> Man is a stupendous antagonism.
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson

I

Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa are some of the names that have won the Cervantes Prize from the Royal Spanish Academy. Since its inception in 1976, only two women have won the annual prize, both of them virtually unknown. María Zambrano of Spain and Dulce María Loynaz of Cuba. Loynaz was a 90-year-old widow when she was awarded the prize and was all but forgotten in Communist Cuba. In fact, Loynaz won the prize in 1992 for books she had written in the 1930s and 40s. Everything Loynaz wrote—her novel, her three books of poetry, and her travel book—was published in Madrid during the 1950s. Her last book was published in 1958, the same year of the Cuban Revolution. That Loynaz won the Cervantes Prize 34 years later after languishing unpublished for three decades in Cuba has to be one of the greater surprises in the history of the Cervantes Prize. When Loynaz received the award from King Juan Carlos I she was too weak to stand on stage, and being nearly blind, she could not read her own acceptance speech. She was also accompanied by a former Cuban official who had once denounced her. The irony, while she sat there, must have been very rich indeed.

Loynaz's poetry earns its place in Latin America's pantheon of great women writers of the twentieth century, which includes the Nobel Laureate Gabriela Mistral (Chile), Alfonsina Storni (Argentina), and Delmira Augustini (Uruguay). Many readers, including this one, admire Loynaz as much for her life as for her poetry, and I venture to say the Royal Spanish Academy might have been similarly impressed. Loynaz suffered greatly in Communist Cuba. There was the prohibition of her work for more than 25 years, there was the ostracization that came with the constant attacks on her character, there was the silencing of her voice and her freedom to dissent, there was the exile of her husband and their twelve-year separation, and there was a nearly constant vigilance by the state police and the unwarranted searches of her home. At the height of her fame in 1958 when her friends included such artists as Juan Ramón Jiménez and Gabriela Mistral, Loynaz was given a choice: life in Madrid as a highly respected novelist, poet, and journalist, or life in Cuba under a regime that made it clear that intellectuals from Cuba's former bourgeoisie would not be tolerated. Loynaz chose Cuba and the silence that came with it. In effect, she chose to be forgotten.

Remaining in Cuba could not have been an easy choice. Loynaz knew she would be ostracized. Unlike other intellectuals who fled after the Revolution, Loynaz could not use her status as a Cuban exile to garner sympathy from the West's intellectuals, she could not publish, and she could not speak out. She was, in fact, silenced. Loynaz also found very little favor in the community of Cuban exiles in Europe and the United States. For exiles like Guillermo Cabrera Infante and other Cuban intellectuals living abroad, Loynaz betrayed Cuba by remaining in the country. She suffered, therefore, a double-edged exile, scorned at home and scorned abroad. This is one reason why so little was known about Loynaz until she won the 1992 Cervantes Prize. She had found no place in the Cuban canon determined at home and no place in the Cuban canon determined by

exiles.

Loynaz accepted the silence imposed on her by the Cuban state, but for many Cubans her presence was a boon to those who secretly opposed Castro. While poets like Nicolás Guillén were reaping the benefits that came with writing poems dedicated to the Communist regime, Loynaz chose solitude. But it was a solitude charged with a quiet, non-conformist stand against Castro's dictatorship. In Communist Cuba, and Loynaz herself must have known this, her mere presence was a form of resistance. But if Loynaz wanted to remain in Cuba her resistance had to be both passive and subtle. Loynaz demonstrated this subtlety in her acceptance speech for the Cervantes Prize, a speech in which—remarkably—she does not once mention Cuba. Nor, of course, does she mention Castro, Socialism, or the Communist government. Even when she quotes José Martí, Loynaz did not call him the great *Cuban* poet, but rather "our great *Hispanic American* thinker." For a Cuban writer to win the Cervantes Prize and not use it as a stage to praise or at least thank Cuba and the merits of its Communist government is an extraordinary act of courage. Not to mention Cuba at all, in the minds of many, is very close to an act of treason. Even the line she quotes from Martí in praising Cervantes had its very pointed meaning: "Men are measured by the immensity of that which they oppose."

