

Advanced Research Seminar I:

Periodical Studies

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Overflowing the Cuba of 1910

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Table of Contents

Overflowing the Cuba of 1910.....	1
Flying Route: An Outline of <i>El Tabano</i>	3
I Make you Laugh, I Make you Think: Satirizing the Political Landscape.....	8
<i>El Tabano</i> 's Bites: Caricatures of the Political Arena	12
A Printed Dialogue: <i>El Tabano</i> and <i>La Política Cómica</i>	14
<i>El Tabano</i> : A Sign of Transnationality.....	15
Conclusion.....	18
Primary Sources.....	21
Secondary Sources	21
Annex.....	25

Overflowing the Cuba of 1910

Former *Esquire* editor, Sam Ferber, explained that magazines play a crucial role in sharing information in any society. In this respect, he argued that it is their duty to “provide a broader perspective” for their readership. For this purpose, “magazines must probe, analyze and offer background material” (Ferber, 1979 p. 44 qtd in Johnson 2). In a simple fashion, his words explain the responsibility magazines have with the public and the multiple ways in which the information contained in them is transformed in order to present it to the reader. Moreover, the fact that magazines “must synthesize complex issues” (Ferber, 1979, 44 qtd in Johnson 2) implies that the process of organizing the information will certainly give a distinctive shape to it, and a unique profile to the magazine. Consequently, news will be presented in a way that will have a repercussion on their readers’ mind. When referring to this matter, David Abrahamson says that “magazines can serve as markers of the sociocultural reality” (146). At the light of his words, it can be said that the information magazines decide to highlight or choose to ignore would be praised or forgotten by their readers. Consequently, the magazine’s behavior towards information can be taken by its readership as the lineament to follow in order to build knowledge about reality in a given society.

As Sammye Johnson explains “magazines help readers to make sense of the world and their lives” (2), since they require the reader to reflect upon the topics they propose, shaping its opinion according to the magazine’s ideology. Consequently, the news magazines share will have a direct repercussion in the way in which the readers perceive their reality and how they make sense of the events of their time. Magazines’ exceptionalism consists on them being both exponents as well as shapers of the social reality of their times. As scholars, we then turn to magazines trying to find such lineaments in the hope that they can help us understand the ideas shaping a socio-political space at a given moment. As Scholes et al. explain, “we read [periodicals] to recover the past, to study the culture, the ideology, and the values of the past” (144). Magazines will respond to the inquiries, anxieties, and urges of the readers that they are addressed to. Consequently, reading them is a way to reconstruct a picture of the reality shared by their readership at their time of publication.

Furthermore, they write about their readers’ morals, sometimes in an indirect way; about their lifestyle, even in matters such as the way in which they should desire to expend

their free time; and the goals they should aspire to achieve. Likewise, magazines help to shape ideas and give information to the reader in order to move it to action (Abrahamson). In addition, Magazines deal with social movements as well as the contemporary situation of politics and political affiliations. In this respect, these periodicals often include a panorama of the international political reality of their time. As scholars, it seems only logical to look at them in order to find out the way in which the dynamics of the political affairs between countries are presented. Furthermore, knowing the transnational connections politics build between nations, it is valid to wonder if magazines, as containers of such relationships, can become a sign of transnationality.

According to Shelley Fisher Fishkin, the transnational perspective is the new approach scholars of American Studies should adopt in order to develop the field further. It requires “that we pay as much attention to the ways in which ideas, people, culture, and capital have circulated and continue to circulate physically, and virtually, throughout the world” (22). Studied at the light of this transnational perspective, periodicals should be understood as maps from which the movement of ideas can be recuperated.

In order to retrieve these ideas, one of Fisher Fishkin’s advices is to “reexamine other wars, as well, from multiple vantage points, probing the range of ways in which U.S. military action has shaped societies around the world” (22). The Cuban reconstruction period, that is, after the second USA’s occupation has a strong presence in *El tabano*, the magazine this paper examines. Besides, Fisher Fishkin refers to the importance of examining “how visions of American democracy and American citizenship shape and are shaped by conversations outside the United States” (35). Consequently, looking at a periodical of Cuba will give us a glimpse of the way in which one side of the conflict understood the period of apparent independence, the idea of democracy, and its relationship with the US. Furthermore, the author emphasizes the existence of “an important body of American literature written in languages other than English” (26). Specifically, she mentions Spanish as a particularly relevant language for American Studies, since the USA is close to becoming the third largest concentration of Spanish speaking people in the world. At the light of this last idea, it seems only logical to work with a magazine written in Spanish at such period of time.

Often, when studying the Cuban political situation of the beginning of the 20th century, scholars concentrate on the anarchist movements and consequently focus in anarcho- journalism or in anarchic journalism as a source (Schaffer). However, the study of the ideas of those with a liberal but conciliatory view of the future of Cuban politics

has been overlooked. The conflicts between the different sectors of the government, as well as the power struggle permeate through all the pages of the satire. Another reason for picking *El tabano* magazine is that it represents the idea of transnationality very well, since it was a political periodical whose pages satirized not only Cuban but also the United States' politicians. Moreover, the publication makes no reference to any other country in the world besides these two, which indicates that the political affairs of both countries were intimately connected and deeply relevant for Cubans. The magazine was published in a period of reconstruction for Cuba, after the second occupation by the United States between 1906 and 1909. Consequently, this periodical reflects the tense relationship with the United States, at the time that it makes visible the frictions that the connections with the superpower created between Cuban political parties and among the members of the government of the country. By portraying these political interactions, the magazine becomes a sign of transnationality.

