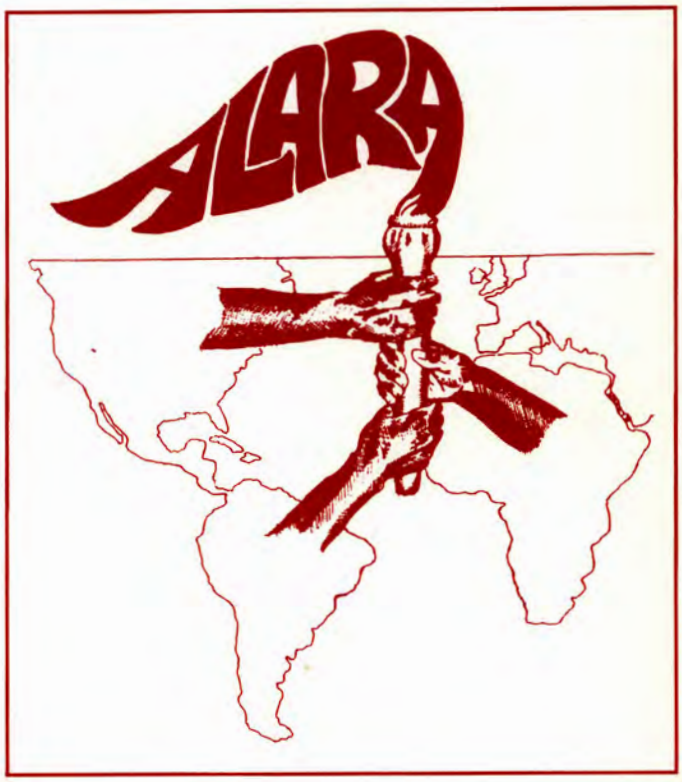
ISSN: 1093-5398

PALARA

Publication of the
•
Afro-Latin/American
•
Research
•
Association



2002
FALL

• Number 6

Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association

The Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association (***PALARA***), a multi-lingual journal devoted to African diaspora studies, is published annually by the Afro-Romance Institute of the University of Missouri-Columbia, and the Department of African and African American Studies of the Pennsylvania State University. PALARA is multi-disciplinary and publishes research and creativity relevant to diaspora studies in the Americas. Manuscripts should conform to the latest style manual of the individual discipline and may not exceed twenty pages in length. The original and a copy must be submitted, accompanied by a self-addressed envelope, along with return postage. It is our policy to have all manuscripts anonymously refereed; therefore, please omit any identification of authorship from the typescript. Neither the editors nor the sponsoring universities can be responsible for damage to or loss of such manuscripts. Opinions expressed in the journals are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily represent the views of the editors, staff or financial supporters.

All correspondence regarding subscriptions as well as manuscripts for submission should be addressed to: The Editor, *PALARA*, Romance Languages, University of Missouri, 143 Arts and Science Building, Columbia, Missouri 65211 USA. FAX: 573-884-8171.

Subscription rates are: $12.00 per year for individuals $20.00 per year for institutions

Checks made payable to: *PALARA*

PALARA

Number 6 Fall 2002

Table of Contents

Articles and Interviews

• • • •

Creative Writing

The Art of Memory in Panamanian West Indian Discourse: Melva Lowe De Goodin's *De/From Barbados a/to Panamá*

by Ifeoma C.K. Nwankwo

[For] peoples who have been to the abyss...the oblivion of the abyss comes to them and ... consequently, their memory intensifies. (Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*)

Introduction

Melva Lowe de Goodin is a member of a generation of West Indian descended Panamanians who have committed themselves to ensuring that the youth remember their West Indian-Panamanian history, the history of the diggers, the history of the washerwomen, and also, significantly, the history of the racism that both of those groups endured in Panama.[1] Lowe de Goodin exemplifies the intensification of memory attributed by Edouard Glissant to (African descended) "peoples who have been to the abyss" (Glissant, Poetics 8) of uprootings, oppression, and alienation. Lowe de Goodin is invited by all levels of Panamanian society, from high government officials to local churches, not only to share her knowledge of West Indian-Panamanian history and present, but also to give organizations guidance in the formulation and enactment of plans for the recovery of this memory. She has worked with the Panamanian government on the creation of the Mi Pueblito museum—a multi-acre site that has a Pueblito (or village) dedicated to each of the three roots of Panamanian society —the indigenous, the European, and the African/West Indian. The Pueblitos each occupy several acres and convey the flavor of the community through art/artifact exhibits, music, food, performances and so on. Lowe de Goodin has also published numerous articles in Panamanian newspapers. She is immediate past president of SAMAAP (La Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afro-Antillano de Panamá), the group that oversees and fundraises for the museum and develops programs to ensure that this part of Panamanian history and present is remembered by all Panamanians. SAMAAP is often the body tapped by media organizations to speak for the West-Indian Panamanian community. The Museum contains a wide variety of materials either from or representative of West Indian life in Panama during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, from beds, to wedding dresses, to stoves. The Museum's collection of written materials is also quite substantial and includes books (among them West Indian-Panamanian George Westerman's still unmatched history of *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panamá* (1990), and poetry by Joseph Dixon who was alive during the building of the Canal), letters, and official documents. One of the most amazing parts of the Musuem's holdings is its collection of photographs. A visitor can read a great deal of Panamanian West Indian history simply by looking into the faces of the people in the photographs. It is this *historia en los rostros* that Lowe de Goodin wants to ensure that everyone knows and remembers. This essay explicates the ways in which her play, *De/From Barbados a/to Panamá* (1999), argues through its form that everyone must participate in the remembering if this dream is to be realized.

Creating Common Memory

De/From Barbados a/to Panamá was first performed on the 12th of August 1985, and the most recent performance was in August of 1997. In addition, the play was recorded and shown on Panama's "Canal Once" in September of 1997. Lowe de Goodin uses music, visual representation, languages, and cultural traditions strategically in her play to imbue her diverse audience with a "common memory" despite differences in experience, age, language, and nationality. Common memory here refers to the possession of knowledge of an event, feeling, or experience by individuals who may or may not share a group identity. That shared memory may, but need not necessarily, come to serve as the basis for a collective identity. Common memory can be the first step to creating a collective, and is not the result of a pre-existing collective memory. If a group of people, heretofore unknown to each other, go through an experience together they can be said to have common memory. They may leave the site of the happening without speaking to or connecting to each other in any way, and would therefore not be a collective. The point here is that through her dramatic artistry, Melva Lowe de Goodin creates a common memory for members of several disparate audiences. The play is the memory that becomes common, regardless of whether individuals have had any or all of the experiences represented in the play. Through her approach to constructing the play Lowe de Goodin ensures that a wide variety of audiences can share a part of the common memory, no matter how small, including the individual who can only see photographs and the one who can only hear music. The possession of this "common memory" by Panamanian West Indians of all ages, non-Panamanian West Indians, non-Panamanians, and non-Spanish speakers is vital to the success of her life's project of ensuring that the experiences and legacies of the West Indians who came to Panama during the canal building era are not forgotten. She has made this recovery her life's work.

Common memory is a fundamental aspect of the African Diasporan experience in general, and vital to the survival of Panamanian West Indian identity in particular. Common memory is crucial to the existence and development of a sense of group identity. Edouard Glissant highlights this connection between memory and group identity for African Diasporan peoples when he writes

> For though this experience made you, original victim floating toward the sea's abysses, an exception, it became something shared and made us, the descendants, one people among others ... Relation is ... made up of... shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange. (Glissant, *Poetics* 8)

The experience of the abyss (which he indicates refers in large part to the uprooting, the middle passage, and slavery) and the shared memory of it are fundamental to the "original victim's" constitution. It is, therefore, impossible to separate the identities of people from the region called the Caribbean from their experiences of displacement, migration, and exile or those of their ancestors. Jan Carew makes this point powerfully by situating the exile of twentieth century Caribbean writers within a lengthy genealogy of exile in the Caribbean that includes the indigenous peoples of the

Americas and Christopher Columbus himself (Carew 110-111). Even the misnaming evident in the names Caribbean and West Indies illustrates this "identity-in-defamiliarization."[2] The history of displacement has led to a special emphasis in Caribbean literature in general, and recent Caribbean women's literature in particular on memory.[3]

What distinguishes Lowe de Goodin's work, though, is the fact that both the form and the content evoke and create memory. The play seeks to make everyone feel and live the characters' experiences, to close the seam between spectator/reader, author, and production. It works to make everyone feel as if the play is their present, as if it is not a performance/ script, but rather a scene in their home, at their workplace, or in their neighborhood. In terms of memory making techniques, the play is quite lush. The scenes alternate between English and Spanish language scenes to reach disparate audiences. In terms of era, the English language scenes take place in 1909 and the Spanish language scenes in the contemporary period. The characters include young Panamanians of West Indian descent and West Indians just arrived in Panama. The basic plot of the play is that a student, named Manuelita Martin (a well-chosen West Indian and Panamanian name), has been given the homework assignment of writing an essay on the Panama Canal. She decides that she wants to write about it from a different angle—that of her West Indian immigrant grandparents, that of the workers. As Manuelita begins to talk with her grandparents, they tell her the stories, engaging in a smaller scale version of the recuperative historical work in which Lowe de Goodin herself is engaged. The play includes both present day Spanish language scenes in which Manuelita is presenting her essay to her class, and Afro-Antillean English scenes from 1909 populated by her great-grandfather and his friends who went to Panama with him, his family both back home, (Barbados for Abuelo Samuel and Martinique for Abuela Leah), and in Panama. The play moves beautifully between these two eras, as a complete bi-lingual, cross-chronological, cross-generational narrative for a historically conscious or nostalgic West Indian-Panamanian audience. Within that multi-layered text is also a fully developed English/Afro-Antillean language text (for those who do not speak Spanish) and an equally fully developed Spanish language text (for those who do not speak English). The play is crafted so that all three audiences can gain a profound understanding of the history and spirit driving the play regardless of whether or not they understand the spoken language. The play's flexibility in terms of audience is evidence of Lowe de Goodin's creative/artistic skill and her keen insight into the minds of her possible audiences.

Implicit in the play's story is Lowe de Goodin's acknowledgement of the difficulty of memory transfer between old and young in light of the experience of "the abyss" described by Glissant. The first signal of this hurdle in the play is the fact that Manuelita and her grandparents have difficulty speaking each other's language. Significantly, Manuelita's mother serves as the bridge in terms of language and memory. She promises to send Manuelita to English classes and to visit her family in Brooklyn. Her mother is the same generation as Lowe de Goodin and many of her literary and museum colleagues, naming Lowe de Goodin's own understanding of the importance of

her own generation to the maintenance and transmission of this memory. I reproduce significant portions of the play here to reveal the strength of the text itself. The play reads

MANUELITA: Hola Abuelita. Abuelo, que pasó! Long time no see.
(Habla el inglés con acento español.)
ABUELO SAMUEL: Hola mamita! Leah, look at how big this child getting—is a long time we ain't see she.
ABUELA LEAH: WOW! 'Tas grande ahora Manuelita. ¿En qué grado estás?
(Habla español con fuerte acento antillano).
MANUELITA: "Año," Abuelita. Ahora estoy en quinto año de la escuela secundaria.
En inglés se dice "eleventh grade," right? Pero en español se dice grado solamente en la escuela primaria.
ABUELA LEAH: I will never get this Spanish right. El otro día vinieron tus primos con tu tía Ruth y ninguno de esos muchachos entendía ni una palabra en inglés. Si viera cómo tu abuelo y yo machacamos el español para hablar con ellos. What a thing, eh, Sam?
MAMA (VIOLETA): Por eso vamos a matricular a Manuelita en un curso especial de inglés durante el verano o mandaría a su tío Bob a pasar sus vacaciones en Brooklyn. (Lowe de Goodin, 8)

The inclusion of the parenthetical descriptions of Manuelita's Spanish accented English and her great grandparents' English accented Spanish emphasize the generation gap, and the presence of linguistic barriers to common memory. Abuela Leah's self-deprecation and reference to her "mashing up" the Spanish language further spotlight these challenges.

The difficulty of memory transfer is a pervasive theme in post-World War II Caribbean Diaspora writing. Scholar Myriam Chancy speaks to this issue in her *Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (1997). She explicates writer Beryl Gilroy's decision to represent easy memory transfer, but points out that the reality is often quite different:

> Beryl Gilroy remedies the alienation confronted by her elderly Black characters by depicting younger members of the Afro-Caribbean community in exile as receptive to both knowledge and acceptance of their elders. In reality, such an embracement of grandparents as a connection to the past, to the recuperation of Caribbean identity, is more often than not impossible. (Chancy, *Safe Spaces*, 74)

As much of the rest of Chancy's discussion of Caribbean women writers illustrates, Gilroy stands out in this representation. Works of literature and art of the Caribbean Diaspora in general, and the work of Lowe de Goodin in particular push us to focus on the difficulty of memory transfer. Further, they encourage us to consider whether the combination of desire to fit in to a host society (whether Panama, England, the U.S., or Canada) and the illusion of being able to fit in that is arguably greater necessitates or has resulted in new methods of encouraging memory. Lowe de Goodin represents the negative impact of the desire to be (only) Panamanian on memory transfer in the Panamanian West Indian community. Abuelo Samuel and Abuela Leah discuss Manuelita's father's denial of his West Indian heritage in his youth, saying

ABUELO SAMUEL: Te acuerdas Leah cuando tu y yo hablábamos con Jorge en inglés cuando era joven, el nos decía "No, no! Somos panameños. Tenemos que hablar

español.
ABUELA LEAH: Por eso nunca podía pasar los exámenes para trabajar en la Zona. Estuviera ganando mucha plata hoy en día como tu hermano Jaime. He just buy another new car for his wife.
ABUELO SAMUEL: There was a time when the boy didn't even want us to say we was from the islands. Como que tenía pena de decir que era de ascendencia antillana. (Lowe de Goodin 9)

Jorge (Manuelita's father) used to claim Panamanianness and ignore his West Indian heritage. Lowe de Goodin, through this scene, represents the reality of the tension between identificatory affinity for host country and memory transfer, in addition to subtly encouraging her audience to discard that way of thinking as Jorge has done. The "panameño" is Jorge, who has now grown out of that phase, and not the younger Manuelita, simultaneously encouraging the members of the younger generation to be like Manuelita and older Jorge while not making them feel that the spotlight is on them. Lowe de Goodin's methodology, particularly her use of language and her positive representation of her target audience (the youth), was developed to overcome challenges to memory transfer in this diaspora community. We can think of her work as a model for understanding challenges to memory transfer that secondary diaspora communities face, and as a signpost that calls attention to all the new methodologies that have been developed to meet those particular challenges.