II

Dulce María Loynaz was born on December 10, 1902, the same year Cuba became an independent republic. Her father, Enrique Loynaz del Castillo, was a famous general in Cuba's War of Independence (also known as the Spanish-American War). To understand why Loynaz chose to stay in Cuba after the Revolution one must begin with Loynaz's relationship with her father. Loynaz believed that General Loynaz del Castillo was one of Cuba's founding fathers. From a military point of view, he was certainly a key figure in Cuba's victory over the Spanish. Loynaz del Castillo was a close friend of José Martí and he is also known for having saved the life of Antonio Maceo, the father of Cuban Independence. As a soldier Loynaz de Castillo fought in 57 battles. In the battle known as *Paso de las Damas,* in which 800 Cubans defeated an army of 2,600 Spaniards, Loynaz del Castillo led a charge in which two horses were killed under him. Perhaps more significantly, Loynaz del Castillo wrote the lyrics to the "Invasion Hymn," the Cuban army's battle hymn as they marched toward independence. General Loynaz died in 1963, four years after the Cuban Revolution. When he was buried without military honors, it must have been a bitter humiliation for his daughter. Asked why she didn't go into exile after the Revolution, Loynaz often replied, "The daughter of a general of the War of Independence does not abandon her country."

Loynaz's mother, Mercedes Muñoz Sañudo, inherited a fortune as the daughter of one of Havana's wealthiest families. When she married the famous general, the Loynaz family moved into a palatial Spanish colonial mansion that boasted a large tropical garden with peacocks and pink flamingos. General Loynaz and his wife had four children: Dulce María, Enrique, Carlos Manuel, and Flor. Enrique himself would become a recognized poet, Carlos Manuel was a composer as well as a poet, and Flor was a poet, too, who also became known as a revolutionary for her active role in the attempted coup to overthrow Gerardo Machado, Cuba's dictator from 1925-1933. The four artistic Loynaz siblings made their home and its Thursday night literary salon the preferred

gathering place for the cultural elite of 1930s Havana. Poets visiting from Spain, like Juan Ramón Jiménez and Federico García Lorca, inevitably found their way to the Loynaz home.

Much has been made of Loynaz's friendships with Jiménez, Lorca, and Mistral. Loynaz was a social woman who seems to have possessed a certain aristocratic grace, but Loynaz did not form close relationships with Jiménez or Lorca. Jiménez praised Loynaz's poetry, but in old age Loynaz recalled that Jiménez was often "silent and gloomy," adding that he represented "a case in which the poet was superior to the man." Lorca, unlike Jiménez, became a close friend of the entire Loynaz family during his 3-month stay in Cuba in the spring of 1930. In his biography of Lorca, Ian Gibson writes that Lorca "was a daily visitor, virtually making the [Loynaz] house his base in Havana." According to Gibson, Lorca became especially close to Carlos Manuel and Flor, but with "Dulce María things were more difficult. She was serious, did not share the Bohemian tendencies of the rest of the family, and to make matters worse had composed a clever parody of one of Lorca's ballads." During dinner one night, Loynaz's brothers, without warning her, read the ballad to Lorca, and Lorca, unfazed by the parody, looked at Loynaz and said, "That's the best poem you've ever written." Loynaz herself remembered Lorca in old age: "We used to argue frequently because our tastes and habits were not only different; they were opposites."

It was only with Gabriela Mistral that Loynaz formed anything that could properly be called a friendship. Mistral admired Loynaz's poetry after discovering her early poems, and was especially fond of Loynaz's long poem, "Song for a Barren Woman." (Like Loynaz, who was unable to conceive, Mistral never had children.) After a trip to Madrid during which she promoted her novel, Loynaz and her husband visited Mistral in Italy. Two years later Mistral visited Cuba and stayed with Loynaz. That summer Loynaz and Mistral gave a reading together at Havana's Ateneo Theater during which the poets took turns reading each other's poetry. Weeks later Loynaz and Mistral had a famous falling-out when Mistral failed to appear at a luncheon Loynaz had organized in Mistral's honor for many of Havana's cultural elite. Mistral evidently had the habit of showing up late to social gatherings, but when she didn't show up at all and offered no excuse, Loynaz asked her to leave her home. The two poets never met again, but when Mistral died only three years later Loynaz wrote a moving homage to the Chilean poet that would ultimately be published as the introduction to Aguilar's Nobel Prize edition of Mistral's *Collected Poems*.