In this essay, I will examine 2 exemplars of *El tabano* magazine, following the model provided by Robert Scholes and Clifford Wulfman. However, I will depart from it, since it focusses in English periodicals only and refers to their interactions with others at a national level, leaving the transnational elements a magazine can show aside. Using the information provided in the front page, the advertisements and humorous descriptions of the political reality of Cuba and the USA, I will provide the reader with a detailed outline of the structure of the periodical and give shape to the intended reader of *El tabano*. In turn, this will give the reader an explanation of how the magazine understood the political scene of Cuba at the time and its intricate relationship with the USA. For the purpose of this essay, the words magazine and periodical are used interchangeably.

Flying Route: An Outline of *El Tabano*

Reading magazines from another time with a historical interest responds to the need of finding answers about the period in which they were produced. By means of studying magazines “the changes of (...) history can be seen in all their complexity, including (...)social and political events and processes” (Latham et al. 520). Analyzing periodicals is a way of learning more about the society in which they were read, the political agenda they shared, as well as the type of culture the magazines were trying to transmit and create. In addition, looking at the structure of a magazine can help to see the type of publication it was. Other peripheral elements such as price, size, and frequency of appearance can help to retrieve the profile of the reader the magazine was addressed

to. *El tabano*'s structure is announced in its cover and it let us see that we are in front of a political satirical publication. Most of its pages are devoted to political satire in the form of both brief verses as well as long stories written in prose. Only one of its pages refers to sports news, and it is accompanied by a satirical draw or a picture and narrated with a humorous tone. Unfortunately, the price of *El tabano* is not written in any of its pages. Referring to the peripheral elements of the magazine, it can also be said that it was weekly published. Its publication started the first of September of 1910 in La Habana. Due to the lack of further exemplars, it can only be known that three numbers of it were published, from which only the first and the third had been preserved in the archive.

The front page of a magazine is an essential part of these publications. As Spidker explains, "magazines rely on this single page to do two crucial things: one, send a message about the personality and voice of the magazine and two, sell issues" (377). The cover is the first element that readers will be in contact with and, consequently, front pages "aim to catch the eye of the passer-by and to tantalize the on-looker with the promise of fascinating content within" (Andrew Losowski qtd in Spidker 377). Furthermore, even if the passer-by might not be interested in the type of content of the magazine, "covers can make a lasting impression on readers no matter their perspective" (Losowski qtd in Spidker 377).

The front page of *El tabano* is no exception to this rule. The front and counter pages of the magazine are the only colored pages, orange was used for the first and green for the third exemplary. The front page of both numbers has the same caricature. On the upper part of the page, the name of the magazine is written in big, black letters contrasting with the background. Both numbers have the drawing of a donkey, standing on its back legs, as a horse would do when feeling threatened. The talented caricaturist of *El tabano*, Massaguer, drew the donkey looking at an uncommonly big horsefly or *tabano*, in Spanish, that is flying above its head. On the wings of the insect, the words "Weekly-Satire" can be read. The scene can be understood as an allusion to unintelligent people since, at the time, bad students were called donkeys. The fact that the *tabano* seems to be flying towards the donkey, suggests that this magazine is there to hurt the animals, that is, the unintelligent, irrational people the writers disagree with. Furthermore, the fact that the horsefly is also flying towards the reader suggests that it can expect to feel alluded in the satirical portrays as well.

Such interpretation is confirmed by the song published in the first number. In it the owners of *El tabano* promise that they will "bite hard, but really hard to the several

politicians that are part of our party, the Liberal (...) to any candidate (...) who does not possess the qualities (for people to elect them) whoever they are” (13)¹. By this sentence, Joaquín Llerena, Miguel Ibañes and Adolfo G. Castellanos show their intention, manifested in the form of a promise, to tell the truth to their readers. It can be argued that the cover of the magazine is used to bite the curiosity of the reader, by making it wonder about the people the magazine considers donkeys and the way in which they will be attacked. Furthermore, the caricature on the cover, combined with the subtitle are used to give a clear message of the type of magazine the reader is about to open.

Nothing more than their good intentions, political affiliation, and the name of the owners is known since there is no reference to them in history books. Besides, the collaborators of the periodical used a *nom de plume*, which also makes it impossible to find out any details about their experience as writers or their formation as journalists.

Let us continue with the structure of the magazine and the information it can provide about its readership. As Scholes explains, the study of advertisements in magazines helps us to “historicize more thoroughly, to understand the past more fully” (242). Consequently, the type of advertisements we find in a magazine would be able to show us the type of products consumed by the readers, giving us a glimpse of their economic position and their lifestyle. Furthermore, as Theodore Peterson explains, “one could achieve a large circulation by selling his magazine for much less than the cost of production and could take his profits from the high volume of advertising than a large circulation attracted” (78 qtd in Scholes et al 31). Consequently, the number of advertisements in a magazine can also give us a clue of how big its circulation was. Moreover, it can also tell us how much the publication depended on sponsors.