Official Forgetfulness

The formidable task facing the writer who endeavors to create a common memory as Lowe de Goodin does becomes clear when we recall that Lowe de Goodin's audience members are not simply blank slates. They already have attitudes toward what she is endeavoring to have them remember. For some audience members this memory already occupies substantial psychic space, because of stories told to them by their first generation West Indian immigrant parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents, or because of their cognizance of the ways in which the legacies of that history determine the ways they can live and are treated on a daily basis. That group's recognition of the importance of the task of remembering is echoed in Gerardo Maloney's praise of the play's contribution to the effort to encourage the youth to remember

> El trabajo de Melva Gooden (sic), ... se coloca en forma y contenido en este esfuerzo educativo y cultural. Muchas felicitaciones Melva, porque con "Barbados a Panamá," has legado un esfuerzo más en tu larga experiencia por la revindicación de los afroantillanos" (Maloney 2).

Lowe de Goodin's task, however, is complicated not only by the fact that none of the audience members has had the experiences of the first generation of Panamanian West Indians that she wants them to "remember," but also by the fact that some of the audience members do not want to know about the experiences, let alone accord them a permanent space in their psyche. The concern that other Panamanian West Indians, the youth in particular, are imposing an "*auto-silencio*" upon themselves, that they are trying to forget, reappears frequently in other Panamanian West Indian writing as well.

Carlos Russell centers Frantz Fanon's statements on the colonized mind in his speech at the "Preserving Our Heritage" conference entitled "The Last Buffalo (1995)." He asks, "If Fanon is correct, and I believe he is, the question arises, have we as a people of Caribbean heritage participated in our own destruction?" (Russell: 1995, 6). He goes on to argue that

> Panamanians of Caribbean origin, since the mid to late 1950s, in our quest for the internalization of a new nationality, namely the Panamanian nationality, have so submerged ourselves within the narrow caveats of the majority society that those things that once held us together, as the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe has written, regarding his own culture, those things have "fallen apart" and we are now prey to the dominant society, and as such, we are in danger of total assimilation which will, in my judgement result in the practical disappearance of our culture. This possible eventuality I regard as undesirable (Russell: 1995, 6-7)

Lowe de Goodin must also speak to those who have replicated the official forgetting. One striking example of this phenomenon is the complete erasure of the workers' voices and histories, from a history of the building of the canal published in 1912 by Rufus Scott. The book is tellingly entitled, *The American in Panama*. The chapter titles include "The Spanish in Panama," "The French in Panama," "The Americans in Panama," "Taking the Canal Zone," "The Canal under Wallace," "The Canal under Stevens," "The Canal Under Goethals," "The Trade Outlook," and "Settling Our Account with Colombia" (Scott vii). The workers appear in numeric tables (Scott 186) or buried under the category of "labor": "the colored labor" (Scott 188). The gold roll and silver roll are explained in this way: "In the first category are the Americans, and in the second the common and unskilled laborers" (Scott 189).[4] This book that aims to treat "the men who have affected the canal in the broadest way" (Scott xii) yet ignores the voices of the men whose hands built the canal. The official silencing makes necessary the explicitly didactic and documentary focus of so much of Panamanian West Indian writing, writing dedicated to recording and remembering, to *"contracontar"* (to counter-tell) both official and intra-group silences. Recall the titles of works such as *Heritage/Legados* (nd) by Melvin Brown, *An Old Woman Remembers* (1983) and *Miss Anna's Son Remembers* (1976) by Carlos Russell, and *Chombo* (1981) by Cubena—Carlos Guillermo Wilson.

Lowe de Goodin does not explicitly name this official forgetting in her memory creating/invoking play. It is, however, implicit in the fact that she felt the need to write such a play. In addition, Manuelita's teacher does quietly represent the forgetting of those in authority. She actually ends up asking Manuelita questions to fill in gaps in her knowledge. After Manuelita's presentation she says

> PROFESOR(A): Esta composición tuya me ha abierto los ojos a todos los sufrimientos del grupo afroantillano en la construcción del Canal. Pero tengo una inquietud. Yo pensé que casi todos habían venido de Jamaica porque como en Panamá le decimos "jamaicanos" o "jamaiquinos" a todos los afroantillanos ... [ellipsis included in play text]
> MANUELITA: Para el Canal Francés, la mayoría vino de Jamaica, pero para el Canal

Americano, la gran mayoría fueron contratados de Barbados. (Lowe de Goodin 27)

The teacher's resistance to the memory of this era becomes clearer when another student raises the specter of race. She cuts him off, seems thankful for the bell, and promises to continue the conversation in a future class, which she never does. She was open to the history, to a point.

PROFESOR(A): Para la construcción del ferrocarril en 1850, también hubo una gran inmigración de las antillas, pero tengo entendido que la mayoría era jamaicanos.
ESTUDIANTE: Profesora, en Panamá no hay jamaicanos ni barbadienses. Todos son "Chombos."
(RISA ENTRE LOS ALUMNOS DE LA CLASE)
PROFESOR(A): Hoy no vamos a tener tiempo de entrar en una polémica, pero en otra ocasión tenemos que hablar de lo que significa esa palabra "Chombo"[5] porque hay personas que lo usan como cariño mientras que hay otros que los usan como insulto.
(SUENA EL TIMBRE)
(Lowe de Goodin 27-28)

The student's comment is ambiguous, particularly because of the use of the present tense. In this way, Lowe de Goodin points to both the official forgetfulness, through the teacher's desire to not get into what she views as a polemical discussion, and the continuation of the denigration of Panamanian West Indians, particularly through the students' laughter and the use of the present tense. In her determination to create and transfer memory, Lowe de Goodin makes sure to name the official forgetfulness, ostensibly the opposite of common memory, as part of the reality that she is endeavoring to represent. She aims to make the relationship between the represented reality and the lived reality of her audience as seamless as possible. These classroom scenes illustrate a key part of that reality. Her choice of the genre of drama also reflects this interest in creating a text that can virtually not be differentiated from reality to encourage common memory.

The Play as Performance/The Play as Published Text

Lowe de Goodin's work is a dramatic script. The work's first function is as performance. Its function as a written text is secondary for Lowe de Goodin. She published it so that it could be performed in even more sites. Her addition of photographs and sheet music to the published version illustrates her validation of both versions. There are thirty-nine photographs of the work, social, and cultural life of West Indians in Panama between 1900 and 1913. Included among these are pictures of weddings, the living quarters of the workers, the arrival of workers on ships, and the workers loading dynamite. Both the published and performed version are vital to the development of common memory, Lowe de Goodin seems to suggest. The fact that her introduction includes an address to future directors of the play clearly illustrates this desire: "Sin embargo, en futuras presentaciones de la obra, productores o directores pueden optar por adaptar la obra a uno de los dos idiomas, dependiendo de los actores y del público" (v). In fact, the performance of the play had already had its impact years before the publication of the written version. As mentioned earlier, the play was first performed fifteen years before it was published as a written text. Given this

fact, it would seem that theories about performance and collective building such as those put forth by Joseph Roach in *Cities of the Dead* (1996) and Edouard Glissant in *Caribbean Discourse* (1981) are useful for interpreting how Lowe de Goodin creates common memory. Lowe de Goodin's play is precisely the opposite of the "sacrificial substitution" that Roach identifies as the way that cultures create memory after being thrown into chaos by loss, death, or other forms of departure. He writes,

> In the likely event that one or more of the above calamities occurs, selective memory requires public enactments of forgetting, either to blur the obvious discontinuities, misalliances, and ruptures or, more desperately, to exaggerate them in order to mystify a previous Golden Age, now lapsed. (Roach 3)

Lowe de Goodin aims to prevent forgetting and counter the selective memory of official discourse. Roach's notion of substitution, specifically that performance "stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace" (3), a fictionalized past seems to be based on a notion of battling cultures. In order to prove that one culture is better than another the culture creates a performance of a fictionalized past that showcases not only what we are but also what we are not. This approach does speak to the battle against the dominant cultures that Lowe de Goodin and others are involved in and the fact that the play implicitly speaks back to the stereotype of the shallow stupid "chombo"—that which we are not.

Glissant's emphasis on the crucial role of theater in the process of collective building, particularly in terms of the fact that it gives the history of the nation significance provides an especially useful theoretical language for explaining what Lowe de Goodin is doing, by linking theater to the creation of a sense of collectivism: "Theater is the act through which the collective consciousness sees itself and consequently moves forward. At the beginning, there can be no nation without a theater" (Glissant, Caribbean 196). This theory is applicable to Lowe de Goodin inasmuch as she aims to build a commonality, in this case a common memory, through theater (as well as dramatic script). Its limitations in terms of relevance to Lowe de Goodin become clear when we note that Goodin is not trying in any way to create a nation. This distinction is significant because it disturbs the notion of natural progression towards nation-ness or even group-ness presumed in both Glissant and Roach, among other post-colonial thinkers. The common memory and the active remembering that results takes precedence over the creation of nation in the Panamanian West Indian context.

In addition, both theories focus on performance, and the present analysis is of the published text. Neither focuses on artistry as part of the theater-making process. In fact, Roach's notion of substitution is reminiscent of Glissant's notion of duplication—his point being that "when a nation is taking shape, it develops a theatrical form that 'duplicates' its history (embuing it with significance) and provides an inventory. Both approaches treat theater as folklore, or as something that arises organically from among the people, rather than as a crafted work of art as this essay endeavors to do. Glissant argues that in theater "structured

from the forms of common folkloric background" folklore "ceases to be lived in order to be represented" (197), and further that this folkloric background must be transcended (although not undermined) in order for theater to achieve the creation of a collective consciousness. His statements here imply that theater must become spectacle in order to perform the work of collective building. I propose that by drawing the reader into the history through the use of music, photographs, language, and content Lowe de Goodin's play builds common memory among all the members of the audience, and by extension, she hopes, a collective of Panamanian West Indian youth committed to remembering. Lowe de Goodin's play draws readers into a community of recall rather than through simply showing and/or telling the story. For example, she has one of the characters in 1909 complain about the mosquitoes in Panama, a complaint with which most Panamanians in the audience would certainly be familiar and wholeheartedly in agreement. Lowe de Goodin writes,

JAMES: ... Man look at all these mosquitoes.
(THEY WAVE THEIR FREE HANDS AND SWAT AT THE MOSQUITOES AND FLIES)
GEORGE: Man, they want to eat me alive. (Lowe de Goodin 21)

Lowe de Goodin's inclusion of the stage direction intensifies the audience's or readership's sense of being there, of sharing an experience with the "people" in the play. In this way, the play works to make itself more than historical spectacle. Lowe de Goodin is able to create a common memory through her play by not just using (rather than being) folklore, but by having her audience live it and feel it whether they are watching or reading the play.

Music as Memory Maker

Lowe de Goodin's cultural referents are geared towards making older Panamanian West Indians nostalgic, helping younger Panamanian West Indians recognize that it is possible to embrace West Indian heritage and be Panamanian, and providing non-West Indian Panamanians and/or non-Panamanians with a way into the history of Panamanian West Indian experience. Even those who speak neither English nor Spanish can read the story through the photographs included in the published text. In this way, everyone participates in the recovery of Panamanian West Indian history.

The music of *De/From Barbados a/to Panamá* is one example of Lowe de Goodin's multimedia approach to making her audience/readership into a community with common memory. For example, in the prologue of the play, a scene written almost entirely in Spanish, Lowe de Goodin has the West Indian Panamanian grandmother and grandfather try to remember and then actually sing parts of a Caribbean creole language folk song about the generic West Indian man who goes to Panama to work on the canal. The refrain from the song familiar even to many Jamaican children is "One two three four, Colon Man a Come" (10-11). The prologue begins with Manuelita's conversation with her mother about the essay. During the conversation her great-grandparents drop in for a visit and she begins talking with her Abuela Leah and her Abuelo Samuel. The inclusion of the song at this point in the play—both in terms of timing and of placement within a Spanish language scene is significant. The

timing of the song—early in the play, does not only emphasize the bilingual nature of Panamanian West Indian life (a point that Lowe de Goodin has repeatedly indexed as particularly important to her), but also, I am arguing, prevents the defamiliarization of the non-Spanish speaking West Indian audience of the play by bringing in something that is familiar to them. The song serves as a metaphorical nudge to the non-Spanish speaking audience who may be metaphorically nodding off because of the Spanish(ness) of the scene. Lowe de Goodin's inclusion of the song serves to keep non-Spanish speakers' interest in the scene alive, and to discourage non-Spanish speaking Panamanian West Indians from detaching from the story. In that way, Lowe de Goodin's use of this important piece of Anglophone Caribbean folk culture furthers her goal of getting/keeping everyone involved in the recovery/ remembering process. It also illustrates Lowe de Goodin's keen understanding of the politics of West Indian/English speaking Panamanian-Spanish speaking/ non-Black Panamanian relations and the audience attitudes that they create.

In the written text of the play Lowe de Goodin goes one step further and reproduces the sheet music of the song illustrating the fact that, for her, this play is about much more than entertainment —the purposes behind the play are the recuperation of a history that is being forgotten and the creation of a common memory. The sheet music as an authentic (rather than fictionalized) part of that history, and functions here in much the same way that the materials in the West Indian Museum do. It means in a manner directly opposed to the way that scholar and critic Valerie Smith argues that the focus on "reality" does in contemporary African-American film. That "documentary impulse" in African-American film, she suggests, produces fiction/art that is masquerading as and taken as reality, and that then silences documentaries. Lowe de Goodin uses the sheet music to link the Museum with the didactic purpose of her drama, rather than to supercede the Museum.

I use the term West Indian and Caribbean interchangeably here, reflecting and echoing the Panamanian usage of the term Afroantilliano that indexes the region, rather than distinguishing between Caribbean and West Indian. In addition, well-known Panamanian singer Ruben Blades' song "West Indian Man" accompanies the great-grandparents singing, reiterating the Panamanianness of the Colon man's experience, marking the special significance of this song within the Panamanian context. The chorus of the song speaks directly to the memory of this experience: "Grandaddy was a West Indian man. Y vivío y murío en Panamá" (Blades). In the play, the grandparents remembering of the song spotlights the West Indiannness of West Indian-Panamanian culture, and Ruben Blades' version ties West Indian-Panamanian history to Panama. Lowe de Goodin builds on previously existing memories (of the Colon man song or Blades' music) to create common memory, and in this case to invoke a collective. Lowe de Goodin's music choices simultaneously highlight the uniqueness of West Indian-Panamanian culture, encouraging the youth to take pride in their cultural roots (the third root) and ultimately, to link West Indian-Panamanians and other Panamanians by indexing a common connection to Panama. The idea emphasized here is that

we, Panamanians, have a common culture despite our different histories, that we are all part of one Panamanian tree even if we come from three different roots.