The 1950s were a prolific decade for Loynaz. In the span of eight years Madrid's Aguilar published, among others, her novel *Garden* in 1951, *Poems Without Names* in 1953, *Lyric Poems* in 1955, and *A Summer in Tenerife* in 1958. Her novel was an immediate success. Luis Buñuel planned to film an adaptation of it and the famous 1950s Mexican film star María Félix once considered playing the role of the novel's heroine. In 1951 Gabriela Mistral lavishly praised *Garden* in a letter to Loynaz, signing it "Your devoted reader," and it is also said to have been the last book the Cuban poet José Lezama Lima read. Only months before he died Lezama Lima wrote to Loynaz: "In giving life to your garden, you have converted it into an archetype, one of those platonic essences that not only defeat time, but turn it into a clean slate and give it new, mysterious functions." When Loynaz's prose poems came out two years later, Mistral wrote: "*Poems Without Names* are pure condensations of poetry, the pure bone of the

affair: it is interior poetry, which is rare in women." Mistral was so impressed with the novel and the prose poems that she personally nominated Loynaz for the 1953 Nobel Prize. During the 1950s Loynaz traveled back and forth between Havana and Madrid, giving frequent readings throughout Spain, but after the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, Loynaz would not return to Spain until 1992.

After the triumph of the Revolution, Loynaz was labeled "una vieja Batistiana," a supporter of Fulgencio Batista, the dictator ousted by Castro. Loynaz never supported Batista, but that didn't matter. Loynaz never joined the Communist Party, she was Catholic, and she was a former member of Havana's upper class—three reasons that were more than enough for the Cuban state to label her a "Batistiana," which was, and still is, a terrible stigma in Cuba that can lead to imprisonment without a trial. Cuba's state-sponsored publishers ignored Loynaz's success in Spain, and when a shipment of *A Summer in Tenerife* was exported from Madrid to Havana, Cuban immigration officers would not allow the books into the country. In less than a year Loynaz went from a widely published poet in Spain to a forbidden poet in her own country.

Then her husband fled Cuba. Those close to Loynaz say this was the blow from which Loynaz never fully recovered. Pablo Álvarez de Cañas, a Spaniard from the Canary Islands, was a charismatic journalist who wrote the society columns for Havana's newspapers in the 1940's and 50's. After they married in 1946, Álvarez de Cañas served Loynaz as both muse and literary agent. In an interview toward the end of her life, Loynaz admitted:

> Whatever value future generations give to my poetry, it will be due less to me than to Pablo because without him . . . nobody would have known what I was doing. He didn't only encourage me to work, but he was also the inspiration of my best poems, including the [love] letters in *Garden* which are filtered in no small part through his own letters."

After Loynaz's first book came out in 1938 and was received indifferently by Cuban critics, Loynaz vowed never to publish again. It was Álvarez de Cañas who finally convinced her to publish sixteen years later and it was he who found publishers in Spain to publish her work. But as the former chronicler of Havana's bourgeoisie, Álvarez de Cañas hardly had a winning reputation in Communist Cuba. He remained in Havana for two years after the Revolution, but he became increasingly paranoid of the state police. With a Spanish passport he traveled to the United States, ostensibly for an eye operation, but did not return. Loynaz would not see her husband again for twelve years. When Álvarez de Cañas became terminally ill in 1974, Loynaz managed to secure him permission to return to Havana so he could die on Cuban soil. Loynaz writes of her husband's death in a moving letter to the Cuban critic Aldo Martínez Malo:

> The consolation to which you allude, of attending the last heartbeat of someone who had loved me so much, was denied me. Pablo died alone like [my brother] Enrique because I, exhausted from the two years I spent battling his death, succumbed to sleep in the final hour. I couldn't even tell you what time he died.

After his death Loynaz spent five years writing a biography of Álvarez de Cañas in which she recounts their life together before the Revolution. She called it *Proof of Life* and it was the last book she ever wrote.

After the Revolution Loynaz stopped writing poetry and fiction, but she continued to write criticism. She also maintained her relationship with Spain as a member of the Cuban Language Academy, Cuba's branch of Spain's Royal Spanish Academy, which was then the only academic institution in Cuba that operated outside the jurisdiction of the Communist government. After the Revolution Castro accused Cuba's academic institutions of conspiring with the Batista dictatorship and subsequently replaced them with organizations sponsored by and faithful to the Communist regime. The Cuban Language Academy lost its home in Havana's prestigious Palacio del Segundo Cabo, but Castro did not eliminate it entirely. As a branch of the Royal Spanish Academy, doing so would have caused too great a scandal. But the Cuban State did not give the Academy a building in which to hold its meetings and it did not award it any funds to meets its expenses. The Cuban Language Academy held its meetings in the homes of different members and it met its expenses by charging its own members a small monthly fee. As Loynaz said in one of her late letters, the Cuban Language Academy existed in "absolute—and official—orphanhood." Its members, moreover, were certain of never being published within Cuba because any writer who joined the Academy was immediately labeled a Batista sympathizer. Alejandro González Acosta, a close friend of Loynaz who was the Academy's youngest member at the time, remembers the meetings Loynaz held in her home: "We were always watched by the CDR on Dulce María's block, and this, even though we only went there to discuss the Spanish language."