The advertisements in *El tabano* are no exception to this principle. The magazine announces all kinds of services from hairdressers to construction workers. It also advertises restaurants and grocery shops that rank from fine wine and imported butter to simple bakeries. However, advertisements are mostly about clothes such as hats, shoes, and suits. Today, these could be considered as formal clothes that only businessmen would buy on a regular basis, however, according to Reddy, in 1910, those were the clothes in fashion. These clothes were used on a regular basis only by the middle or upper classes. Hats were a source of status that working-class men would not wear every day. In *lieu* of a hat, these men wore a wool cap. Moreover, working-class men would not wear a three-piece suit for their everyday activities, but shirts with a soft collar and a jacket. From these advertisements, it can be concluded that the reader of this magazine

¹Picar duro pero muy duro a tanto político que convive en nuestro partido Liberal (...) a cuanto candidato (...) que no reúnan condiciones sean quienes fueran

was, at the very least, a middle-class man, who would be interested in buying hats and suits in order to fulfill the fashion requirements of his class at the time.

The number of pages containing advertisements in *El Tabano* can give us a glimpse into its power of selling and its freedom of speech. On its first number, the first and the second pages of the magazine are entirely devoted to advertisements, as well as small spaces in four of the fifteen remaining pages of the magazine are. On the third number, there are three pages reserved for advertisements, one more than on the first one. Moreover, there are small pieces of advertisement in seven of the other fourteen pages. In addition to this, the offer to advertise in the magazine can be found two times on different pages in both exemplars. At the light of this number of announcements, it can be argued that the magazine required sponsors in the form of paid advertisement in order to cover the costs of its publication. Besides, it can be said that the rapidly growing number of advertisements in *El tabano*, from week one to week three, suggest that it was reaching more readers and that its popularity was growing.

The implied reader can be either masculine or feminine, based on the fact that there is an advertisement for a ladies' clinic²: "She who wants to be in fashion, to acquire good manners, to seduce an illustrious man, ask me and I will help"(6)³. This advertisement is obviously directed at a woman. However, this is the only piece that is specifically written for women, and it only appears in the first number of *El tabano*. The rest of the advertisements, that are about lands, contractors and suits and the political articles seem to be directed at men. The published letters to the editor were also written by men. Even the short jokes, that refer to brief encounters between beautiful women and men, are clearly aiming for a masculine readership.

Authors have also explained that the size of the magazine can tell us something about the economic class of the person who reads it. *El tabano* is 26x18,5 cm. and it has seventeen pages, with only ten to fourteen of those pages containing news. A long magazine can show that its readership had several hours of leisure time, which suggests that he or she belonged to a middle or upper-class. The size of *El tabano* indicates that its readers had some free time in their hands to read it, but that their recreation period was also limited. A magazine with several pages is designed to be read for a long period, allowing its reader to show others "what they are reading by (...) placing new and old issues alongside coffee-table books" (Lamb 272). At the light of this evidence, it can be said that the length of *El tabano* allowed its readers to use the periodical as an artifact to "symbolize social mobility and literacy" (Lamb 272).

² Consultorio de damas

³ Quien quiera a la moda estar, buenas formas adquirir, hombre ilustre conquistar, pregunte y le he de servir.

As it has been mentioned, the size of the magazine, as well as its pieces of advertisement, can tell us much about its readership, however, the economic class of the reader of *El tabano* is not easily defined. At the light of these two elements, the reader is middle or upper class. However, in its first number, *El tabano* argues that Carlos Alberto Sierra is a candidate who is “a warranty for the proletarians” (9)⁴. Since *El tabano* belongs to the same political party that Sierra does, and the party supports a man who serves proletarians, it can be argued that the magazine is written by and for the proletarians. Nevertheless, the type of titles the periodical uses and the way in which the news are presented shows differently.

It can be said that the readership needs to be educated, a very rare characteristic in the proletarians of the time, in order to understand certain satires *El tabano* published. Readers need to speak a little English, French and understand Latin in order to know what “Remember”, “*L’élite*”, “*cabia porcellus*” or “*pitecantropus*” mean. Moreover, the reader needs to have a general knowledge of the international reality of its time in order to be able to understand the satires. This can be seen in the six answers to the readers’ letters *El tabano* published in the third number. One of them mocks a reader who obviously has little knowledge about history and believed that Neron arrived in America. A second letter, answers to a reader who was unable to discover who was “the death arm who appeared without a head on the previous number” (13)⁵. The editors give the answer to the riddle but not before asking the reader if he really does not know who the character they were trying to describe was, suggesting he should reflect more about the topic. The fourth answer tells a reader that he has understood a joke perfectly, and he had guessed who the character they were talking about was. At the light of this evidence, it can be argued that the magazine was aware of the need its reader had to be well informed about the political scene of its time, and also, the importance of having an agile mind in order to be able to understand the satirical humor they use. This is something very difficult for the members of the working classes who would spend long hours in their working places and have little reading skills. In addition to that, these letters had a main role in the reading experience.

As Powel explains, “the contents that surround any particular periodical piece— letters to the editor, other articles, advertisements— all affect how the piece was experienced by its readers” (447). It seems that these letters were used as proof of the intelligence of the readers, becoming a source of reassurance for them. Furthermore, the correspondence

⁴ Carlos Alberto Sierra (...) es una garantía para las clases proletarias

⁵ Brazo muerto que apareció sin Cabeza en el número anterior

appears to be a way for the editors to mock the readership unable to solve the riddles, creating a sort of brotherhood of the wit among those who could understand them.