Lowe de Goodin's use of the music of Jamaican singer Harry Belafonte's music during the scenes that take place in 1909 both helps in the creation of an authentic West Indian scene/context as well as encouraging a feeling of nostalgia among the older West Indian-Panamanians. Her inclusion of these songs is also a key part of the historical documentation that is key to her recuperation of Panamanian West Indian history. Although Belafonte rose to prominence as a singer much later than 1909, her use of the song "Day Oh" written in the voice of a West Indian laborer ties the Panamanian West Indian laborers experience to that of West Indian laborers throughout the region and throughout the twentieth century. These songs function to emphasize the Caribbean itself as a vital referent for Panamanian West Indian culture. By the Caribbean as such I mean the Caribbean at home rather than the Caribbean as reconfigured in diaspora. By using Caribbean songs rather than Caribbean Panamanian ones, I would argue that in using the song Lowe de Goodin refuses to detach from the Caribbean itself, refuses to represent the Caribbean only through retentions, and implicitly encourages West Indian-Panamanian youth to follow in her footsteps. Significantly, it is Manuelita who puts on Belafonte's song, reiterating the link that Lowe de Goodin is highlighting between Panamanian West Indian memory and the Caribbean itself. Manuelita takes a moment while her grandparents are sharing their experiences, saying "Abuelito, dejame poner un poco de música. Creo que tengo un cassette de Harry Belafonte por ahí" (Lowe de Goodin 13). This layering of Panamanian West Indian and Caribbean referents illustrates the progressive complexity of Lowe de Goodin's creation of common memory. The audience shares the experience of the play as a whole, of songs about the West Indian laborer (Blades, sheet music, Abuelo Samuel). Further, by including all of these Caribbean references, she specifically encourages a common memory of life in the Caribbean and of its continuing presence in contemporary Panamanian West Indian life.

Lowe de Goodin's insistence on the recognition of connections to the Caribbean qua Caribbean is further bolstered by the fact that she includes scenes that take place in Barbados. The first scene of the play, after the prologue, takes place in Barbados. The stage directions in the scene are very specific, and illustrate Lowe de Goodin's desire to use the memory of their ancestors' lives in the Caribbean as part of the common memory she uses the play to create. She writes,

> JAMES AND GEORGE ARE SITTING AT THE TABLE WHERE THEY WERE PLAYING DOMINO.... SAMUEL'S FATHER HAD DIED SUDDENLY AND HIS MOTHER HAS FIVE CHILDREN, SO SAMUEL HAS TO WORK HARD TO PUT FOOD ON THE TABLE. (Lowe de Goodin 13-14)

The "push" factors that prompted the men to travel to Panama are explicated in Lowe de Goodin's representation of the poverty they endured at home in Barbados. The reference to dominoes provides a hint of the cultural context of Barbados, one that her Panamanian West Indian audience likely recognizes. The words of the

families of each of the three young men who migrate to Panama (Manuelita's great grandfather and his two friends) are given dramatic/textual space, as are their fears about what will happen to the young men. The fiancee of Abuelo Samuel's friend, George is afraid that George will forget her and start a new family. The play reads

> GEORGE: Sam, tell this woman that we not planning to stay in Panama. I can't seem to get it in her head that all I is going to do is go there and make some money for us to get married.
> HANNAH: (in tears) That is what Charles Thompson did tell him girlfriend Sara. And you know what happen? Charles stay in Panama and I hear him married to a Jamaican or Martinican girl and have a whole lot of children. Poor Sara. Up to now, she not married. (Lowe de Goodin 18)

Lowe de Goodin's inclusion of the Belafonte songs and the scenes in Barbados definitively demonstrates to all portions of the audience the significance of Caribbean referents for the development of West Indian-Panamanian culture, creating a common memory of that significance. Further, by centering Barbados in this way Lowe de Goodin evades the obsession with Jamaica of which Caribbeanist scholars are often accused, and which Manuelita's teacher's earlier comments show is common in discourse on Panamanian West Indians. By including Belafonte she inspires a sense of comfort in her older Jamaican audience.

Lowe de Goodin bridges the chronological gap between 1909 and 1999 with music. Music links what takes place in the present day portions of the play and what takes place in the 1909 scenes, and by extension the lives of the diggers and the lives of today's West Indian descended Panamanian youth. She places Bob Marley's "No Woman No Cry" at the end of the last 1909 scene, making it both a literal and metaphorical bridge between the history and the present. The scene is the wedding of Manuelita's great-grandparents, but the wedding festivities are interrupted by news of the death of one of the friends of her great-grandfather's who had come to Panama with him. The Bob Marley song is meant to reflect both the mourning of the West Indian-Panamanian wedding guests and their determination to make a good life in Panama. The scene ends with Marley's music and the words of Manuelita's great-grandfather Samuel. He says

> From now on we only going to think about making it here in Panama. No use dreaming about going back to Barbados. We are living in Panama now. Our children are going to be born in this place. We have to make it here. We have to make a good life here for all our children. Too many of our people are dying in this land. We have to make sure that their sacrifice will not be in vain. (Lowe de Goodin 55)

These words reiterate Lowe de Goodin's point that Panamanian West Indians are as Panamanian as any other Panamanian, and that their Caribbean cultural roots/ referents/past do not subtract from their Panamanianness. Lowe de Goodin is trying to create a common memory of the experience of West Indians in Panama, and these words reinforce that idea. The Bob Marley song reflects their links to the Caribbean and opens the door for a young and/or West Indian non-Panamanian audience to understand the characters' situation and sentiments.

The chronological disjuncture between

Bob Marley (1970s and 1980s) and the wedding (1909) indicates that Lowe de Goodin decided that it was more important to reach into the contemporary era than to maintain historical authenticity in this scene (especially since she goes out of her way, as she indicates in the introduction, to maintain historical authenticity in terms of language). This disjuncture implies that she is endeavoring to reach out to the Panamanian West Indian youth, who are not just familiar with, but in many cases revere Bob Marley, as do so many young people all around the world. They may not associate him with Jamaicanness as such, but the placement of the song alongside such an outpouring of emotion from a group of Panamanian West Indians it almost impossible for the audience to avoid making that association. Lowe de Goodin subtly pushes the youth toward engaging their West Indian heritage. It is possible, Lowe de Goodin seems to argue here and throughout the play, to simultaneously claim Panamanianness and embrace West Indian cultural heritage. It is significant that this scene is written in English, not only because of linguistic and historical authenticity, but also because the language chosen implies that the words are primarily directed at an Anglophone, and by extension West Indian, audience. (The idea here is not that there are not people who speak both Spanish and English, but that the choice of language is inherently connected to an anticipated and/or desired audience). The scene could have ended with the news of the death, and the action could have returned to the present day with Manuelita's greatgrandparents telling the end of the story in Spanish—so we decided to stay here. That Lowe de Goodin did not choose that route speaks to her desire to engage the various portions of her audience in the process of recovering and remembering the Panamanian West Indian history. She is clearly encouraging people to put themselves in the characters' places and commit themselves, as the characters do, to not letting their ancestors losses be in vain.

Conclusion

Throughout the play, Lowe de Goodin argues that there is no choice to be made between embracing West Indianness and embracing Panamanianness. The recognition and remembering of the Caribbeanness within West Indian Panamanian history and culture can coexist with a firm connection/claim to being Panamanian. Lowe de Goodin's method recognizes the painful histories behind these multicultural identities, but focuses on the new "doubly creole" identities that can and must be not simply recognized, but also spotlighted and celebrated. For her, creating common memory is the first step toward the preservation of Panamanian West Indian history. Active remembering by the audience is the next. This second step recalls Glissant's point about the importance of theater to collective building. Although Lowe de Goodin is not attempting to build a nation, or even a collective per se, her play is a vital element of her lifelong goal of creating common memory of the Panamanian West Indian experience in order to ensure active remembering. She has endeavored to facilitate common memory and active remembering through her work in the governmental, cross-generational, pan-Caribbean, and pan-American realms. The play speaks to audiences in all of these

realms, and makes them remember.

University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

Notes

[1]During the construction of the Panama Canal (1904-1914) tens of thousands of people migrated from the British Caribbean to Panama. Panamanian West Indian historian George Westerman estimates the number at 31,071 (Westerman 27). The canal builders worked under torturous conditions, with death always hovering over their heads in the forms of yellow fever, malaria, and accidental dynamite explosions. There was also another factor that, although not explicitly fatal, profoundly shaped their lives—racism. The segregation of the "Gold Roll" (white) employees and the "Silver Roll" (Black) employees recreated the contemporaneous Jim Crow system in the U.S. Although both groups often did the same work, the blacks were paid less than, given worse housing than, denied privileges accorded to the white employees. The Black workers had to drink from the "silver roll" fountains and use the "silver roll" bathrooms.

[2]Carole Boyce Davies reiterates and builds on this point by arguing that "exile and return ... [are] fundamentally inscribed in "New World" post-/modern identities" (Davies 2), and further that Black women's texts should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical ethnically or nationally bound category of writing" (Davies 4). Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (New York: Routledge) 1994.

[3]Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, for example, entitled her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). In addition, the novel centers on the clash between the painful memories of a daughter and those of her mother. Those memories are personal--of rape, physically abusive traditions (such as virginity tests), as well as national–of the rape of the Haitian nation by imperial forces and the negative relationship with the Dominican Republic, exemplified especially by the Trujillo government's 1937 massacre of Haitians. As in Danticat's other novel, *The Farming of Bones* (1998) that is organized around the 1937 massacre, flashbacks and other chronological shifts permeate *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The characters and the narrative itself jump between the past, present, and future illustrating the author's belief in the importance of historical memory to the present and future. *The Farming of Bones*, in particular, displays Danticat's documentary impulses through its intense focus on historical detail and reconstruction. Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York: Vintage, 1994 and *Farming of Bones*, New York: Penguin, 1998.

[4]Significantly, even the author has trouble glossing over the glaring racism inherent in this division, as illustrated in his explanation in the following quick clause: "the idea was adopted as the best means for the Government to draw the color line—a practice it would not attempt under the Constitution in the United States" (Scott 189). The book is dedicated exclusively to congratulating Americans and celebrating the canal as "a manifestation of the building genius of the American people (Scott xi)." The author makes a point of giving credit for the success of the canal to all the levels of Americans who made the canal a success --from the American rank and file to the American administrators. William Rufus Scott, *The Americans in Panama*. New York: Statler Publishing, 1912.

[5]According to Ian Smart, the term *chombo*, unlike such descriptors as *afro-antillano*, and *afro-antillano panameño*, is "by and large considered disparaging" (Smart 119). Ian Smart, *Central American Writers of West Indian Origin: A New Hispanic Literature*. (Boulder: Three

Continents Press) 1984.

List of Works Cited

Brathwaite, Edward K. *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

———. "Nation Language." *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. London and Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1984.

Blades, Ruben. "West Indian Man." *Amor y Control*. Sony Music Entertainment, 1992.

Brown, Melvin. *Heritage/Legados*. Panama City: Instituto Episcopal San Cristóbal, nd.

Chancy, Myriam. *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

———. *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York: Vintage, 1994.

———. *The Farming of Bones*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Davies, Carole Boyce. *Black Women, Writing, and Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Dixon, Joseph. *Life's Journey*. np:np, 1990.

Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. 1963. New York: Grove Press, 1968.

Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse*. 1981. J. Michael Dash, trans. University Press of Virginia. 1989.

———. *Poetics of Relation*. 1990. Betsy Wing, trans. University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Lowe de Goodin, Melva. *De/From Barbados a/to Panamá*. Panama City: Editora Geminis, 1999.

Maloney, Gerardo. *De Barbados a Panamá*. Book Review. Obtained from Melva Lowe de Goodin February 2000.

———. *Juega Vivo*. Panama City: Ediciones Dieciséis, 1984.

Presentation of the Book From Barbados to Panama at Mi Pueblito Afroantillano. August 5th 2000. Transcript obtained from Melva Lowe de Goodin February 2000.

Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Russell, Carlos. *An Old Woman Remembers*. New York: Caribbean Diaspora Press, 1983.

———. "The Last Buffalo." Paper delivered at "Preserving Our Heritage," A Conference Sponsored by The Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afro-Antillano de Panamá, Feburary 21-23, 1995.

———. *Miss Anna's Son Remembers*. Brooklyn: Bayano Publications, 1976.

Scott, William Rufus. *The Americans in Panama*. New York: Statler Publishing, 1912.

Smart, Ian. *Central American Writers of West Indian Origin*. Boulder: Three Continents Press, 1984.

Smith, Valerie. "The Documentary Impulse in Contemporary African-American Film." In Gina Dent, ed. *Black Popular Culture*.

Westerman, George W. *Los Inmigrantes Antillanos en Panamá*. np:np, 1980.

Wilson, Carlos Guillermo (Cubena). *Chombo*. Miami: Universal, 1981.

———. *Cuentos del Negro Cubena*. Guatemala: Landivar, 1977.

———. *Pensamientos del Negro Cubena*. Los Angeles: n.p. 1977.

Echoes of Euripides' *Medea* in Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba... Black Witch of Salem*

by Katherine M. Thomas

Maryse Condé has claimed that the protagonist of her novel *Moi, Tituba, sorciere...noire de Salem* is intended to be "a sort of female hero, an epic heroine, like the legendary 'Nanny of the maroons.' I hesitated between irony and desire to be serious. The result is that she is a sort of mock epic character" (201). The mockery takes place on many levels. Tituba's story is a parody of the official white history of both the Caribbean and the Salem witch trials. Snitgen says that Tituba is "the emblem of a Caribbean in search of an erased identity, as well as the symbolic embodiment of revolt and opposition to colonial oppression" (58). Bécel states that as "a counternarrative to western historical perspectives on oppressed and colonized peoples...[the novel is] a parody of modern discourses on history as a construct" (608-9). In giving voice to a black woman who identifies with African and Caribbean thaumaturgy, Condé mocks the official history which marginalizes or ignores Tituba. Tituba's assertion of her witchcraft also "mocks the patriarchal authority of the church which allows miraculous power to be held only by 'the Ambassadors of the Lord'" (Snitgen 71). Western concepts of feminism are also mocked in the interaction of Tituba and Hester Prynn. Condé attributes to Tituba Caribbean "womanism," causing Hester to dispair of making a feminist of her since Tituba loves men too much. The parodies and ironies of the novel are evident, but Tituba, the confessed black witch of the Salem witch trials, is less a mock epic heroine than a mock tragic heroine. She has much in common with the Euripidian tragic heroine Medea. Reading Euripides' *Medea* as a subtle intertext highlights the way Condé's novel parodies and blends myth and history in a counterpoint similar to the use of myth in Greek tragedy which manipulated myth to address the social problems of the day. In this context her "womanism" can be read as a *hamartia* which leads to her downfall. This flaw lends the novel a sort of dramatic irony common to Greek tragedy, for readers know that Tituba's loves will time and again lead to tragedy. Without this weakness she would not have become a slave, gone to Salem, thus losing the protection of her spirits, nor been on trial for witchcraft, nor hanged. Like the tragedies of Euripides, the novel has psychological aspects "of a character who makes her destiny—more or less unconsciously—happen" (Perret 661). Thus, Tituba becomes a mock-tragic heroine as the novel presents oppression, accommodation, and resistance in a parodic tone similar to that of Euripides.

Tituba, the product of the rape of a black slave woman by an English seaman during the Middle Passage, achieves a status rare for a black child in Barbados because she is driven off the plantation to live on her own in freedom "at the tender age of seven" (Condé 8). Mama Yaya, first as a maroon later as a powerful spirit, teaches Tituba to communicate with the spirit world, to tend wounds, and to heal with herbal cures. Tituba grows strong in her powers like Mama Yaya. Though resistance smolders within her, she always uses her powers for healing and later in the interest of love.

