Travel Request Proposal
Conference:
Radical Caribbeans/los caribes radicales: Reimagining Caribbean Life
Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana
October 3-5, 2013

Presentation:
Calvert Casey’s Politics of Going Unnoticed in the Cuban Revolution

Abstract:
The Cuban Revolution attempted to usher in a radically new society under an all-pervading light that illuminated marginal social actors as well as Cuba’s dependency on foreign economic interests. In bringing visibility to the formerly invisible—what Jacques Rancière and others call “politics”—the Revolution placed new actors on the national stage and also exposed others as counterrevolutionaries. Between 1958 and 1965, the Cuban-American writer Calvert Casey (1924–1969) lived in Havana, writing for Lunes de Revolución and Casa de las Américas, before going into self-exile in Poland and Italy. He published collections of his short texts at Ediciones R and Seix Barral. This is to say that he chose to live in the center of the revolutionary city and published in the centers of the cultural markets of the 1960s, documenting volunteers who labored in the Cuban countryside and discussing ways to improve Cuba’s national theatre. Yet, he never occupied the Revolution’s center stage—like Guevara or even Cabrera Infante—and some of his essays subtly register his unease with Castro’s growing authoritarianism. After the founding of the UMAPs, Casey flees, fearing future imprisonment for being gay. Both before and after his exile, his fiction recounts the stories of timid, often naive, but selfless subjects who seek to go unnoticed by those around them. Casey’s fiction opens different political possibilities, I will argue, not in exposing his criticisms and characters to the spotlight that shines on the Revolution’s main stage, but in going unnoticed among the swirling lights and shadows of his era to research the fragments of abandoned texts and unattended voices that, he says, “can offer us splendid clues” about this era.

Research Statement:
The presentation I will give at this conference at Tulane University is drawn from chapter two of my dissertation, Arteletra: The Politics of Going Unnoticed in the Latin American Sixties. The dissertation, in broad terms, examines the works of four Latin American writers who published in the 1960s; what unites them is a common exploration of political subjects who refuse to force their way onto the center of the political arena, opening instead alternate routes among less visible spaces wherein they enact their democratizing, dissensual gestures. Calvert Casey’s essays and short fiction occupies a seminal place within my dissertation, and this conference will provide me with the opportunity to share my research to a very significant group of Caribbean scholars (Ana Serra, Lici Fiol-Matta, Duanel Díaz) and celebrated writers (Antonio José Ponte, Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo). The significance of this presentation lies in the fact that so many scholars continue to mention Casey as an important figure—despite his outsider position as a gay, American-born intellectual—during the early years of the Cuban Revolution; however, very little research has been dedicated to studying his works and situating him among the vast field of Cuban and Latin American writers, artists, and discourses in this era. My research achieves precisely this goal, and this conference will provide me with the opportunity to test my hypotheses among my soon-to-be colleagues just before I go on the job market this semester. Thank you for considering my request!