The structure, front page, and advertisements of *El tabano* can reveal some aspects of the type of magazine it was. The table of contents shows that the magazine is eminently a political publication. Moreover, the magazine speaks to its political affiliation when referring to the liberal political party as its own. The size shows that the reader had some time on its hands, which leads us to presume it was a middle- or upper-class person. The type of advertisements are proof that the publication was directed to people of both sexes, but mostly to middle- and upper-class men. Settling the question of the economic class of the reader is difficult. On the one hand, the magazine supports a candidate who advocates for the proletarian class. On the other hand, the fact that the reader needs to have minimal notions of several languages, as well as a fair knowledge of the political affairs of the time shows that the magazine was targeting an educated audience.

I Make you Laugh, I Make you Think: Satirizing the Political Landscape

Magazines, as tools to mediate communication, provide the readers with a space for the discussion of political and social critical issues, helping the public to learn about such topics. They offer “commentary on intellectual and political debates” (King et al. 2). Moreover, they call the reader to act upon this knowledge, rising its participation in political life, and urging it to become part of its community.

Besides, as Lamb explains, readers “often seek reinvention through magazines” (278) and the periodicals, in turn, help to define the lifestyle the reader has to aspire to, while offering its readers an opportunity for leisure and recreation (Prior-Miller 22). As King et al. explain, “periodicals and newspapers structure reader’s days, weeks, and months providing news, updates in the last fashions [or] commentary on (...) the next installment on a gripping serial novel” (2). Consequently, an analysis of the content of a magazine allows scholars to have a glimpse at the ideas the magazine was trying to communicate. Besides, “magazines are to gratify specific needs, they are required to assert the need to which their niche is most directly attached” (Vincent F. Filak 263), which means that the ideology that the readers of a magazine share will be present in its publications. Filak’s words are a confirmation of the theory of magazines’ exceptionalism. Magazines will give shape to their ideal readers, and they, in turn, will make the magazine answer to their wishes.

As mentioned before, on the first page of the first number of *El Tabano*, its editors present the reader with a song. The singer is the horsefly and its melody should be imagined by the reader. The song describes the *tabano* or horsefly as a small insect that makes people worry about its *picaduras* or bites. On the third paragraph, it says “I make people laugh, I make people angry, I am the boogie man of many animals”⁶. Such sentence suggests that the reader can expect to be entertained by the magazine, but also to read about controversial topics. It can be argued that the song is a way to explain to the reader the purpose of the magazine. *El tabano* is published both to entertain, and to move people to reflection, also, it is there to denounce those in power that are unfitted to govern. Moreover, the fact that *El tabano* identifies itself as “the boogie man” of many “animals” implies that its targets will be worried about the bites. This sentence suggests that the magazine is not afraid of telling the truth about the political reality of its time, which can be worrisome for those who have something to hide. Moreover, it can be argued that by saying this, they are establishing that their intention is to engage with the political situation in a truthful way and that they do not intend to spare anybody. According to Elizabeth Crawford, such is the exact intention of several magazines that hope to make the reader think, but also to move him or her to action (286). It can be said that this song is a way the magazine had of making its readers think about participating in the political life in an active way. Additionally, this section is a good example of the way in which the analysis of a periodical can help us understand the political situation of a certain moment in history.

On their quest to inform their readers, magazines draw attention to specific topics, such as politics and social matters, that are especially relevant for the publication. These topics act like conduct lineaments and serve to shape the image of their ideal reader. By means of the stories they share, “they promote the image that a well-rounded person is someone who is knowledgeable and potentially concerned about the world” (Lamb 273). Readers see themselves wanting to answer to this model and behave accordingly. The reader of *El tabano* is frequently confronted with this ideal model. In most of its sections, the magazine refers to politicians, political parties, armed conflicts, and even to political impasses using only code names or descriptive adjectives. The style makes it difficult for the uneducated, simpleminded, or poorly informed reader to understand the satires. It can be argued, that the magazine’s style is used to tell the readership that in order to be the

⁶ Yo hago reír, yo hago rabiar, yo soy el coco de mucho animal.

reader of *El tabano*, one has to have a sharp mind besides being a well-informed person. Besides, using the type of humor the readers enjoyed, as well as the topics of the satires, we can learn about the way in which the periodical portrayed the society it was immersed in.

On page three of the first number, there is an article titled “.....!!!”. It seems that the writers are yelling something to the public, but they are not willing to say it loud voice. The article is a page-long and speaks about the divisions and the lack of directing force in the Conservative party. On page four, the magazine makes a list of its members, only mentioning their attributes.

A philosopher that is not enough. A criminal lawyer who wants to please everyone and who does not know how to do such, and who does not know who he is with either with these or with those. A master in judicial sciences, a good old man, who has given himself up realizing that he is powerless.⁷

The paragraph is a clear example of the way in which the periodical incites its readers to reflect. The name of these characters is not mentioned, which appears to be a way of making the reader think about who they could be and even move him to read other publications to try and solve the mystery. Moreover, the fact that the periodical assumes its readers will be able to find the answer, suggests that it considers its readers well-informed people. The philosopher could be J. M. Morales, the author of *Tirando el limoncito* a book *El tabano* mocks a few pages after, on the same exemplar. The lawyer seems to be Fernando Freyre de Andrade, who was a chief of the judicial department of the *Ejército Libertador* (Freedom Army) from 1987 until 1902. It seems that the third member is Tomas Estrada Palma, who was the first president of Cuba and who called the second USA intervention to stay in power. In order to find the answer, the reader has to have a sharp mind, and also to know these people from years before *El tabano* started to be published. Consequently, it needs to know about the matters of the government of Cuba and its intricated political connections with the USA.