Upon meeting John Indian, Tituba turns her powers to ensnaring her love. He is the first to call her a witch. Tituba wonders why the word is said with such disapproval, for she has learned to revere the craft. "Isn't the ability to communicate

with the invisible world, to keep constant links with the dead, to care for others and heal, a superior gift of nature that inspires respect, admiration, and gratitude?" she asks (Condé 17).

Eventually she surrenders all her knowledge and power for love, as well as her freedom, her country, and her spirit protectors, following John Indian to his "home" in Bridgetown where he is a slave to Susanna Endicott. When Susanna and her friends view Tituba as "a non being ....ugly coarse, and inferior"(Condé 24), she, in turn, wills Susanna's death, so all can witness "the decomposition of [Tituba's] enemy now a soiled baby wrapped in dirty linen" (Condé 31). Dying in a puddle of her own excrement, Susanna survives long enough to effect Tituba's banishment across the sea, selling Tituba and John Indian to Samuel Parris, a Puritan minister from New England.

In Salem, Tituba continues to use her knowledge of herbs and natural healing "magic" to help the women in her new community. Scarboro tells us, "Tituba's entire life is a demonstration of the power and importance of love. Her sense of humanity is all the more dramatic and powerful for being set against the background of tyranny and hatred of difference that flourished in Puritan New England" (219). For her help Tituba is accused, arrested, and confesses to the practice of witchcraft. Only this small part of Condé's story is history. As a black woman in Puritan New England, Tituba's story is granted only the briefest reference in the legal documents of the Salem witch trials: "a slave originally from the West Indies and probably practicing 'hoodoo'" (qtd. in Condé 110). But Condé's Tituba "leaps into history, shattering all the racist and misogynist misconceptions that have defined the place of black women" (Davis x). Condé gives her "female protagonist who evolves from victim to self-defined agent" (Bracks 7) a voice to tell her own story from her silent and erased margin.

Tituba's brief foray into history quickly comes to an end. The other "witches" were exonerated and rehabilitated. History records what became of each. Only Tituba's fate remains unknown. This lack of record, according to Snitgen, makes Tituba "a figure of a Caribbean history ...with its gaps and erasure. She is the emblem of a Caribbean in search of an erased identity, as well as the symbolic embodiment of revolt and opposition to colonial oppression" (58).

After her jail term, Tituba is sold again to pay for the expense of her stay in prison. Benjamin Cohen D'Azebado, a Portuguese Jew also exiled from his homeland by persecution, buys her to help raise his nine children. After all his children are killed and his livelihood destroyed by fearful and jealous villagers, he gives Tituba her early wish—freedom. She returns to her beloved Barbados and her waiting spirit protectors.

In Barbados, Tituba joins the maroons living in the woods outside the plantation society. They want to exploit her powers of healing and reputation of witchcraft. Their leader Christopher, seeking accommodation with the colonial system in order to survive, maintains his status as maroon only by betraying potential slave revolts to the white oppressors and eventually betrays Tituba and her youthful lover, Iphigene. Succumbing to the fate she narrowly escaped in Salem, Tituba is hanged, becoming one with her ancestral spirits in death.

Although Maryse Condé has not claimed Medea as a model for Tituba, she

is a singularly appropriate model for this Caribbean heroine, for Medea would probably have been perceived by Euripides' audience as a mulatta herself, both through historical and mythological tradition.

Historically, Medea's home in Colchis was perceived as an area of African population. Herodotus, writing in the mid-fifth century in the *Persian Wars* (II.104), believed that the Colchians were descended from Egyptians.

> My own conjectures were founded, first, on the fact that they are black skinned and have woolly hair; which certainly amounts to but little, since several other nations are so too; but further and more especially, on the circumstance that the Colchians, the Egyptians, and the Ethiopians are the only nations who have practiced circumcision from the earliest times (Herodotus 165).

Another contemporary of Herodotus, the poet Pindar, also refers to the dark-skinned Colchians in describing the Argonauts' battle for the golden fleece (Bernal 249). Herodotus supposes that these dark-skinned Colchians were the result of either a planned colony left by the Pharaoh Sesostris or a group of deserters who "wearied with their long wanderings, deserted and established themselves on the banks of [the river Phasis]" (164).

The fifth century historian continues to mount proof of the Colchians' descent from the Egyptians by pointing out that "These two nations weave their linen in exactly the same way, and this is a way entirely unknown to the rest of the world; they also in their whole mode of life and in their language resemble one another" (Herodotus 164).

Although the stories of Sesostris and his extensive conquests during the first millennium B.C. are probably exaggerated and mix together adventures and conquests of several pharaohs, Martin Bernal points out that "when Herodotus...[was] writing, there had been a rich and continuous tradition about Sesostris for some considerable time" (237). Bernal also demonstrates that the story of Jason and the golden fleece is related to the importance of rams and their fleeces in Egyptian religion (246) and that the parallels between the traditions surrounding the Colchian ram/fleece and the Egyptian cults of Amon as a ram would seem to be extremely close (247).

Thus, both the people and stories of Colchis have African links, and one of those stories is the Jason myth in which Medea plays so large a part. Turning to mythology, we see that Medea is the granddaughter of the sun, whose descendants are frequently portrayed as black. The sun's daughter Kirke is depicted as black in fifth century and later art. Kirke is the sister of Aeetes, Medea's father. Kirke is also a witch known for detaining Odysseus on his homeward voyage when she turned his men into swine. She is depicted on two late fifth/early fourth century skyphoi from the sanctuary of Kateiroi near Thebes. Although the vases are black figure and generally interpreted as caricatures, Kirke is clearly black. Although racial characteristics are emphasized in these vases, the classical image of Ethiopians was favorable (Snowdon 56). From Homeric times Ethiopians were regarded as a very pious people, dear to the Olympian gods. Homer relates that Zeus and all the gods went to feast with the blameless Ethiopians, remaining for twelve days.

Nor was there a critical attitude toward racial mixing in antiquity. Classical mythology relates several instances "of black gods or heroes and their interracial amours [which] presented no embarrassment and evoked no apology from poets or artists," (Snowdon 94).

Snowdon found that "Realistic portrayals of mulattoes and of mixed black-white types in ancient art vividly illustrate various steps in the so-called disappearance of Negroid physical traits" (96). Therefore, it would have been easy to represent Medea as a mulatta by a simple alteration of the mask and probably would not have occasioned a need for comment within the play since the Greeks were used to a racially mixed society. Whether or not Medea was more easily identifiable as a foreigner as a result of her skin color is not mentioned, but clearly from the standpoint of both myth and history she can be a prototype of Tituba —a black witch in a foreign land, trying to survive and prosper in the face of oppression and betrayal.

Medea, like Tituba, gives up her status in her country to follow the man she loves. She too is regarded as a witch because as a priestess of Hecate she deals with otherworld spirits. Her skills with medicines enable her to concoct a potion to put the seven-headed guardian of the golden fleece to sleep, thus giving Jason the power to claim his lawful throne. But her later magic means they must flee Iolcus. Exiled to a foreign land, Jason accommodates himself to the situation, basing his survival on the Greek structures of Corinth. "When I came here from Iolcus as a stateless exile dogged and thwarted by misfortune—why what luckier chance could I have met than marriage with the king's daughter?" (Euripides 33) John Indian follows Jason's model and conforms to expectations. "I wear a mask, my tormented wife," he tells Tituba (Condé 74). He joins with those making accusations of witchcraft and abandons Tituba to her fate. Both men seek assimilation into the public structures of their new lands at the expense of the interior realm of the home. John Indian's choice has led to Tituba's exile and enslavement. Jason justifies the exile he has brought his wife, claiming "[Y]ou left a barbarous land to become a resident of Hellas; here you have known justice; you have lived in a society where force yields to law" (Euripides 33).

For both women the exile to civilization means giving up their families to take up residence in a "civilized" world where they are worse than second class citizens; they are non-citizens. Neither their religion, their heritage, nor their marriages are considered valid by the dominant society. When Jason exclaims, "If only children could be got some other way, without the female sex! If women didn't exist human life would be rid of all its miseries" (Euripides 34), he is the model for Tituba's mother's repeated plaint, "Why can't women do without men?" (Condé 15)

Both men justify their assimilative choices by claiming to act for the good of their children, for "men's public sociality is concerned...with the maintenance of the economic, cultural, and political system as a whole" (Blunt and Rose 3). Both try to force their women into compliance with the male power system and seem amazed that the women will embrace their own "cultural praxis [of witchcraft] making it the springboard from which...[to oppose] colonial cultural imperialism" (Snitgen 62).

Medea's act of vengeance is a model for Tituba's. Medea sends her rival, the young princess, a gown and diadem steeped in the sun god's fiery poison so that "her head discharged a stream of unnatural devouring fire (Euripides 54). Like Susanna Endicott, the princess dies in a puddle, "her flesh attacked by the invisible fangs of poison, milled from the bare bone, like gum-drops from a pine tree's bark—a ghastly sight" (Euripides 54).

Of course, Medea's final act of vengeance against Jason is to kill her sons. She is almost swayed by her love for them, but then asks, "What is the matter with me? Are my enemies to laugh at me? Am I to let them off scot free? I must steel myself to it" (Euripides 49). Although her first motivation is vengeance, she also feels they will be better off dead than enduring a life of exile or living in an enraged Corinth, sons of a regicide. Medea sees her motherhood as violated, " producing and reproducing for the other so as to perpetuate the existence of the oppressive system" as slave mothers did later (Dukats 746). Tituba, too, kills her child. As soon as she realizes she is pregnant, Tituba knows, "There is no happiness in motherhood for a slave" (Condé 50), for the innocent child will have to live in "a world of slavery and abjection" (Condé 50). Yet like Medea who keens over her sons, "Oh, darling hand, and darling mouth; your noble, childlike face and body" (Euripides 50), Tituba is haunted by "the image of that little face whose actual features I would never know" (Condé 52). She, too, perceives her deed as an act of caring to prevent a wretched life for her child as a slave, reflecting a common means of resistance by slaves in the West Indies (Pfaff 63) where woman's resistance is defined "as strength of endurance rather than active struggle for change" (Dukats 749).

Both women are exiled, friendless, alone in a foreign land. Both are clever women who have used their knowledge to help the strangers who now oppress them. But faced with betrayal by those they have loved and helped, both turn to "witchcraft" to vent their rage and to exert a moment of power from their positions of powerlessness. Neither can gain back what she has lost, but each will experience a moment of triumph. From their confined, gendered spaces and through gendered activities, they destroy the stability of the patriarchal public space. Medea's mythical witchcraft brings down the power of Corinth and leaves Jason without wife, family, or power. Tituba, by her clever confession of witchcraft, brings chaos to Salem village, turning the villagers against one another. In effect, she lets Satan loose among the villagers by making vague allegations of Satanism and witchcraft. Bécel says, "Tituba's witchcraft defines a contradiscourse to the 'essence' of white presence and domination, embodied by the plantation system and the Puritan society" (611). Likewise, Medea's witchcraft is a contradiscourse to the oppression of the non-Greeks—so-called barbarians—by the great "democracy" of Greece. Their resistance develops from what Ibrahim calls their "exilic consciousness [which is] inherently interconnected with subversion" (6).

Just as Tituba finds a protector from outside the oppressive group to escape the consequences of her revolt, Medea must seek the protection of an outsider. She binds Aegeus to herself by powerful oaths. Like Benjamin, Aegeus wants a clever woman, not to take care of his children,

but to solve Delphi's riddle about his childlessness and perhaps to provide him with an heir to Athens' throne. Aegeus will not help Medea to escape, just shelter her when she does. But Medea is able to enlist the help of her ancestral gods to bear her to safety in the sun's dragon chariot. Unlike the reversal typical of Greek tragedy, at the end of Euripides' play Medea is already transformed, appearing above the stage in the machine, the abode of the traditional *deus ex machina*. There she acts as the gods traditionally behave in Greek tragedy, bringing closure to the drama. "Stop! Be quiet. If you have any business with me, say what you wish. Touch us you cannot, in this chariot which the Sun has sent to save us from the hands of enemies" (Euripides 58). Then she addresses Jason in the voice of prophecy, speaking as a god or an oracle. "You, as you deserve, shall die an unheroic death, your head shattered by a timber from the Argo's hull. Thus wretchedly your fate shall end the story of your love for me" (Euripides 60). To go beyond Euripides' play, the myth returns Medea to her native land where she gives birth to Aegeus' son Medus whom the Greeks believed to be the ancestor of their most feared enemies, the Persians. Thus she is the mother of ongoing resistance to her own oppression.

Tituba, too, ends her life suspended in the air. Both women are, indeed, written off the map of human beings. Patriarchal "ground rules" deny them all earthly space, leaving them only the liminal areas of resistance. Betrayed by her lover Christopher, Tituba is taken to the gallows where "[a]ll around me strange trees were bristling with strange fruit" (Condé 172). But astride the beam of the gallows are her ancestral spirits, Mama Yaya, her mother, and her stepfather. In death, Tituba becomes one of the spirits of her island, a beneficent spirit still helping wherever she can, still resisting oppression. She says, "I am hardening men's hearts to fight. I am nourishing them with dreams of liberty. Of victory. I have been behind every revolt. Every insurrection. Every act of disobedience" (Condé 176). Like Medea, Tituba prophesies. "[America] A vast cruel land where the spirits only beget evil! Soon they will be covering their faces with hoods, the better to torture us. They will lock up our children behind the heavy gates of ghettos. They will deny us our rights and blood will beget blood" (Condé 177-8).

Thus, Tituba and Medea join together across the ages as victims of oppression who nevertheless exercise the little power left to them as foreigners, females, status-less persons in perfidious societies which ignore and erase them. They disrupt the societies that exploit them and escape to the other world in final triumph. They leave us with two images, different yet similar, of witches spanning the ages, both representing male fears of powerful women, foreign and black women in particular as signs of "otherness," as threats to the established order. Each represents an oppressed minority in her own time ready to break out into resistance and rebellion, threatening the patriarchal status quo.

Reading Euripides' *Medea* as an intertext to Condé's novel has implications on several levels. First, it raises Tituba to a higher level of heroine than the epic model. Epic heroes are affected by the whims of capricious gods while tragic heroes bring about their own destinies. Tituba is not a character simply acted

upon by the nefarious societies in which she dwells. She is a self-actualizing individual who effects and embraces her fate.