CDR stands for "Committee for Defense of the Revolution." They are essentially groups of patriotic citizens who meet weekly to discuss any suspicious activities in their buildings. Every apartment building has at least one CDR representative. They know the names of everyone in their buildings and they keep a close watch on any irregular gatherings or activities. An irregular activity might include a party, a poetry reading, or the late-night chatter of a typewriter. CDR presidents make a list of the suspicious activities taking place on their blocks and report them to the State police. It is a system of vigilance in which neighbors spy on neighbors and gossip often takes the form of accusation. The daughter of wealthy family before the Revolution, Loynaz was frequently the object of her neighbor's resentment. While Álvarez de Cañas lived in the U.S., one of Loynaz's neighbors anonymously denounced her in the CDR and accused her of hiding U.S. dollars in her home. It was due to such accusations that Loynaz was detained twice while state police searched her home for U.S. dollars, a serious crime in Cuba until dollars were made legal in 1993. In the process of searching Loynaz's home, the police broke open a safe in which they found nothing. At the time of the second search, Loynaz was an 80-year-old widow living with her sister. Loynaz recalls how she destroyed much of her personal correspondence after the second search:

> I did it, I must confess, with much regret, but I had no other alternative. The police, stupidly looking for I don't know what, had already searched my home twice, a home where nobody lived but two lonely old women. They were intimate letters and I couldn't risk a third invasion of the barbarians.

During the Mariel Exodus in 1980 CDRs in every neighborhood performed public "acts of repudiation." These acts were meant to counter the thousands of Cubans fleeing the island and they were organized to target anyone who was suspected of not being a loyal supporter of the Revolution. Loynaz, of course, was singled out. Although she was 77 at the time, one such group threw rocks and eggs at her home amid shouts and insults. Eusebio Leal, the Cuban historian who is currently the director of the restoration program dedicated to restoring the monuments and colonial architecture of Old Havana and its historical center, was a neighbor and close friend of Loynaz's, and he put himself at great risk when he confronted the mob in an effort to protect Loynaz's home.

Even in the year 2000 people were extremely wary of talking to me when I asked them about Loynaz's life. Some of her friends refused to talk to me and others, after sharing anecdotes that spoke to Loynaz's political beliefs, would contradict themselves days later insisting that Loynaz had always been a friend of the Revolution. In the early 1980s, when Loynaz's work began to be promoted by a small group of young Cuban critics, it must have taken no small measure of courage. Four critics who deserve special mention are Aldo Martínez Malo, Pedro Simón, Jorge Yglesias and Alejandro González Acosta. Loynaz was surprised by the attention, and when Martínez Malo implored her to provide information for a biography, Loynaz was ambivalent at best:

> My own country has silenced me for more than twenty years. How to pretend now that everything has changed when I am closer to death than to life? And if, when I was alive, I was never sufficiently interested in seeing my name . . . fly on the wings of fame, how is it going to interest me more after I die?

After Loynaz was nominated for the Cervantes Prize by the Cuban Language Academy in 1984, Cuba finally decided to publish a selection of Loynaz's poetry. It was 1985 and it was the first time Loynaz's poetry had been published in Cuba since 1938. Loynaz didn't win the Cervantes that year, but she did win Cuba's 1987 National Literature Prize even though her nomination was opposed by Cuba's powerful Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC). The irony of winning Cuba's 1987 National Literature Prize for poems she had written in the 1920s, 30s and 40s was not lost on Loynaz:

> Why didn't they remember me before? For 30 years I slept like Sleeping Beauty, 30 years that felt like a 100. They [her publishers] tell me they hadn't been born yet. You know, it's sad to have to start over with people who didn't exist when I existed.

Loynaz never joined UNEAC, although the powerful Writer's Union conferred an honorary membership on her in 1989. Loynaz, in the end, won acceptance in Cuba on her own terms, and it took her thirty years to do so.