On the third number, a set of short verses refers to the situation of the country. An imaginary dialogue takes place between Mon, who could be José de Jesus Monteagudo, a Senator during the government of José Miguel Gómez, and Primitivo, most likely, another member of the government of the time. “Our nation is ready to display another flagship on its national emblem, next to the CHIVO (goat) it could show the cannon” (3)⁸. *Chivo* was the name that a fraudulent business was given in Cuba at the time. This is a

⁷ Un filósofo que no se alcanza. Un penalista que a todos quiere contentar y que nadie sabe, ni el mismo siquiera, dónde está, si con estos o con aquellos. Y un maestro, en ciencias jurídicas, un buen anciano, que se ha entregado ya a la resignación de la impotencia.

⁸ Ya puede nuestra nación lucir otro distintivo en su escudo, dijo Mon. ¿Cuál? Preguntó Primitivo. Qué enlazado con el CHIVO podrá ostentar el cañón.

piece of knowledge the reader would need in order to understand the joke in the first place. Moreover, it should have to be well informed on the political and social matters of its time. During the presidency of José Miguel Gómez, extensive lands of what was known as the *Arsenal*(arsenal) grounds were exchanged for those of the tramway, on the city. Such sale was considered fraudulent by most of the people of the time and repudiated as illicit enrichment. It seems that the satire of *El tabano* is a way of denouncing to what extent this type of behavior was normalized by the members of the corrupt government. The fact that two of its members are suggesting that they would adopt the cannon, presumably a symbol for the arsenal, as a national emblem suggests that the politicians knew and endorsed the situation. The satire, as well as the name of its protagonists, are difficult to understand at first sight. This suggests that the magazine was counting on its readership being at least moderately educated in the political situation in order to identify the politicians. Moreover, these satires present us with a clear portrait of the opinion the magazine and its readership had of the politicians of the time, and the difficult economic situation La Habana was going through.

The satires published in *El tabano* are challenging, which suggest that reading it was a troublesome endeavor. This shows that the periodical was inciting its reader to reflect upon its social reality while suggesting that only the sharp minds were fitted to be occupied with the political matters of the time. A close reading of the satires can help us understand the dynamic between the magazine and the readership and to reconstruct the reality of the Cuba of 1910. The humorous depictions of the government and its candidates show to what extent *El tabano* and its readership were disenchanted with the government of the time, as well as their lack of confidence in the power of politics to change the situation. In this sense, a close reading of the magazine is an effective way of learning about the political behavior of the society at the time.

El Tabano's Bites: Caricatures of the Political Arena

Magazines use several tools in order to present the information to their readership and to tell the stories they share. As Crawford explains, “The depth of coverage that magazines provide includes more visual content, including photographs and other images” (286). In *El tabano* we find several caricatures that are a way of giving information about the political situation of the time while stating the position of the magazine. On page three of the first number, there is a satirical caricature that shows a group of five men holding a blanket with the drawing of a can on it. The men are pulling

the blanket in different directions and it is breaking. There is a sentence under the caricature that reads “*la conserva*” which means canned food. For the unsuspecting reader, such a name makes little sense, however, *conserva-* is the first part of the word *conservative*, that is conservative. The satire refers to the struggle of the Conservative party to maintain its union in the face of the power fight its members are protagonists of. Moreover, the identity of caricatures can only be discovered if the reader is familiar with the political characters of the time. The caricature is another way the periodical has to test its reader’s sagacity. It can be argued that *El tabano* is trying to make its readership reflect upon the situation of its time while moving him to wonder who are those tangled in the struggle for the control of the Conservative party.

On page 7 of the first number, there is a caricature of a young man in a tuxedo, wearing a white flower in his lapel. The young man has a large nose pointing upwards. It can be argued that this feature is used to show the airs this man gave himself since the nose of the alluded, Luis Montané y Dardé, was not pointy in real life. Moreover, the section in which the caricature is printed is called Heads Who Think⁹, implying that the reader will have to reflect upon the description given in order to solve the riddle. The epigraph of the caricature reads “*L’elite*”. The list of tips includes the epithet *gentil homme* to describe him. It can be argued that these words are used in two senses. One, as a sardonic way of referring to the character’s ostentatious manners and aristocratic pretenses. Two, as a way of mocking him for writing books in French, a language that was considered the one of the *élites* since the Norman court imposed it as such in the Europe of the 18th century. This clue is not useful if the reader does not know how Montané behaves or that he wrote any books, to begin with. It seems that the hint is based on the belief that only the well-informed reader will be able to understand the satire. The description of this man refers to his “illustrious ancestors”, the *cabia porcellus* and the *pitecantropus*. Giving the scientific name of the hamster and the monkey is a clear attempt to mock his airs of superiority. The depiction is more than a page long, but only mentions part of the last name of the anthropologist. It can be argued that this feature is another way *El tabano* has of challenging the reader.