Additionally, the background of the Salem witch trials unites the novel with the many appearances of the assembly and courtroom in Greek tragedy which in Vernant's view "become elements in a general clash of policies of reappraisal of all norms that are part of an inquiry that is no longer concerned with the law but is focused on man himself..." (32). Condé reappraises the Caribbean past, examining what it means to be a Caribbean, both on the islands and in exile. So this novel, as so many of Condé's novels, focuses on the search for a Caribbean identity. The men in Tituba's life represent two unacceptable identity choices. John Indian chooses accommodation and assimilation while Christopher chooses *marronage*. Neither reflects Caribbean realities. Tituba offers a third choice. Living in the interstices of the plantation system, she establishes relationships through her healing power (a part of her avowed witchcraft) which Bécel believes "may well represent a contemporary and consciously anachronistic response to the politics of identity and racial discrimination....metaphorically underwriting a shift from traditional notions of identity to a recognition of cultural hybridity—the heterogeneity of her island and the Caribbean in general" (613-4). Tituba's construction of a Caribbean identity mimics the aim of Greek tragedy where "The dramatic stectacle...deliberately aimed at maintaining social identity and reinforcing the cohesion of the group" (Longo 16). Thus the tragic model is more appropriate than the epic, adding more resonances of parody and meaning to the already complex study of *I, Tituba...Black Witch of Salem.*

Southeast Community College-Kentucky

Works Cited

Bécel, Pascale. "*Moi, Tituba sociere...noire de Salem* as a tale *of petite marronne.*" *Callaloo* 18.3 (1995): 608-15.

Bernal, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. Vol. II. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1991.

Blunt, Alison, and Gillian Rose, eds. Introduction. *Writing Women and Space*. New York: Guilford, 1994.

Bracks, Lean'tin L. *Writings on Black Women of the Diaspora*. New York: Garland, 1998.

Condé, Maryse. *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Ballantine, 1992.

Davis, Angela Y. Foreword. *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Maryse Condé. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Ballantine, 1992.

Dukats, Mara L. "A Narrative of Violated Maternity: *Moi, Tituba, sorciere...noire de Salem.*" *World Literature Today* 67.4 (autumn 1993): 745-50.

Euripides. *Medea and Other Plays*. Trans. Phillip Vellacott. New York: Random House, 1963.

Herodotus. *The Persian Wars*. Trans. George Rawlinson. New York: Random House, 1942.

Ibrahim, Huma. *Bessie Head: Subversive Identities in Exile*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1996.

Longo, Oddone. "The Theater of the *Polis*." *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?* Ed. John Winkler and Froma Zeitlin. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990. 12-19.

Perret, Delphine. "Dialog with the Ancestors." *Callaloo* 18.3 (1995): 652-67.

Pfaff, Françoise. *Conversations with Maryse Condé*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska P, 1996.

Scarboro, Ann Armstrong. Afterword. *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. Maryse Condé. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Ballantine, 1992.

Snitgen, Jeanne. "History, Identity and the Constitution of the Female Subject: Maryse Condé's Tituba." *Matatu: Journal of African Culture and Society* 3.6 (1989): 55-73.

Snowdon, Frank M., Jr. *Before Color Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983.

Vernant, Jean-Pierre. "Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy." *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*. Ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet. Trans. Janet Lloyd. New York: Zone Books, 1988. 29-48.

Dos ensayos sobre Manuel Zapata Olivella

por William Mina

Creación, novela y mestizaje

Manuel Zapata Olivella nació en Lorica Córdoba en 1920, marcado por el signo del mes creador por excelencia: marzo, el mes de García Márquez, Ospina y Maclanil. 1920 Será un año lleno de efemerideces para las futuras actividades artísticas, culturales y políticas de Zapata Olivella, pues nos encontramos que el jamaiquino Marcus Garvey en New York lanzó la declaración de los pueblos afros del mundo; también en este año surge con impacto la "vanguardia artística" de lo que se llamaría el renacimiento negro de Harlem, término acuñado por Alain locke.

El mestizaje biológico que esgrimirá Zapata Olivella en su escritura ya estaba presente en su familia, a través de "la rebelión de los genes"; su madre era costeña y su padre con ancestros catalanes. El mestizaje cultural estuvo influenciado por el carácter de libre pensador y autodidacta de su padre. Zapata Olivella daría muestra de su escritura mestiza a edad temprana. Estando en el bachillerato ganó un concurso con un ensayo titulado "el mestizaje americano", donde uno de los jurados sería uno de sus pedagogos en cuestiones de identidad, nos referimos a Jorge Artel.

La pasión de viajar ha sido una constante en la vida de los filósofos y artistas. Sabemos de Platón y de sus viajes a Siracusa como consejero del joven Dion, sabemos de Descartes y sus peregrinaje por Europa en búsqueda de un principio absoluto del conocimiento humano; rememoramos las caminatas por el extremo oriente de Conrad, las cabalgatas por la India de Kipling, los viajes por rostros mestizos de Gaugin, los viajes musicales Debussy - Ravel- Faure para componer su "Negrito", no olvidemos las prosaicas aventuras por "África" de Hughes y Wright, a cada uno de esos trotamundos emuló Zapata Olivella, quien dice en alguno de sus textos " Me he dejado influir por las lecturas de Gorki, Istrati, London y ese otro vagabundo de don Quijote que no midió la realidad en ningún momento".

Zapata Olivella como viajero recorrió a pie centro América, luego fue a Estados Unidos, en búsqueda de alguna seña de identidad afro, posteriormente a Europa con el grupo folclórico de su hermana Delia, también al Asia a un encuentro sobre la paz , congreso donde tuvo la oportunidad de estar con eminentes personajes: Neruda, Amado, Gaitán Durán, Jorge Zalamea y finalmente cabalgaría a la tierra madre, la África de los ancestros donde los orichas le revelarían los secretos mágicos para escribir su obra magna: *Changó, el gran putas.*

De estas caminatas espaciales, temporales y culturales, surgirían obras como: *Pasión vagabunda, He visto la noche, China 6AM* .

En Estados Unidos aunque fue discriminado, la estadía en la patria de Whitman, le permite enamorarse del Jazz y conocer el arte y la literatura afro norte-americana, cuyo mensaje significativo ha sido el de abrirse brecha y dignificarse en una sociedad que los ha invisibilizado y dejado en elemento creador afro relegado a un plano insignificante aún cuando la presencia ha sido central para darle forma al mestizaje cultural afronorteamericano. Eso y no otra cosa es lo que han exaltado sus críticos literarios y los novelistas de antaño y de hoy.

De la tradición afro norteamericana, Zapata Olivella ha heredado de Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, el espíritu anti-servidumbre; de Dubois, la

exaltación de la belleza afro sin temor ni vergüenza; de Malcolm X, el espíritu de rebeldía; de Luther King, la convivenvia humana; de Hughes, la pasión por la escritura; de Wright, la magia de la palabra, magia hecha realidad en los poemas de Mckay, en la música de Robeson, en la literatura de Ralph Ellison. En sí, él como heredero del "nacionalismo" afro-norteamericano, ha "recesionado" de sus principales líderes políticos su valor y responsabilidad para ser fieles a los mandatos y exigencias del muntu: Luchar incansablemente por la libertad.

La itinerancia de Zapata Olivella no ha sido nada más física sino en las letras y en la vida cultural. No es un asunto banal que él "haya" peregrinado por disciplinas tan diversas pero que con sabiduría ha sabido entreverar el cordón umbilical de su filiación.

Así la antropología cultural le ha servido para conocer la multiculturalidad y la diversidad étnica de los pueblos del globo, en especial de los afros y amerindios.

La práctica médica le ha servido de purgante para vomitar los estereotipos de alienación presente en la psique de los oprimidos, iletrados, desheredados y afligidos.

La novela como creación de un estilo original y lenguaje propio donde los personajes son mayoritariamente afros y quienes continuamente están luchando por no "olvidar" su identidad, su historia, su cultura mestiza, su religión, sus imaginarios colectivos de hombres creadores y libres.

Creo no equivocarme si digo que gran parte del quehacer ensayístico, dramático, periodístico, poético y artístico de este novelista del mestizaje está dado por relucir denodadamente la "memoria" de los principios aludidos diciéndole a los afros: Sois espíritus guerreros, sois creadores, sois hijos del muntu qué ha pasado con vosotros que habéis olvidado los principios legendarios de la tradición africana de la cultura Bantú, sopesados en hacer realidad *la vida, la inteligencia y la palabra*. No cualquier "vida" sino aquella que es plena tanto material como espiritualmente. No cualquier "palabra" sino aquella que nos permite expresar libremente nuestras ideas, argumentos en la dignificación de vuestra cultura y en la comunicación con los ancestros a través del sonido melodioso de los tambores.

La "inteligencia" para construir reinos legendarios, imperios imperecederos, crear lenguas y dialectos en medio de la opresión, sobrevivir a las condiciones subhumanas bajo la barbarie del "amo" recreando sus creencias y resistiendo a la opresión esclavista, a través del sincretismo cultural para no perecer de sed espiritual y evitar así el disgusto de sus dioses, ancestros, antepasados.

Frantz Fanon, es para Zapata Olivella el intelectual afro que nos sirve de modelo paradigmático para descolonizar la mente de nuestros compatriotas, pues aunque el "antiguo régimen" ya pereció, queremos asumir, adoptar e imitar las mismas conductas y comportamientos del colonizador de manera mezquina, porque se ha socializado e instituido que es así y sólo así , de que es ello lo que debemos hacer, y no otra cosa.

El "colonizador" nos enseñó a avergonzarnos de nuestro "color" y nosotros lo asumimos. El "colonizador" nos dijo que éramos una raza inferior y lo seguimos asumiendo. Utilizando los filósofos, pensadores e ideólogos se infundió que nuestro coeficiente intelectual

era bajo y lo seguimos aceptando. Según las palabras del maestro Olivella, es una tarea urgente e inmediata descolonizar la mente de los aún alienados, sobre todo hoy cuando se ha implantado la cátedra afrocolombiana. Igual labor hay que hacer con la historia, la cultura y con el lenguaje, pues creo que no por curiosidad le importó tanto la exactitud de las palabras a Confucio, a Sócrates, a Nietzsche.

Es relevante la descolonización y desalienización del lenguaje, pues los términos utilizados para referirnos a nosotros como hombres creadores, siempre tuvieron estigmas despectivos: esclavos, piezas de indias, negros, cosa sin alma, individuos de mente primitiva por fuera de la historia.

Debemos asumir nuestra responsabilidad literaria, filosófica y temática de devolverle a las palabras su efectividad en el arte de significar las cosas por su esencia y verdadero nombre. Este debe ser un reto de todo intelectual afro, cuestión que un ensayista desalienado como Zapata Olivella ya asumió con su escritura lúcida y pedagógica siendo joven.

La novela de Manuel Zapata Olivella amalgama lo real con la ficción, así el autor-narrador mezcla lo que sí tiene límites, los hechos demostrables con la experiencia, el análisis, las variables cuantificables de la antropología y la ciencia con el desfuncionamiento de su imaginación creadora literaria que no tiene límite alguno para adelantar el tiempo, resucitar a los muertos, atravesar cuerpos con armas sin herirlo. Los ancestros abren grilletes sin dejar huellas. Benkos nace parado, letras de fuego que queman el papel, huellas ensangrentadas que andan solas, etc, etc. Él consigna magistralmente el **animismo** de las tradiciones africanas con el "**realismo**" histórico de los hechos y personajes de la vida real sin desconocer su estructura de alienación social y efectiva para producir algo así como el **realismo mítico.**

Frente a lo "real maravilloso" de Carpentier y el "realismo mágico" de García Márquez, Zapata Olivella nos habla de lo "empírico mítico" desde la antropología y el psicoanálisis, entendido como respuesta material del hombre primigenio respecto a lo "real material". El realismo mítico no es una mera forma de falsear la realidad a secas, sino la creación de un mundo simbólico e imaginario para "fabricar", expresar y explicar los contenidos de la realidad.

Manuel Zapata Olivella ha compartido con José Martí su espíritu americano, con Rodó su optimismo en la juventud, con Amado la afirmación triétnica americana, con Icaza el conocimiento de las condiciones socio-históricas de los oprimidos de este continente; ha aborrecido la mirada piadosa hacia el afro de escritores como Gallego; se ha identificado con todos los novelistas humanistas y demócratas que no pueden ser libre sin algún ekobio independiente de su raza, color o ideología; padece hambre, marginalidad, pobreza, no habiendo conquistado sus condiciones mínimas de vida. Si hay libertad y no hay condiciones de igualdad social, eso no es libertad sino exclusividad y privilegio. Para Zapata Olivella el hecho de que el continente afro sea la semilla primigenia de la humanidad, debería animarnos a no crear barreras entre los hombres, pues todos son anthropos, hijos de África donde el hombre se hizo hombre y mujer el mismo día en que empezó el peregrinaje ontogenético de nuestra especie en el planeta.

Zapata Olivella expresa ayer y hoy con

su escritura ensayística, antropológica y literaria, la multiculturalidad del hombre del globo en su amalgama genética y cultural de la especie, porque ello no es un imperativo categórico sino una obligación con los ancestros.

Es porque el novelista del mestizaje nos ha recordado todas las facetas de la tradición cultural y oral africana aquí en América con sus escritos lúcidos y creadores, la razón suficiente, por que debemos llamarle con todo honor el *"Guardián de los ancestros"*. Él es aquél protector de la memoria ancestral y legendaria africana que los orichas y las tablas de Ifá-fa eligieron para reproducir e inventar toda la sabiduría del hombre africano en su diáspora homérica en búsqueda constante de su libertad efectiva.

Africanidad, multiculturalidad y mestizaje

"El mañana de la humanidad está en la fusión amorosa de las sangres y las culturas y no en conquistas y monopolios de las ciencias y el dinero."
Manuel Zapata Olivella

La rebelión de los genes acompaña en espacio y tiempo a dos textos en forma de ensayo escrito por el gran novelista Manuel Zapata Olivella; nos referimos a *Las claves mágicas de América (1989)* y *¡Levántate mulato!* (1990), donde una de las ideas centrípetas es el mestizaje: el aporte bio-cultural afro-amerindio a la sociedad americana. Acervo imaginario y creación colectiva omnubilada por seudo intelectuales que siempre redujeron nuestro pensar, decir y hacer a las catacumbas de la invisibilidad histórica.

¿ Por qué la rebelión de los genes ? Por la trietnicidad plural de América a nivel de sangres, culturas y razas entre la experiencia socio histórica africana, amerindia y europea. Hibridez de ideas y creencias, amalgama de valores y principios, butiburrillo de idiosincrasias y costumbres, mezcolanzas de imágenes y símbolos, juego enhebrado y dinámico de sangre y genes.

> "América se hizo negra por la fusión de las sangres llamadas impuras. El mestizaje igualó biológicamente a la india y a la negra con su violador blanco. Desde entonces la mezcla de las sangres fue superior a la pureza racial proclamada por los conquistadores" (Zapata Olivella, 1990, 222).

El tema de la identidad Latinoamérica no es nuevo, empezó al otro día de la independencia de los países de América. A dicha cuestión han hecho alusión gran parte de nuestros estadistas, humanistas y novelistas. Zapara Olivella no sería ajeno a dicho asunto.

Allí donde José Vasconcelos y Domingo Faustino Sarmiento habían denigrado de la creatividad del grupo étnico-indígena, verá Zapata el aporte genético-sociocultural amerindio a la constitución del mestizaje en América Latina y en Colombia, proceso que empieza cuando:

*Se intercambian plantas, animales, especies.
*El colonizador viola a la india
*En la fusión de símbolos lingüísticos, experiencias indígenas y enfermedades.
*El Colonizador se aprovecha de la sabiduría indígena para conocer la selva.