By the time Castro called in a special period of rationing after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, Loynaz, like everyone else in Cuba, was embroiled in a daily struggle to survive on a meager supply of monthly food rations. She could no longer read and the Spanish colonial mansion she had bought with her husband in the 1950s was

falling apart, subject to severe flooding during tropical storms. But then everything changed for Loynaz when the King of Spain awarded "Latin America's Great Lady" the 1992 Cervantes Prize. Almost overnight Cubans young and old flocked to the home of the now famous 90-year-old poet. Embarrassed by the sudden international recognition and in an effort to cover up the years of oppression suffered by Loynaz, Cuba quickly moved to claim responsibility for her nomination, but Cuba, in fact, had nominated the poet Eliseo Diego. It was Alejandro González Acosta, then in exile in Mexico, who persuaded the Spanish-born Mexican writer and philanthropist Eulalio Ferrer to personally nominate Loynaz to Inocencio Arias, the president of the Cervantes Prize jury. The year after Loynaz won the award Cuba published Loynaz's *Complete Poems*. Since 1993 Cuba has published almost 20 books by Loynaz, including her novel, her memoirs, her letters, her uncollected poems and her essays. For a poet whose books were once prohibited by the Cuban State, the flurry of publishing activity the last four years of her life must have been bittersweet indeed. Loynaz died in 1997 at the age of 94. In a final irony, the Cuban State took possession of her home in 2002, renovated it, and turned it into a museum.

IV

Although Cuba has belatedly claimed her as part of its cultural heritage, Loynaz continues to be an inspiration to those who oppose the Cuban regime's repression of dissident thought. In 1998, the year after Loynaz's death, many Cubans began to organize public libraries out of their own homes, lending books that were banned by the Cuban state. Most of the "home libraries" in the independent library movement contain no more than a few hundred books, but others have as many as two thousand. One of Cuba's largest independent libraries is the Dulce María Loynaz Library, founded by Gisela Delgado, the president of Cuba's independent library movement. In 2003, as the U.S. began its war with Iraq, Cuba's state police arrested 75 dissidents that included writers, economists, and human rights activists. Fourteen of the dissidents were owners of independent libraries and each one of them, in one-day trials closed to international journalists, were sentenced to prison terms of up to 26 years.

Amnesty International immediately protested the prison terms and called the librarians "prisoners of conscience." Vaclav Havel and other writers from Eastern Europe wrote a letter to the International Federation of Library Associations asking them to publicly condemn the raids on Cuba's independent libraries, and writers formerly sympathetic to Cuba, such as José Saramago, Eduardo Galeano, and Noam Chomsky, all criticized the arrests. Six years after her death, even as the Cuban state was renovating her home to turn it into a museum, Loynaz's name was at the center of Cuba's crackdown on dissidents. On March 20, 2003 Cuba's state police sealed off the block where Gisela Delgado runs the Dulce María Loynaz Library. Thirty armed policemen entered the apartment and confiscated nearly a thousand books. One of the books confiscated was a biography of Martin Luther King Jr., signed by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, who gave Delgado the book in honor of her work. The police also confiscated videos, computers, a fax machine, and circulation lists containing the names of people who had borrowed books from the Loynaz library. Although the State police did not arrest Delgado herself, they did arrest her husband, Héctor Palacios, and sentenced him to 25

years in jail.

Dulce María Loynaz lived from 1902-1997 and in the process experienced some of the most tumultuous political events in Cuban history, from the Cuban Revolution to the fall of the Soviet Union. Suffering political oppression, censorship, and hunger, she resisted the injustices of her time and the cost was nothing less than her poetry. When most poets today clamor after fame and indulge shamelessly in the art of self-promotion, Loynaz sacrificed both her fame and her voice. And in a country where all things religious were declared a crime by the government, a country that expected its poets to write poems that rejected individualism in favor of nationalism, Loynaz continued to train her gaze inward on herself, her solitude, and her faith. In *Poem VI* from *Poems Without Names* Loynaz wrote five declarative sentences that could serve as the epitaph of any poet. There is no explicit subject in the first two lines. The subject could be *He, She* or a *formal You*. English does not allow for such ambiguity, so I have chosen *She*. I will let it stand here as an epitaph for Dulce María Loynaz.

> She lived—she was able to live—with a word pressed between her lips.
> And with a word pressed between her lips, she died.
> They shoveled loose dirt on the word.
> Her lips wasted away beneath the earth.
> And yet the word remains pressed I know not where.