On page thirteen of the third number, *El tabano* shows a story in two vignettes. The first is titled *pretérito imperfecto*, which is a tense in Spanish that refers to a past that has no specific temporal mark or has recently occurred, like present perfect. Also, the word *imperfecto* means imperfect. The vignette shows a military man, presumably, Armando De la Riva who was named Chief of the National Police in 1909. Three men

⁹ Cabezas que piensan

are standing in front of him and one is holding a petition that reads “We want Baccarat”¹⁰. One of the men holding the petition seems to be Mario García Menocal and the one behind him seems to be Ernesto Asbert, who killed De la Riva three years later. The reader is only likely to understand the scene if he is able to identify the faces of these politicians in the caricatures. Moreover, the meaning of that sentence is not clear, but it seems that “Baccarat” could refer to the popular card’s game that was played in gentleman’s clubs at the time. It is logical to assume that De la Riva, as the Police chief, could control the activities of these clubs, despite the fact that there is no historical evidence of him exercising such control in 1910. However, it is known that De la Riva died in 1913 shot by Ernesto Asbert because the first closed a club that belonged to the, then, governor of La Habana. Consequently, it is logical to assume that that is the reason for the argument. In the vignette, De la Riva answers “Gentlemen, I will not give in to your pressures”¹¹. The next vignette shows a scene titled “*Futuro plusquamperfecto*”, which is a tense that does not exist in Spanish. It can be translated as “a future more than perfect”. On the vignette showing the future, De la Riva is being literally kicked out of the Police Station, by a gigantic boot. The caricature suggests that the Police chief is under a strong political pressure and that the politicians of the time are not into keeping him on his position if he is not to answer to his interests. Once more, the magazine seems to be presenting the reader with a riddle that would make him think for a long time in order to understand the political affairs of its time in a better way.

It can be argued that a close look at the satires *El tabano* published can reveal crucial aspects of the political and social game of its time. The first two portrayals show the members of the conservative party and the personalities of the aristocracy of the time. The caricatures are proof of the lack of respect their actions inspired on some members of the liberal party. In addition, the last image suggests that politicians were under pressure and had to answer to the personal interests of powerful people, showing how fragile the political situation of Cuba was.

A Printed Dialogue: *El Tabano* and *La Política Cómica*

As Latham et al. explain, “anyone who studies periodicals soon discovers that they are frequently in dialogue with one another” (529). Moreover, “periodicals create and occupy typically complex and often unstable positions in sometimes collaborative and sometimes competitive cultural networks” (Latham et al. 529). *El tabano* is no

¹⁰ Queremos Baccarat

¹¹ Señores, no estoy dispuesto a darme

exception to this principle. On its pages, several references to another liberal satirical periodical of the time, *La política comica*, can be found.

On page three of the third number, the editors refer to the lack of reliable political information *La comica* shared. They specifically say that it prepared an *ajiacó*, that is, a casserole with which it is trying to cheat its readers. The accusation against *La comica* suggests that it is purposely mixing information in order to confound the reader. Moreover, it can be argued that the reference to the kitchen, a place in which dishes are created, is a way of saying that the news are the result of the magazine's own invention and that they present the readership with their own version of the stories. On the next paragraph, *El tabano* says "one strap of our Torrente broke"¹². The sentence is a humorous way of saying that the editor and owner of the magazine lost his mind and the evidence is that he published articles that do not reflect the reality of La Habana.

On page 7 of the third number, *El tabano* presents the reader with the caricature of a man giving birth to "a strange creature"¹³. The creature looks like a small version of Fernando Freyre de Andrade, the Cuban lawyer, military, political figure, and a man of influence on the Conservative party. The midwife is another man, presumably Ricardo del Torriente y Torriente, who is smiling at the reader. The story that accompanies the caricature refers to how the magazine has suddenly changed its political affiliations, leaving everyone puzzled about its new way of thinking. The caricature suggests that its owner, now affiliated to the conservative ideas of Freyre, is giving birth to creatures that resemble him through his magazine, that is lying in bed. It can be argued that the man in bed is a collaborator of the magazine or another important figure of the time, however, the text gives no clue of who he could be. The editors of *El tabano* directly accuse Torriente of changing his heart "overnight"¹⁴. The article refers to how the magazine "went to bed liberal and woke up in such a state that not even Carlos de la Torre (illustrious anthropologist of the time) would be able to tell us what it is" (7)¹⁵. The sentence suggests that the editor and, consequently, the magazine have suddenly changed their political affiliations. It can be argued that this sentence is also used to accuse Torriente of printing articles that no longer answer to his liberal ideas, but that respond to the conservative opinions of the time.

At the light of this evidence, it can be said that *El tabano* was following the news published by its competitor *La política comica*. Moreover, the detailed comments and

¹² A nuestro Torriente, el tirante se le ha reventado hace poco

¹³ Criatura extraña

¹⁴ De la noche a la mañana

¹⁵ Anocheció liberal y amaneció que ni el mismo Carlos de la Torre, tan experto en clasificaciones, sabría decirnos qué es.

caricatures about the magazine show to what extent the first aimed to answer the publications of *La comica* and its bid for criticizing it.

El Tabano: A Sign of Transnationality

El tabano makes several references to the relationship with the USA and the influence such country had in Cuba. It is important to remember, that its publication started the year after the second USA's occupation ceased. Moreover, the books of history accuse José Miguel Gómez, president of the Republic at the time, of serving the interests of the United States. The difficult relationship between the two countries, as well as the open secret of the American interventionist presence in Cuba, permeate through several pages of the publication.