> La colonización de América, cuyo afincamiento se realizó sólo en medio tiempo, pudo realizarse sobre la paradójica destrucción del indígena y su

cultura; el campo se nutrió de cuanto había construido ese hombre al que le negaban alma. Conocedor milenario de la tierra; experimentado cosmógrafo de los vientos, las sequías, las nieves, los huracanes, los mares, los ríos, los valles y las montañas (Zapata Olivella, 1989, 25).

Allí donde la creatividad afro ha pasado desapercibida por los novelistas, ignorada por la historia oficial, mancillada por los académicos, vilipendiada por los ilustrados, Zapata Olivella con su palabra de alfarero y la meticulosidad del investigador social desenmascara la realidad de los hechos sobre el aporte genético-cultural del afro en América Latina y el Caribe. Zapata Olivella con la claridad interpretativa del historiador y la complejidad del pensador profundo, muestra el germen creador del africano (religión, arte, magia, filosofía, música, literatura) al muntu Americano. Ello se evidencia cuando:

*El afro se rebeldió contra el rapto esclavista.
* Los genes del amo se mezclaron con los de la esclava.
* Forjaron su libertad a punta de lucha.
* Se unieron a los ejércitos libertadores para luchar contra el imperio.
* Fue utilizada toda su sabiduría ancestral, oral, y sus prácticas tradicionales (agrícolas, pecuarias, artesanales). Para la producción material del continente.

"La presencia del africano en Colombia, al igual que en cualquier otro lugar de América, despierta inquietantes preguntas, muchas de las cuales aún no han sido respondidas. Prejuicios, vacíos históricos, esquematismos, actitudes paternalistas y visión eurocentrista, entre otros fenómenos, impiden profundizar en su real contribución y la de sus descendientes en las culturas nacientes" (Zapata Olivella, 1997, 222)

La hispanidad constituye el tercer elemento constituyente de la trietnicidad Americana. Ella está dada por la aculturación en América manifiesta en la fusión magnánima de ideas, lengua, religión, creencia, a partir de la conquista y colonización a través de una España que ya era herencia híbrida de: Celtas, Tartesios, Romanos, Árabes.

"La omnipresencia de España en América omnubila la mirada retrospectiva de los procesos históricos por los cuales millones de españoles fueron nutriendo y fortaleciendo el mestizaje étnico y cultural de hispanoamérica. Igualmente los sucesos políticos que se nombran con los rótulos de "conquista", "colonización" e "independencia" ocultan los complejos fenómenos de transculturización, a-culturización y endoculturización que se diera a lo largo de los siglos" (Zapata Olivella, 1997, 206).

Zapata Olivella critica con agudeza los fenómenos enajenantes que han distorsionado la identidad triétnica americana. Así se ha pensado al amerindio como un ser bárbaro, al negro se lo ha concebido como un ente salvaje y pasivo. La estratificación de castas y del blanqueamiento colonial republicano como legado alienante, ha contribuido en gran magnitud a que el acervo socio histórico afroamerindio haya permanecido subrepticio. Quizá el acto más pusilánime de ciertos académicos consistió en ver la hibridez triétnica- cultural como algo negativo y empobrecedor del mestizaje

biológico[1]. Otra extrañeza consistió en ver la historia nuestra como si fuese resultado de caudillos, gobernantes y ciudadanos blancos, dejando a un lado el factor innovador, anónimo, colectivo e imaginario de los mulatos, zambos y afroamerindios.

> "La creatividad es una fuerza inmanente que no debe medirse tan sólo por los resultados materiales, sino también por la mente de quienes la generan y en la idiosincrasia de sus descendientes. Una onda etnohistórica, cuya parábola debe juzgarse a través de los siglos y generaciones. La chispa arrancada por el abuelo cavernario al frotar las ramas secas, dio comienzo a la fusión atómica de Einstein" (Zapata Olivella, 1997, 239).

Americanidad es la amalgama triétnica plural, reinventada por Zapata Olivella de cara al presente-porvenir en América Latina. Con la Americanidad África se des-africaniza, España se americaniza, y la indianidad se afirma en la americanidad. La identidad triétnica americana se convierte así en una especie de magma biológico, simbólico y lingüístico: *"Nadie escapaba al gran trapiche de la molienda multicultural y sus jugos"*.

Trietnicidad es amalgama religiosa entre deidades católicas y africanas, donde los orichas africanos suplen el papel de los santos cristianos: Vudú, Santería, Candomblé. Tenemos pues, recreación, reinterpretación, re adaptación de símbolos religiosos. Este sincretismo se evidencia en el lenguaje a través del enriquecimiento de la lengua española con expresiones africanas y amerindias; así la trietnicidad ha dinamizado las costumbres (vestidos, comida, artes, música) El eco del tambor sigue siendo un instrumento eficaz de la trietnicidad y de la comunicación entre vivos-difuntos.

> "Los tambores africanos se difundieron y multiplicaron en América. Confeccionados con troncos, pieles y bejucos nativos a escondida de los amos, desde el comienzo transmitieron mensajes mágicos, religiosos, levantísticos". (Zapara Olivella, 1997, 305).

La africanidad[2] empezó cuando el esclavo se reveló contra el usurpador europeo y prefirió suicidarse en las naos negreras.

Africanidad es libertad y autonomía expresa en rochelas, palenques, cimarrones y en movimientos sociales afro-americanos; africanidad es actitud de combate negrero por la igualdad efectiva de opciones a nivel económico y político en una sociedad seudo democrática y discriminadora como la nuestra. Africanidad es la diáspora de la poesía negra cantando desde norte América, el Caribe y América Latina en la voces de: Nicolás Guillén, Langston Hughes, Candelario Obeso. Africanidad es creación humana en general y del hombre afro con sus conocimientos y experiencias legendarias a la trietnicidad americana.

> "La africanidad es un sentimiento filosófico, religioso y poético que se nutre en la historia de la semilla humana nacida en África. Su discurso lo inició el primigenio africano—no sabemos qué color tenía, ni nos asusta—para dirigirse a sus orichas. Sólo por ello inventó la palabra, la música y la danza. Después se hizo epopeya al narrar sus correrías por todos los continente y océanos" (Zapata Olivella, 1997, 79).

Cuando Zapata Olivella como

intelectual y crítico social habla de alianza entre los afros de cualquier lugar, lo que en el fondo pone a discusión es el llamado político, expreso en unidad espiritual de acciones, proyectos, pensamientos para reconocernos como ciudadanos afros y redefiniendo nuestra identidad desde los genes, para así, luchar aquí o allá por ser libre en el sentido efectivo de la palabra.

Africanidad es tener conciencia de que la semilla más cercana de la humanidad es africana. Es como ha dicho el paleontólogo francés Yves Coppes **"Todos somos africanos"** y es precisamente de esta evidencia, según Zapata Olivella, el dispositivo paradigmático que África a través de la filosofía muntu[3] puede aportarle a la descomposición de nuestras sociedades contemporáneas, al deterioro ecológico y a la soledad del hombre actual.

> "El muntu concibe la familia como la suma de los difuntos y los vivos, unidos por la palabra, los animales, los árboles, minerales (la tierra, agua, fuego, estrella) y las herramientas en un nudo indisoluble. Es la concesión de la humanidad que los pueblos más explotados del mundo, los africanos, devuelven a sus colonizadores europeos sin amarguras ni resentimientos. Una filosofía vital de amor, alegría y paz entre los hombres y el mundo que los nutre". (Zapata Olivella, 1997, 362)

Universidad del Cauca-Popayán, Colombia

Notas

[1]En el fondo el objetivo era negar el protagonismo histórico y sociocultural del afro. Todo ello viraría radicalmente cuando los afroamericanistas (Roger Bastides, Arturo Ramos, Nina Rodríguez, Fernando Ortiz, Nina Friedemann) exaltaron el valor y la significancia del acervo afro para repensar la identidad criollo mestiza.

[2]Este término tal cual lo utiliza Manuel Zapata Olivella, es similar al de la negritud puesto en boga en los años treinta en París por Césaire, Damas, Senghor para referirse a un modo específico de ser afro en América y de hacer creador indistintamente del afro.

[3]Concepto religioso filosófico de la etnia Bantú muy similar a la del Tao de los Chinos, afín al concepto romántico al amor umbilical que vincula a toda criatura existente desde la ameba a las galaxias. Esta idea de hermandad es descrita poéticamente por Walt Whitman en su libro *Canto a mí mismo*.

Bibliografía

Zapata Olivella, Manuel. *!Levántate mulato!* Rei Andes, Santafé de Bogotá, 1990.

———. *Las claves mágicas de América* (Raza, Clase y Cultura) Plaza y Janés, Santafé de Bogotá 1989.

———. *La rebelión de los genes*, Altamir, Santafé de Bogotá, 1997.

Mojos, Vodou and Conjurations: New World African Religious Aesthetics and African American Poetry

by Anand Prahlad

Although New World African religions have exerted a tremendous influence on African American poetry, this topic has received little scholarly attention.[1] In particular, Vodou related motifs, metaphysical philosophy, cosmology, and divination are rich veins in African American poetry that cry out to be explored. Although these elements occur more frequently in poetry written after the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, their influences are also present in some poetry composed prior to that time, as in the works of Langston Hughes. In this paper I theorize specific influences of the religion of Vodou on the ideological foundations and craft of African American poetry in an effort to shed light on how this very ancient religion continues to be a vital component of contemporary African American cultural expression, and to demonstrate the value of focusing on elements of New World African religion in examining works by black poets. Implicit in this discussion are several important ideological assumptions. One is that much African American poetry arises out of a fundamentally different weltanschauung than does more mainstream American poetry. Because of cultural and historical factors, one must look beyond the modernist and post-modernist impulses that are assumed for American literature for insights into the dilemmas of spirit faced by black poets and the strategies used to confront those dilemmas. Not to engage the connections argued in this essay amounts to gestures of hegemonic denial, and a refusal to accept the necessity for broader theoretical tools than are currently in use in the academy; all of which undermines the project of fully appreciating the art of black poetry. Before preceding to an analysis of poems, however, some discussion of Vodou is necessary. Thus, I examine the historical origins of this religion, its dispersal to the New World, and key aesthetic elements observable in Africa, the Caribbean and the United States, and then progress to considerations of how some of these elements resonate in black poetry.

No other religion is as maligned in the western world as Vodou. Just the mention of the term "conjures" up images of witchdoctors, zombies, and clandestine ceremonies complete with chicken blood, snake handling and scantily-clad, dark-skinned dancers sweating to the "hypnotic" beat of "persistent tom toms." Of course, these pictures have more to do with European and European American imagination and fears than with the actual religion of Vodou. To Americans, Vodou has typically represented Africa, that which is uncivilized, magical, superstitious, wanton, barbaric, dark, forbidden and exotic. These stereotypes have been reinforced and virtually celebrated over time in popular film, television, newspapers and literature; while, paradoxically, Vodou has been regarded as something to be eradicated. Tragically, and as a result of attitudes found in mainstream America, many African Americans are unable to acknowledge such African-influenced aspects of their own behaviors and expressive forms.

Despite efforts toward its extermination by European and American powers, however, Vodou has continued to thrive, even in the United States, and is a major influence on the art, world view, philosophy, and rituals of African Americans. Contrary to the propaganda

that depicts Vodou and related religions as insignificant, outdated superstition, their influences are, in fact, growing tremendously throughout the New World, transcending class and ethnic boundaries.[2] Barnes, a prominent scholar on African-derived religious systems, writes, in chronicling the proliferation of African-based religions in the new world, "In this respect North America is experiencing an African renaissance" (xv). One could go so far as to say that Vodou is overwhelmingly the symbolic religion of choice for black artists and, thus, if one is to be an informed critic of African American arts, one must seriously engage the philosophies and aesthetics of Vodou and make an effort to understand and appreciate this very dynamic and artful religion.[3]

The roots of Vodou lie in the religion and philosophy of African civilizations. The term *vodun* (alternately spelled *vodu, vodou, vodoun, voodoo,* etc.) allegedly appeared first in print in 1658 in the *Doctrina Christiana*, a work written by West African King of Allada's ambassador to Phillip IV of Spain (Cosentino 61). In the text, *vodun* is translated as god, sacred, or priestly. The text offers proof that *vodun's* cultural origins lie in the language family to which the Fon, Mahi, Hueda, Hwla, Ouatchi, Adja, Wemenu, Mina, and Gen belong, people who reside in the lower areas of the countries of Benin (Dahomey) and Togo (the Guinea Coast, or Slave Coasts).

Specific elements of Vodou, however, can be traced back to 500 B.C., the beginning of the Iron Age in West Africa. The smelting of iron is recognized as a principle factor in the development of the Guinea Coast empires, as iron weaponry was key to the success, organization and support of large armies, and helped to facilitate centralization of governments and expansion of territories. Such kingdoms as Benin, Dahomey, and Oyo welded a power that was based on military force. Quite naturally, iron became a focus of religious and ritual practices, and guilds and other sects were organized around the complex of symbolic traits associated with iron, iron working, and various occupational implements involving this metal. Gu, and later Ogun, became the deities associated with iron, and beliefs centering on them were eventually found throughout the Guinea Coast (Barnes 50-53). As a deity, Ogun came to symbolize the creation of fire, the hunter, the opener of roads, the clearer of the first fields, the first warrior, the introducer of iron, the founder of towns and kingdoms; in essence, the transformer of nature into culture, civilization itself.

Ogun, or Ogou, is one of the deities who emerged as a central figure in New World African religions. For example, he is an important deity in Haitian Vodou, albeit, transformed in purpose and character. Ogun is also prominent in Vodou and related sects of the Americas, in countries as widespread as Cuba, Brazil, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Trinidad, Tobago, Grenada, St. Lucia, Canada, Argentina, Venezuela, parts of Europe; and in regions of the United States such as Florida, California, Louisiana, New York, and Philadelphia. In short, this deity is found throughout all parts of the world in which we find people of African descent.

Aside from the presence of specific symbolic elements, such as deities, what are some broader identifiable characteristics of Vodou as it emerged in West Africa and was dispersed throughout the Diaspora?

First, we must acknowledge the overwhelming complexity of Vodou that makes giving a thorough answer to this question a virtually impossible task for this paper. This religion encompasses a wide range of oral performances, such as songs, chants and incantations. It also includes many complex material behaviors such as the making of sequined flags, decorative bottles, musical instruments, wood and iron ornaments, devotional foods, candles, clothing and paintings; in addition to the arrangements of textile and plastic votive objects on altars, the use of herbs, the drawing of *veves* (ground drawings used to invoke the loa), animal sacrifices, dancing, and the architecture and decoration of the *hounfor* (temple). Finally, the very elaborate mythological and philosophical systems in which these elements obtain their meanings are critical.

