a reincarnation of Buddha, are available in one edition from Dalkey Archive Press, which calls Sarduy “perhaps the strangest and most inventive writer” of the Latin American “Boom.”



“Bacardi and the Long Fight for Cuba” by Tom Gjelten

The history of Cuba told through the family behind the Bacardi Rum Company, founded when Cuba was still a Spanish colony. In a review in The Times, Barry Gewen wrote: “There’s a shelf of histories to consult” about Cuba, but “it’s hard to imagine that any is as enjoyable” as this one.

“Dancing With Cuba” by Alma Guillermoprieto

“Dancing With Cuba” recounts the time the author spent in Havana in 1970, when she was in her early 20s, teaching modern dance to young Cubans. Writing in the Book Review, Katha Pollitt said Ms. Guillermoprieto “uses dance as a lens through which to explore the aspirations and injustices and contradictions of a whole society.”

“Telex From Cuba” by Rachel Kushner

Ms. Kushner’s first novel is about a group of Americans prospering in Cuba before Castro’s revolution, and what happens to them when change comes. In the Book Review, Susann Cokal wrote: “Kushner’s sharp observations about human nature and colonialist bias provide a deep understanding of the revolution’s causes.”

“The Man Who Loved Dogs” by Leonardo Padura

Writing in The Times, Álvaro Enrigue said that Mr. Padura “known for detective thrillers, has made his entrance to the Latin American Modernist canon by writing a Russian novel.” His book has three strands, involving Trotsky; his killer, Ramón Mercador; and a frustrated Cuban writer. The writer meets a man who may be Mercador and through him learns about Stalin and other 20th-century horrors, things he is ignorant of because of the Cuban government’s policy of “programmed ignorance.”

“Trading With the Enemy: A Yankee Travels Through Castro’s Cuba” by Tom Miller

Mr. Miller’s account of eight months he spent in Cuba, including run-ins with some well-known people and many ordinary citizens.