As it has been mentioned, on page three of the first number there is a caricature of several members of the conservative party who are holding a blanket that is breaking. There is a character who stands by, but who is directing the actions of the group to try to prevent the blanket they are holding to continue breaking. The man seems to be William Howard Taft, successor of Theodore Roosevelt. The presence of this American president in the conservative party of Cuba seems to be a direct accusation against the party. The caricature suggests that the actions of such party answer directly to the American interests and present its members as Taft's puppets. The politician was the governor of Cuba during three months in 1906, and it was him who named Charles Edward Magoon his successor. It can be argued that by portraying the intricate relationship between the two countries in political terms the caricature becomes a sign of transnationality.

On the third number, there is a section with brief dialogs written in the form of verses. On page two it can be read: "Why, asked Soler, are the Americans in such a hurry to seize the Maine, Trevejo, my friend? Because they fear Cubans will sell it as scrap iron". (3)¹⁶ In order to understand this humorous piece, it is necessary to remember that Cuba was under Spain's domination until 1898. In 1895 Cubans started a revolution that would result in them becoming free from the Spanish occupation. However, not free to self-govern. The US government of the time sent the Maine to the coasts of Cuba, arguing that it was there to protect its interests during the Cuban revolt against Spain. The ship, that was the pride of the US Marines, exploded in 1898. It is not clear whether it was bombed from the coastline or if its destruction was the result of a malfunction. This incident motivated the decision of the USA of declaring war on Spain and resulted in the USA discontinuously occupying Cuba until 1909.

¹⁶ Por qué, preguntó Soler mandan los americanos con tanta prisa extraer el "Maine", amigo Trevejo...? Por temor que los Cubanos lo vendan por hierro viejo. 15

It is known that Cuba had a twenty million dollars reserve in its treasure before the second occupation of the USA in 1906, but that, after the government of Magoon, the country was left with an eleven million debt. On the one hand, the joke could refer to the difficult economic situation Cuba was suffering at the time. On the other hand, it seems that this joke is a way of declaring that Cuba was finally free from the US oppression and could start thinking about leaving America's influence in the past. The fact that Cubans would sell the once USA's military pride as scrap iron suggests that they no longer feel the need to respect the US's interests or to answer to them. Furthermore, it can also be argued that considering a military pride scrap metal is a way of saying that the influence of the US in Cuba is part of the rotten past and that there is no place for US domination in Cuba anymore. In addition to that, the satire also suggests that the US occupation was still an open wound for the liberals of the time. The fact that they need to make a joke about the topic on the first place, suggesting that they would not respect the American emblems, implies that they are still very interested in challenging the power of the USA over Cuba. The *Maine*, in this sense, becomes a sign of the relationship between the nations. The ship is a signifier for both the withdrawal of the USA from Cuba but, at the same time, its constant presence on the island.

On page eight of the same number of *El tabano* there is a short paragraph that reads: "Our illustrious José Varona changed for next Tuesday the trip he planned to the United States. We want to let the numerous admirers of the eminent politician know that on the shipyard there will be several tugboats prepared"¹⁷. It seems that this is another joke used to mock the United States. The fake announcement seems to imply that José Varona needs tugboats because he is planning on bringing the *Maine*. As well as on the previous joke, this one suggests that the USA is asking politicians to bring back the personal effects that it lost when it left Cuba. The joke also suggests that it left Cuba so fast that Cubans need to send its personal belongings later on. As it has been said before, the fact that Cubans need to repeat the joke indicates that the fake announcement is a hyperbole, designed to exaggerate their lack of respect for the United States' military presence. In reality, it seems that the *Maine* is a constant reminder of such events and that it still haunts the imagination of the inhabitants of La Habana. It can be said that the announcement virtually becomes a container of the transnational relationship between the countries.

In addition to that, it does not seem to be an accident that they used the trip of a

¹⁷ El viaje proyectado por nuestro ilustre amigo señor Enrique José Varona a los Estados Unidos lo ha transferido para el próximo martes. Avisamos a los numerosos admiradores del eminente político que en la máquina estarán preparados varios remolcadores.

member of the conservative party to make the fake announcement. The fact that it is him who is taking the Maine back to the US, suggest that he has hidden relationships with the country. The satire seems to be an accusation directed at the political party, that he founded, and to its members.

On page nine of the third number, there is a drawing of three children playing in a seesaw. Behind them, the silhouette of the Capitol can be seen. The two children in the seesaw are, presumably, William Howard Taft and his political opponent, William Jennings Bryan. The third child is Theodore Roosevelt. He is holding the end where Taft is sitting, and helping him to go up in the seesaw. It seems that this caricature is a simple way of showing the opinion of the magazine about the political situation in the US. It can be said that the caricature is a way *El tabano* uses to portray the game of power that was taking place in the US. The fact that it is Taft the one making Roosevelt go up, shows to what extent the last's success depended on the support the first was giving to him. By giving its controversial opinion about the struggle of power between the candidates, *El tabano* seems to be taking sides on the political situation. Besides, the inclusion of a satire mocking the ex-governor of Cuba suggests that, for its readership, his destiny was still relevant. In this respect, the magazine presents itself as a sign of transnationality, showing the interest that the people of La Habana still have in the American political affairs.

It can be argued that the multiple references that *El tabano* made of USA are proof of the negative feelings the liberal sectors of La Habana were experiencing. The fact that both written satires, as well as caricatures, are used to ridicule the US is evidence of the fear and anger the country still inspired on the liberals of La Habana. Furthermore, by not naming any other country in the world besides the USA the magazine shows to what extent this country, and not international politics in general, was the topic its readership wanted to know about. Besides, by making direct reference to the US relationship with Cuba in everyday life, *El tabano* opens a new dimension in which Cuba is not yet an independent country, but a territory whose political and economic relationships are still dependent on the US. The indirect accusation against the Conservative party of answering to the USA's interests turns the magazine into a virtual representation of the transnational connections between the two nations.

