

OPINION: Life-saving Poets

By: Enrique Ubieta Gómez / Special for CubaSi
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A poet from Fomento, in the province of Sancti Spíritus, envisioned an online book distribution project, created a digital reading room, and fulfills requests via the Internet. The number of readers in the town has grown, although the reach of his deliveries extends far beyond. In Camajuaní, Villa Clara, another poet dedicates himself to reading books in schools or at people's doorsteps, inviting them to his home, where 19th-century-style literary gatherings are revived. Whether using modern technology or old-fashioned methods, these Quixotes fight against the cognitive reduction caused by fleeting social media messages, reels, and other blinding flashes that endlessly populate “social” networks. Names like Cervantes, Marx, José Martí, or Gabriela Mistral —just to cite a few— cannot fit into a single X post, and we cannot afford to discard them or the literary and scientific legacy humanity treasures.

These poets do not only battle the reductive influence of social media; they also contend with the power outages caused by the U.S. blockade.

They seek to ignite and simultaneously quench a different kind of hunger in people: for spirituality, truth, and beauty.

In these towns, there may be no electricity for eight to ten hours a day. Yet, the generous mother of another poet, a fellow traveler, offers me in Vueltas town, a wood-fired coffee that tastes like glory. Meanwhile, Zizú, her passionate nephew, explains his undergraduate thesis about local birds, aimed at protecting their ecosystem. A country of poets who do not retreat into ivory towers, of students who love and care deeply about their environment, is invincible.

In Camajuaní, a small business producing high-quality shoes and boots, in association with the Cuban Fund for Cultural Assets, operates with a solar-powered plant and never halts production. Its owner belongs to the Municipal Band, earning the nickname "The Musician," which also serves as the name of the factory.

While this occurs, the United States swears in a convicted criminal as President —judged by a court in his own country, not Iran or Cuba, supposed "enemies"— and his Secretary of State, the son of Cuban economic emigrants who left the island in 1956 (under the Batista regime), declares that Cuba, a country he exploits as a political pedestal yet has never walked its streets or fields, should not be removed from the list of *"state sponsors of terrorism."* This designation, crafted to prevent investments or financing in Cuba's development projects, serves imperialist interests. *"I have no doubt that they meet all the criteria for being a state sponsor of terrorism,"* he states without hesitation. These "criteria," however, reflect his personal agenda.

Adding to the farce, when President Biden excluded Cuba from the arbitrary list in his final days in office, the new administration reversed the decision immediately. On his first day, Trump revealed, like a mafia boss, plans to reclaim the Panama Canal and reinstated Cuba on the list. While Biden's decision acknowledged findings from U.S. intelligence agencies, Trump's actions demonstrated his administration's prioritization of self-interest over truth, laws, and international norms. If Biden washed his hands like Pontius Pilate by maintaining the sanctions of his predecessor, Trump and his staff

ensured the tightening of the blockade, exploiting the Cuban people's suffering for political gain. As Che warned: *"Not even a little bit to imperialism."*

Life in Cuba's small towns is harsh. What saves them is solidarity, the ingenuity to overcome obstacles without surrendering, and the values of a culture forged in resistance. Samuel Feijoo's playful and creative spirit lives on in the central Cuban countryside, illuminating even the darkest moments.

Fidel Castro's oft-quoted phrase, *"Culture is the first thing to be saved,"* deserves to be understood in its full context. It is a reminder that Cuban identity, rooted in popular culture, also encompasses the values shaped by socialism:

"(...) People learned to live with these values, and I have witnessed it," Fidel said at the Fifth Congress of UNEAC on November 25, 1993. *"All these manifestations I see are evidence of how deeply rooted certain ideas, values, and beliefs are in our society and country. We must maintain our attachment and love for these values in these difficult times when so many threats loom over us. Culture is the first thing to be saved."*

Culture will not survive without its defenders. It will not be inherited by our children if we do not preserve, reproduce, and enrich it, even amid imperialist aggression, shortages, and the resignation or abandonment of some.

Where poets seek or create readers, bringing light to the needy —saving lives in their way— like the Pechero, my new friend Zizú's term for the Cuban endemic bird that attracts other species with its song; where mothers uphold family bonds with strength and tenderness, there is hope. In places where others plan death, Cuba projects life.

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