It is precisely these philosophical and aesthetic components that help to distinguish Vodou conceptually from other religions and upon which I wish to focus. One such ingredient involves an emphasis on music and dance as media through which the heavenly *loa* (gods and spirits) communicate with earthly human beings, an orientation that envisions these activities and the body as inherently sacred. In Vodou, the body literally becomes an instrument, a flute for the wind blown from the mouth of the spirits, a drum pounded by the hands of *loa*, an offering, a sacrifice, like the foods placed so lovingly on altars; a resonance, tingling, vibrating, sensual and celebratory, active and energetic. As Deren observes, in reflecting on her experiences with Vodou ceremonies in Haiti: "It is this which draws one in, for one rises to commit oneself neither to the dancers nor to the drummers, but to some pulse whose authority transcends all these creatures and so unites them" (257).

The sacralizing of movement is closely connected with another important characteristic of Vodou—the emphasis on trance possession. Deren writes about possession, "...it is the center toward which all the roads of Voudoun converge" (247), an observation echoed by other scholars such as Brown: "The center of Vodou worship, regardless of the classification of the spirits being addressed, is possession-performance" (in Barnes 1997: 70). Through singing, drumming and dancing, the *loa* are invoked to possess or "mount/ride" ceremonial participants (the "horses"). Several philosophical beliefs underlie these practices. One posits that the intervention of spirits and deities into the social interactions of human beings is necessary for individual and community healing. Another indicates that periodic, ritual trance states are necessary for social equilibrium. A third involves individuals being possessed by identifiable spirits who take control of the body while the ego is displaced, surrendered or lost, and that such mediation of "supernatural" power is liberating (Deren 1991; Brown 1991; Hurston 1990; Cosentino 1995).[4]

In the New World, these characteristics are interwoven with particular social forces and circumstances found in specific societies at given moments in time. Symbols, beliefs and rituals are necessarily tailored to the social realities and historical circumstances in which practitioners find themselves. To put this another way, Vodou cannot be extracted from the political, economic and social contexts in which it is found. The names and characteristics of deities vary, as do

beliefs and ceremonies. In fact, one could say that the essence of Vodou is the aesthetic of adaptation, of creolization. Certainly some of its power lies in a profound ability to absorb elements from a given environment and to imbue them with its own eclectic but African influenced meanings.

Several concepts are critical to understanding the adaptive nature of Vodou, including *syncretism,* which refers to the blending of African symbols and meanings with those found in contact religions. Often syncretic systems employ the symbols of the dominant religious group to disguise the actual meanings and symbols of the subordinate group. The use of Catholic Saints by Vodou worshippers to signify African deities represents a common example of this. Other examples include the Star Wars character Darth Vader as a symbol for the *loa* of the cemetery, Bawon Samdi, or the image of the American popular movie character Rambo as a symbol for Ogoun, protector of the oppressed. A second concept, *assemblage*, refers to bringing together separate and seemingly disparate elements into a holistic system. According to Blier, "Four words are employed among the Fon to convey the action of *assemblage*: *kple, ha, agblo,* and *fo,* each in turn suggesting ideas of "'bringing together,' 'uniting,' 'agglomeration,' and 'gathering together'" (in Cosentino 75). Artistically, this is reflected in such material objects as flags or *appliques*, which consist of assemblages of multi-colored cloth. Ritually, *assemblage* is illustrated by the incorporation of foreign deities into a local corpus.

The concepts of *assemblage* and *syncretism* help to explain an important facet of Vodou often misunderstood by monotheists: Vodou practitioners commonly take part in several faiths simultaneously (Barnes 11). Although, the rhetoric of practitioners who claim to be 100% Catholic might lead one to think otherwise, a polytheistic approach is the norm for Vodou worshippers throughout the Diaspora. For example, most Haitians might identify themselves as Catholic; however, it would be a mistake to conclude from this that they *only* practice Catholicism. In this very fluid and expansive system, one finds no inherent conflict in practicing several faiths; hence the common adage that one is 100% Catholic and 100% Vodou. One's religious life may consists of elements derived from numerous ideologies, e.g., Catholic, Indian, African, and contemporary popular culture. As Cosentino notes: "There is no typical vodou" (52). Thus when we come to Vodou in the United States, we need to consider much more than specific rituals that fit some stereotypical idea of what Vodou (Hoodoo, or Neo-Hoodoo) is. Instead, we look for complexes of practices and symbols unified by some underlying philosophical thread.

Beyond performances and ceremonies, a significant aspect of Vodou involves the way in which individuals conceptualize their relationships with the spirits. Devotion to *loas* and deities imparts a profound impact on concepts of being, shaping and guiding principles of individual and social action. *Loas* are not simply picked up during ceremonies and left behind when ritual occasions end, but continue to play significant roles in the day to day lives of practitioners, becoming especially critical in creative endeavors. In the testimonies of artists such as André Pierre, for example, it is clear that the

intimate connection to *loas* represent an essential part of the inspiration and actualization of their work. Pierre states, "I am married to Ezili Dantò. I sleep at her altar on Tuesdays.... I have confidence in the spirits. I love the spirits. I live with the spirits" (Cosentino xxiii).

Vodou in the United States has usually been viewed by scholars as surviving only in fragmented and sporadic forms. The work of Zora Neale Hurston (1938), who allegedly became initiated into a Hoodoo sect in the Southern United States stands alongside Harry Middleton Hyatt's (1970) voluminous interviews with conjure doctors as one of the early ethnographic studies of this religion. Scholars like Albert Raboteau have contended that whatever intensive meaning and power this religion had was lost along with the African languages spoken by the first generation of slaves, just as the names of deities were lost or forgotten (Raboteau 1978). Hence, even scholars of African American religion rarely consider Vodoo a viable and ongoing religious practice. In part this scholarly vision results from a near-sighted focus on religions with written canons and centralized leadership ("major religions"), but it also reflects: 1) a reliance on written texts rather than on ethnographic studies, and 2) a desire to present African American culture in a "respectable" light, an impulse sometimes aligned with philosophies of racial uplift.

Vodou has been a major ideological element of African American culture since the slavery period. Its impact is noted throughout slavery and references to the conjurer or Hoodoo doctors are commonly found in colonial dairies and autobiographies, and in interviews with ex-slaves: "On almost every large plantation of Negroes there is one among them who holds a kind of magical sway over the minds and opinions of the rest; to him they look as their oracle..." (Levine 70). Vodou or conjure-related practices proliferated (See Levine 70-78). Although W.E.B. Du Bois's views on African religions was as pejorative as any held by his white contemporaries, still he recognized the importance of Vodou to the survival of enslaved Africans. He wrote that "the chief remaining institution was the Priest or Medicine-man" (342), and later, "mystic conjurations were invoked, the witch-woman and the voodoo priest became the center of Negro group life" (323). Just as in countries such as Haiti, slave rebellions in the United States were often linked to Vodou, as "Magical folk beliefs did give many slaves the courage and determination to indulge in acts they otherwise would have had difficulty committing: standing up to the master, moving freely about the plantation, conspiring to escape, even in some instances rebelling itself" (Levine 75).

Louisiana (and in particular New Orleans) was known as the major center of Vodou worship and activity in the United States. To a large extent, this was a consequence of New Orleans being a French territory, as the French were less interested in converting slaves to Christianity than were the British and, hence, less likely to suppress performances of African cultural expression. Thus drumming and dancing were permitted in Louisiana, and Congo Square in New Orleans became a famous site for public performances of African rituals. The stature of *houngans/mambos* or priestesses such as Marie Laveau—the high priestess of Hoodoo in New Orleans —is legend, and such priestesses served both the African American, Cajun and

white communities. As reflected in a popular blues lyric—"I'm going to Louisiana/get me a mojo hand" —Louisiana still maintains its reputation as the major center of Hoodoo.

The influences of Hoodoo have also persisted throughout other parts of the United States, although usually underground. One evidence of this is the proliferation of magic shops in areas where there are large African American populations. These shops stock herbs, icons, candles, books, and other magical objects used in traditional Vodou-related practices. It should be obvious that these shops would not exist without ample demand for the goods they provide.[5] The role these businesses play in African American communities, however, remains undocumented and un-explored in scholarly writing.

The impact of Vodou is further evident in the common allusions to Hoodoo-related beliefs and practices in blues and jazz. Those familiar with the blues will recognize the recurring motifs of mojo hands, black cat bones, goofer dust, fixes, and other such conjurations. As Spencer observes: "The blues repertoire, up through at least the early forties, was replete with references to hoodoo, as evidenced in such popular songs as Muddy Waters's "Louisiana Blues," and John Lee Williamson's "Hoodoo, Hoodoo."

Other formulaic lines include: "I believe to my soul, my baby got a black cat bone," "Don't put that thang on me," and the refrain to the famous Muddy Waters's song—with which he often ended his concerts, working the crowd into a pulsating frenzy—"I got my mojo workin'." Finn writes about such bluesmen as Muddy Waters:

> Churchless, he praised God in his songs, and his listeners were reminded of the powers of the *loas*, of the forces the enemy could not understand, of their past glory and the history of their native land. (188)

Spencer further positions these influences in the context of New World African religious ideology, stating that blues represents "...a language expressing African resistance to oppression, and a testimony of the will of the oppressed to maintain African values in the face of forced Christianization to the deity of white magic" (Spencer 16-17).

A number of earlier and more recent studies postulate and document connections between African religions and African American cultural forms (Herskovits 1966; Armstrong 1993; Jahn 1990), further substantiating that African American art has always been saturated with resonances of African and Diasporan spirituality and aesthetics. Theophus H. Smith demonstrates in his recent work that conjure is one of the most critical sets of principles for African American cultural integrity, permeating political, social and religious institutions and movements (1996). Spencer argues that the blues is a New World African syncretic system, employing elements of African cosmology, aesthetics, mythology, performance styles, divination, and herbalism: "For 'blues people' at the periphery of Afro-Christianity, this religion given to them by their European captors was only an outer form in which they could encase their African religious worldview while paying only lip service to orthodox Christianity" (14).

Vodou and analysis of poetry

If we consider that practically all forms of African American music, oral traditions, and religious and ritualistic practices are characterized by syncretisms, it is not such a stretch to suggest that African American poetry, which draws its lifeblood from oral, musical and religious sources, is also syncretic. While the literary tradition of African American poetry is said to begin in 1746 with Lucy Terry's "Bars Fight," in fact, African American poetry began with the work songs, spirituals, field hollers and other oral genres of folklore that evolved on slave plantations in the South. African American poetry began with the moans and cries of displaced and abused Africans. With chants, incantations, and whispers. With the drumbeats they carried in their bodies as they toiled long hours in the merciless sun. With the work rhythms, the dance rhythms, play rhythms, prayer words and rhythms, new sounds that emerged from their mouths in this New World crucible; and New World scents, sounds, textures pressed against their bodies, causing them to flex, bend, resist, defend, and accommodate the new environment. African American poetry began with the subversion of the European tongue, taming it and making it dance to the explosives of African drumbeats and "Pat Juba."

As any poet would verify, poetry is comprised of far more than the words on the page. It encompasses the aesthetic and linguistic sensibilities of the artist, as well as the moral and artistic impulses influencing its creation. As such, poetry, whose impetus is often the search for sense and meaning, cannot arise out of a metaphysical vacuum. An ideological foundation must precede it; otherwise, how can it question? How can it seek? How will it even know what to begin questioning? The speaker must have some sense of self, relative to the universe and society; or else, who is speaking and how can the speech be framed? That sense rests upon metaphysical belief, intuited or prescribed. The tradition of African American poetry, like that of other arts, has always, to some extent, relied upon a syncretic philosophical system, comprised of elements of African religious thought, Christian ideology, and other Western influences.

I posit that New World African religions, and in particular Vodou, operate in several ways within African American poetry. Vodou-related allusions function first on the level of signifiers of that which is most essentially African. As such, they can be viewed as responses to the hegemonic, Christian thrust of Western society, and a defiant assertion of African-derived sensibilities, aesthetics, spirituality, and world view. On this level, such allusions recall the romanticized images of Africa found in poetry of the Harlem Renaissance. However, in the modern tradition, Vodou is not simply a romantic signifier, but a means through which critical interrogations of African philosophy and religious ideals can occur. Ultimately, these allusions are keys to the processes of creating and understanding identity as well as "juju" in the ongoing struggle to maintain personal and cultural integrity in the midst of hostile forces. Consider, for example the following excerpt from Henry Dumas's "Rite":

> Vodu green clinching his waist,
> obi purple ringing his neck,
> Shango, God of the spirits,
> whispering in his ear,

thunderlight stabbing the island
of blood rising from his skull.

Mojo bone in his fist
strikes the sun from his eye.
Iron claw makes his wrist.
He recalls the rites of strength
carved upon his chest.
Black flame, like tongues of glass,
ripples beneath a river of sweat.

Strike the island
Strike the sun
.....

No power can stay the mojo
when the obi is purple
and the vodu is green
and Shango is whispering,
Bathe me in blood.
I am not clean. (5)
(Accents mine)

Here the subject of the poem is the struggle for survival and identity. The allusions to Vodou signal voices and sensibilities of an African heritage and Africanized identity and the speaker is invoking these ancient *loa* in an effort to heal himself, restore his spirit, and regain his strength. The "rite" of which the poem speaks, recalls rituals of warriors and hunters, and the many eruptive and aggressive images in the poem forge associative links between elements of Vodou and the primeval urgency of the black struggle. Note for example, such phrases as "thunderlight stabbing the island," "blood rising from his skull," and "strikes the sun from his eye."

The second function of Vodou in African American poetry is as religious/ aesthetic practice. By this I mean that the practice of Vodou informs the poem's spiritual and aesthetic dimensions. This occurs in a number of ways, the most common of which is when the poet implicitly or explicitly casts him/her self in the role of conjurer. As conjurers, they may invoke the presence of any number of *loa*, including the names of specific African deities; the names or symbols of African American *loa* (blues, jazz, etc.); or ritualized, ceremonial and sacred practices, dancing, for example. They chant and offer prayers to deities. In most cases, the two functions I have mentioned work in concert in poems, rather than being found in isolation.

One of the most defining characteristics of Vodou in the United States is, in fact, the emphasis on conjuration, or the conjurer—the American variation on the Haitian titles of "houngan" or "mambo." The first prominent attention given to the conjurer in African American literature can be found in Charles Chestnutt's *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales*, published in 1899 (although individual tales appeared in the period between 1887-1898). Chestnutt's work illustrates the primacy of the conjurer as a site for the negotiation of power between African and European, or white and black society. The stories, which focus on an ex-slave, Julius, and the tales that he tells to a young white couple who have recently moved to the South, articulate the social influence of conjure, but also reflect America's fascination with the mysticism of the religion and the subtle way in which it begins to infuse the consciousness of white Americans. This tradition is continued in African American fiction, in the centrality of the two conjurers, Mama Day and Ruby, in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, and Madam Toussaint in Ernest Gaines's short story, "A Long Day in November," and in scenes in novels by Arthur Flowers, Toni

Morrison, John Edgar Wideman, Charles Johnson, Charles Dumas, and in stories by Alice Walker, Ann Petry and Toni Cade Bambara.