Conclusion

An analysis of the structure of *El tabano* helps us to see that the magazine was a political publication that answered to liberal ideas. The cover already announces that

satires will be the tools to entertain and to move the reader to reflect upon the political situation of its time. Specifically, the horsefly promises to bite every animal who deserves it, notwithstanding its political affiliations. This element is the first step towards drawing a portrait of the reader of the magazine since it implies that it will be interested in the political affairs of his or her time.

Analyzing the advertisements of the magazine is also a way to know more about the reader, as well as a form of understanding the past in a deeper, clearer way. On the one hand, they tell us about the lifestyle the reader had; on the other hand, they show how magazines helped to build an ideal reader and its desirable lifestyle. *El tabano* advertises all kinds of products, but mostly hats and suits which indicates that it was targeting middle- or upper-class men. Additionally, several pages of *El tabano* are used for advertising products on the first number, and the amount grows on the third. This could mean that the periodical depended on pay advertisement and could be an indicator of its lack of freedom. However, its ideology was in direct opposition to the government of the time, which suggest it functioned as a counterforce. Furthermore, the growing number of advertisements could also suggest that its popularity was growing. Advertisements are also proof of the fact that *El tabano* was targeting men. This can be confirmed by the published letters to the editor, all signed by men, and by the jokes and satires it printed.

The size of *El tabano* is another indicator of its type of reader. Its seventeen pages suggest that the reader had the same leisure time and the education of a middle- or upper-class person. The caricatures and riddles are difficult to understand without a fair knowledge of the political reality of the time and previous years. Moreover, the letters male readers sent to the magazine confirm that they found the riddles challenging and were, sometimes, unable to solve them. Several titles and epithets are in French, English or Latin which makes them unintelligible for people who spent long hours on a tiresome work or for those who had little reading skills. At the light of this evidence, it can be concluded that *El tabano* was targeting educated men.

Reading magazines from another time with a historical interest responds to the need of finding answers about the period in which they were produced. Magazines, as tools to mediate communication, provide the readers with a space for the discussion of political and social critical issues, helping the public to learn about such topics. An analysis of the content of *El tabano* lets us see that the satires it publishes are a way of manifesting its liberal ideology and to denounce the incoherencies it saw on the Conservative party. Moreover, they are a very clear way of portraying the reality of the Cuba of 1910. These

satires are challenging, which suggest that reading it was a troublesome endeavor. This shows that the periodical was inciting its reader to reflect upon his social reality while suggesting that only the sharp minds were fitted to be occupied with the political matters of the time. The humorous depictions of the government and its candidates show to what extent the readership and *El tabano* were disenchanted with politicians as well as their lack of confidence in the power of politics to change the situation. In this sense, the magazine is historicized and used as a tool to learn about the political attitudes and behavior of the society of 1910.

Often, magazines provide the reader with visual content that includes photographs and other images such as caricatures. The caricatures of *El tabano* are an intelligent and effective way of portraying the political landscape of its time. The depictions of the members of the conservative party as power or status seekers are proof of the lack of respect their actions inspired on some members of the liberal party. The caricatures are also a way of showing that the politicians of the time were under pressure and had to answer to the personal interests of powerful people, showing how fragile the political situation was.

A close look to *El tabano* reveals that it was in dialogue with *La política comica*. The first's biting remarks to the second's publications are proof of such reality, at the time that they help to reconstruct the picture of the political landscape of the time. Based on the satires accusing Torriente, *La política comica*'s editor, of losing his mind and the caricatures alleging his change of heart, it can be argued that *El tabano* was upset with its competitor's publications. Moreover, the comments and caricatures putting in doubt the integrity of the magazine show to what extent the first was paying a close look at *La comica*.

Sometimes, the magazine *El tabano* becomes a transnational field where the power advancements and withdrawals between Cuba and the USA can be retraced. It can be argued that the multiple references that *El tabano* makes of America are proof of the negative feelings it inspired on the Liberal sectors of La Habana. Moreover, both written satires and caricatures are used to ridicule the US which is evidence of the fear and anger those were still experiencing. Furthermore, the fact that *El tabano* does not refer to any other country in the world shows to what extent the USA, and not international politics in general, were read by the people of the time. Besides, by referring to the involvement the US had in Cuba's everyday life, *El tabano* opens a new dimension in which Cuba is not yet an independent country, but a territory whose political and economic relationships

are still dependent on the US. By portraying the conservative party in a caricature as answering to the USA's interests, the magazine turns into a virtual representation of the transnational connections between the two nations. In turn, the picture of the political forces the magazine makes turns *El tabano* into a tool that help scholars to reconstruct the political panorama of the Cuba of the beginning of the twentieth century.

Due to the need of restricting the scope of this paper, some relevant elements have been left out. The topic of race is one of them since referring to it implied opening a new political dimension and making reference to another aspect of the society of the time. Future research on the topic would be not only interesting but also valuable for study fields such as diaspora studies, Caribbean literature, among others. In addition to that, it would be noteworthy to see how *La comica* understood these transnational and local political relationships *El tabano* referred to. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see how and if, *La comica* responded to its criticisms.

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