

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The literary work of Jesús Díaz has been translated into many languages but appears here for the first time in English. Born in Havana in 1941, Díaz was a writer, filmmaker, and prominent intellectual force in Cuban culture until his sudden death in Madrid in 2002. Díaz was a complex character, a man who lived life with passion and even excess, a controversial figure who played an important role within the early Cuban revolutionary process and remained allied with it until the last ten years of his life, which he lived in European exile. To the international Cuban exile community, Díaz was a key fomenter of dialogue between disagreeing factions of various political stripes through the influential journal *Encuentro*, which he founded in Madrid; he has yet to be replaced in that exceptional role. Díaz's decision to leave Cuba in 1992 came as a surprise to many, if not most, who knew him. Ambrosio Fornet, in his epilogue to this volume, provides a view of those events from the perspective of a longtime friend who has remained on the island.

The Initials of the Earth, set in Cuba during the 1950s and 1960s, speaks eloquently to the controversial topic of the Revolution's numerous successes and failures. Originally written in the 1970s, then rewritten and published simultaneously in Havana and Madrid in 1987, it was the last book Jesús Díaz produced before leaving Cuba. Many critics consider this novel to be both Díaz's most outstanding work and the quintessential novel of the Cuban Revolution (Fornet's epilogue elaborates further on these questions of literary history and criticism). Through Díaz's narration of the coming of age of the protagonist, Carlos Pérez Cifredo, we are taken on a passionate journey that celebrates and criticizes with intense love Cuba's music, dance, history, racial

mixture, humor, sexuality, struggle for independence, and, of course, language, the medium expressing it all.

To imagine revolutionary Cuba, as narrated through fiction by a Cuban for his compatriots, means that the English-language reader must make the leap to understanding from a Cuban perspective. With that goal in mind, I have left certain key words in Spanish throughout the translation; a glossary of those words has been included in the volume. These are words that cannot translate easily or neatly into English without losing a great deal of their meaning, and without taking a great deal away from the entire narration. I hope they will enhance the reader's sense of discovery rather than detract from his or her pleasure in the reading.

I have pictured the audience for this translation as a varied one. Some readers may have a great deal of knowledge about certain aspects of Cuban culture, music, for example, or leftist politics, or history. They may have read other works of Cuban literature in translation, or the writings of revolutionary figures. Other readers may approach this book with no prior knowledge at all. Some readers, then, may welcome additional information while others will not. Thus, while the text is followed by extensive endnotes explaining factual details, local references, and my own solutions to particular translation problems, there is nothing in the narration itself, whether numbers or asterisks, to interrupt the flow of reading. Endnotes, organized by chapter and page, are there for the reader who wishes to use them.

Readers will find three more aids: a bibliography and filmography of Díaz's books and films, as well as selected critical work on the author published in English and Spanish; a chronology of major events in Cuban history during the revolutionary period; and a map of Cuba, with locations pertinent to the novel indicated. In the firm belief that every translator should reflect on and write about practice, I have provided an afterword describing in greater detail my approach to the translation. Most importantly, Ambrosio Fornet's epilogue constitutes a critical evaluation of the novel's reception, structure, and placement within Cuban literary history, as well as a moving personal testimony.