Conjuring remains a difficult phenomenon to define, largely because it represents spiritual and psychic forces and we are limited by a materialistic, Western discourse. It is clear, however, that conjuring concerns invoking power, channeling energy and arriving at a state of consciousness beyond everyday pragmatic modes in which people find themselves most of the time. Conjuring is concerned with creating sacred time and space, sharing of this sacredness with the community, healing through such means as described above, and the attainment of equilibrium and psychic health. It is a process that creates gateways between different modalities and dimensions of reality, e.g., the psychic, intuitive, cognitive and corporeal; affecting a balance between the past, present and future, and the spiritual, natural, and cosmological realms. Conjuring represents an ancient technology, a psychic internet, whose complexity and significance go generally unrecognized in a material culture.

Beyond references to specific deities or rites, African American artists have embraced the concept of conjuring as a key to how they envision themselves, their roles, their creativity and their relationship to society. Poet Larry Neal writes:

> Essentially, art is relevant when it makes you stronger. That is, the only thing which is fundamental to good art is its ritual quality. And the function of ritual is to reinforce the group's operable myths, ideals, and values. The oldest, most important arts, have always made their practitioners stronger. Here I refer to the Black Arts, ju-ju, voodoo, and the Holy Ghost of the Black Church. The Black Arts are among the earliest examples of mixed media. They combined ritualistic drama, music, the poetry of incantation, and the visual arts. The intent was to communicate with the Spirit...We are Black writers (priests), the bearers of the ancient tribal tradition. (1969: 141)

While Neal's sentiments are not shared by all black artists, many do insist on seeing themselves as conjurers, a phenomenon widespread in visual arts, music and literature. While Betty Saer is renowned for the incorporation of Vodou-inspired elements in her art, the works of hundreds of other artists are similarly influenced. In titling their study of black women's fiction, *Conjuring*, for instance, Marjorie Pryse and Hortense J. Spillers cast women fiction writers in the same mode, suggesting that black writing is generally speaking, a form of conjure. Pryse notes that Alice Walker "associates authorship with magic (1)" and later writes, "If there is magic involved in Walker's perception of herself as 'medium,' it is women's magic, the origins of which are as old as women themselves" (2).

Lines from numerous poems reflect the practices and functions noted above. Lines from a Joe Johnson poem, titled "Cecil Taylor" contain allusions signifying Africanness and read as a chant or incantation; hence insinuating the poet as conjurer: "Conga li bombo gri gri/bombo conga li bombo/burned blood blast down black..." (Feinstein & Komunyakaa 107). Lines from Sterling D. Plumpp's "I Hear the Shuffle of the People's Feet" function similarly (in this case, from the religion of Santeria): "i plant tobacco/i train sugarcane/i yessir masters/i go straight

from sunrises/to death/i chant shango/i sing ogun/i dance obatala/i hum orishas" (Feinstein & Komunyakaa, 168).

Lucille Clifton includes in *Two Headed Woman*, motifs from Christianity and Vodou. The book's title insinuates Clifton's role as a conjurer. One can argue further that the religious motifs in this work represent examples of *syncretism*, in which Christian symbols are reinterpreted in an African-based philosophical context. In the course of Clifton's writing, biblical figures, New World African religious motifs, and an eclectic brand of womanist mysticism syncretize to render a compelling spiritual vision. Clifton writes, in an untitled poem:

> "i was born with twelve fingers
> like my mother and my daughter.
> each of us
> born wearing strange black gloves
> extra baby fingers hanging over the sides
> of our cribs and
> dipping into the milk.
> ... (166)

Hence, the gift is hereditary, passed on through the mother's side of the family, and a symbol for an essential African power upon which identity in the American context is constructed. However, as the poem continues to chronicle, claiming such aspects of one's heritage in America is not without travail, as a tragic impulse found all too often among African Americans is to make themselves over in the image of good Christians and assimilate. This impulse leads to acts of immense cruelty, in the name of racial uplift. Ultimately though, nothing can prevent the passing of this secret knowledge and the manifestations of the power it eventually gives rise to.

> ...
> somebody was afraid we could learn to cast spells
> and our wonders were cut off
> but they didn't understand
> the powerful memory of ghosts. now
> we take what we want
> with invisible fingers (166)

However, such women (read: African centered power, self knowing, and spirituality) are not free to live in open celebration of who they are:

> ...
> and we connect
> my dead mother my live daughter and me
> through our terrible shadowy hands. (166)

In "homage to my hips," Clifton brilliantly locates the power of conjure in the body, reclaiming the fundamental beauty of black women's bodies and an Africanized spirituality in a single stroke:

> ...
> these hips are mighty hips.
> these hips are magic hips.
> i have known them
> to put a spell on a man and
> spin him like a top! (168)

In an untitled poem, she further explores the phenomenon of the conjure woman, as she does in many of her poems. At issue is her struggle to move past Western perceptual modes and values to embrace the ancient powers within herself. In this poem, the speaker's dis-ease with her power is translated through an image of woman conjurer as carnivalized spectacle, an eery distancing of one's self from one's self.

> in this garden
> growing

following strict orders
following the Light
see the sensational
two-headed woman
one face turned outward
one face
swiveling slowly in. (185)

One may note the title and cover art of such collections as Amiri Baraka's *Black Magic: Poetry 1961-1967*, which is adorned with the picture of a white, blond-haired, blue-eyed "Vodou" doll riddled with hatpins. Baraka's collection revolves conceptually around the idea of spiritual/political revolution, identifying the forces that are destructive for black people, destroying them, and rebuilding "what is actually spiritual, what is actually good..." (Introduction). The book is loosely tied together by the notion of the author as conjurer, and the titles of poems such as "Sacred Chant for the Return of Black Spirit and Power," "Ka 'Ba," and "The Spell," as well as the form and content of poems, reflect the extent to which the author draws upon divination, herbalism, liturgy, astrology, etc. in the creative process and conceptualization of the poems. Lines from the widely-anthologized "Ka 'Ba" clearly demonstrate this aesthetic: "We need magic/now we need the spells, to raise up/return, destroy, and create. What will be/ the sacred words" (146)?

The cover of Calvin Hernton's *Medicine Man* shows a drawing of an African American shamanic mask, alluding, along with the book's title, to the idea of a New World African healer. In Hernton's poem, "Medicine Man," the speaker is engaged in a vision quest in which elements of American, African and African American culture, history and religion are scrutinized. The Santeria god, Shango, is given special attention, as the poem opens, "North of dark/North from Shango/in kangaroo jungle of West Lost" (47). References to the mother/ grandmother/goddess, and the traditions of prayer and conjure associated with them, are woven throughout the poem. One passage states: "Oh Grandmother, figurine gris gris Goddess/ Do I/Should I/Can I live so that I may die easily" (48). The poem focuses on the integration of New World African religions and Western influences as a key in the struggle to forging a uniquely, African American identity:

And if I pray
I pray not to God nor Shango
I pray to bellies of deep sea sharks
And pray for us survived west lost
North of dark in chains (49)

As is evident, the poet is critically assessing the viability of the African deity for the difficult process of forging an identity true to the modern African American experience. The excerpt above suggests that a concern with immediate dangers and a reverential engagement with natural forces is more prudent than an effort to invoke the power of western or African deities. The poem does not eschew Africanized religious practice, however, but relocates its locus to the goddess cult of African American culture.

Novelist and poet Ishmael Reed is well known for invoking the persona of conjurer and for the creative ways in which he has integrated this motif in literature. In fact, most of his writings revolve around this theme and he describes the act of writing as conjuring, performing "neo-hoodoo" rites to counterbalance the devastating effects of racism. Simply the

titles of his books give an indication of this perspective. His first book of poems, *Catechism of d Neo-Hoodoo American Church* contains an innovative attack on the powers that threaten the "Neo-Hoodoo Church." In the first poem of the book, "Black Power Poem," he writes: "A spectre is haunting america—the spectre of neo-hoodooism./all the powers of old america have entered into a holy alli/ance to exorcise this specter:/...may the best church win. shake hands now and come/out conjuring" (3). Essentially, Reed uses the symbolism of conjure to signify the ideological and metaphysical heart of African-derived culture that wars with the philosophical cornerstones of Western, capitalistic, Christian society. He articulates that the aesthetic principles guiding African American creativity and culture *are* essentially those of Vodou. His works are classic examples of *syncretic* discourse, as elements of American popular culture are incorporated into the paradigm of neo-hoodoo philosophy.

Reed furthers the argument by suggesting that African American expressive culture in general exemplifies the philosophy of Vodou. A character from *Mumbo Jumbo* states:

> You see the Americans do not know the names of the long and tedious list of deities and rites as we know them. Shorthand is what they know so well. They know this process for they have synthesized the HooDoo of VooDoo. Its blee blop essence; they've isolated the unknown factor which gives the loas their rise. Ragtime. Jazz. Blues. The new thang. That talk you drum from your lips. Your style....So don't ask me how to catch Jes Grew. Ask Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, your poets, your painters, your musicians, ask them how to catch it. (152)

Approaching African American arts from this perspective helps us to better understand and appreciate the connections between jazz poetry, for example, and "jazz religion." Furthermore, it aids us in understanding how the historical role of resistance played by New World African religions becomes a central component of African American art. As the poet Ted Joans has written:

> Jazz is my religion / and it alone do I dig the jazz clubs are my houses of worship and sometimes the concert halls / but some holy places are too commercial (like churches) so I don't dig the sermons there.....Jazz is my religion Jazz is a unique musical religion the sermons spread happiness and joy to be able to dig and swing inside / what a wonderful feeling jazz is/YEAH BOY/!! JAZZ is my religion and dig this: it wasn't for us to choose because they created it for a damn good reason / as a weapon to battle our blues (Feinstein & Komunyakaa, 104)

Joans echoes the sentiments of many jazz converts—artists and otherwise—and allows us to consider jazz poetry as it should be considered: a tradition of sacred poetry concerned with theological praxis. Jazz poetry is comprised of incantations, rituals and ceremonies, and is concerned with conjuring, healing, and creating effect in the corporeal and spiritual worlds. In a poem titled, "Blues Five Spot," Art Lange writes: "A last item a found object/a lost item/a refrain of rain, wordstruck,/ birdlike/to conjure with/borrowings new and 'savage'/delicate forms in blue green orangish-yellow white" (Feinstein & Komunyakaa, 123).

The importance of this perspective cannot be overemphasized, for it positions jazz as a matrix for a complex of aesthetics, rituals, theological orientations, and performative practices comparable to other New World African religions and informed, in particular, by Vodou. Within this system, certain figures are given the status of ancestral *loa*, for instance, Charlie "Bird" Parker, Miles Davis, and John "Trane" Coltrane. These are all consummate conjurers who have passed on to the other side and whose essences can be invoked to empower jazz worshippers, inspire artists, and sacralize social and personal activities. Most such *loa* are interestingly, entertainers of some kind, and poet Quincy Troupe has depicted figures in jazz and sports as conjurers. In the poem, "Four and More," he describes Miles Davis as a "juju hoodooman conjuring illuminating darkness" (1996: 222), and writes in another poem, "Snake Back Solo": with the music up high/boogalooin bass down way low/up & under eye come slidin on in mojoin/on in spacin on in on a riff/full of rain/riffin on in full of rain & pain/ spacin on in on a sound like coltrane" (223). In a poem to the former Los Angeles Laker's star guard, Magic Johnson, the following lines resonate:

> so put the ball on the floor again "magic"/juke & dazzle, shake & bake down the lane/take the sucker to the hoop, "magic" johnson/recreate reverse hoodoo gems off the spin/deal alley-oop dunkathon magician passes/ now, double pump, scissor, vamp through space. (41)

The impact of Vodou can also be seen in the prominence of movement, music and dance in African American poetry. As I have noted, music and dance as means through which to summon the *loas* or deities and to effect healing is a critical component of not only Vodou, but many other New World African religions. One can see this theological influence not only in the many references to these activities within poems, but in textural and prosodic features. Countless poets have testified to the importance of music to their creative process, emphasizing it as a device for opening channels to the beyond, and this testimony becomes a part of the text and subtext of poems. Komunyakaa describes, for instance, how his poem "You and I Are Disappearing," from *Dein Ca Diu* is based on Thelonious Monk's music. "If you listen to Monk, you hear all of his repetition constantly, and I tried to capture that repetition, that 'other role'..." (660). "You and I Are Disappearing" revolves around the image of a burning girl that haunts the speaker, a soldier in Vietnam. Lines of the poem include: "She burns like oil on water./She burns like a cattail torch/dipped in gasoline./She glows like the fat tip/of a banker's cigar" (1988: 17). Not only does the music of Monk inspire tonal and structural elements of the poem, but Komunyakaa also speaks about the space of discovery that the jazz ethos opens up for the poet. Jazz religion then becomes a path of discovery; a theological framework facilitating the spirit of exploration—creativity itself, and the mode for interpreting what is found on the journey. The poet effectively surrenders to the guidance of the *loa*, who shapes the tenor of the poem.

Hence, such poems embody a philosophical orientation with roots in New World African religion. They encompass not only the sacredness of music, but of dance, which is sometimes

alluded to in very obvious ways.This orientation is central, for instance, to Ishmael Reed's "I am a cowboy in the boat of Ra," in which a number of references signal different cultural and historical relationships between African and European aesthetics. The line, "I bedded/down with Isis, Lady of the Boogaloo..." (4) suggests the Egyptian origins of African American dance styles. Isis becomes the *loa* of black dance, which the speaker has surrendered to in much the same way that men surrender to Erzulie Frieda, creating at times a separate bedroom in the house devoted to sleeping with this *loa*. Later, in a stanza built on the African American toasting tradition, the speaker includes in a list of other boasts: "I do/the dirty boogie with scorpions" (5), invoking sacred dance as testimony to the speaker's virility and power. Implicit in the lines is the suggestion that the speaker is an Africanized, Vodou-ized person of power.

Although music and dance are frequently alluded to in African American poetry, even more frequently they are woven into the fabric of poetic structure, texture and tone. This practice would be comparable to making a piece of clothing out of sacred kente cloth. It is essential, though, that we recognize the cloth when we come across it. I have argued that jazz can be viewed as a theological system, and the same argument applies to blues and other major musical genres. On each occasion in which blues are referenced, for instance, an entire theological framework is invoked; in this case, the Blues *loa*, or the lesser *loa* within the pantheon; for example, Bessie Smith, B.B. King, or Ma Rainey. Such invocations are indicants of healing practices. One could say that the poet invokes certain *loa*, and with these supplications come a host of cultural rituals and aesthetic flavors. With blues comes a certain bitter/sweet exuberance for life, the love of music, and of dance; a certain sassiness, pride and integrity. As with other Vodou-inspired religions, there is also an implicit understanding that one gains one power through surrender to *loa* and inducements of trance states. But an important point to remember when thinking about New World African religions is that they have always served political as well as "spiritual" functions and Blues is no exception. Along with Blues comes a tradition of subversion and resistance, a thirst for liberation and autonomy, and even a practice of guerilla tactics. Surrender to *loa* and trance states are a part of healing and fortification of spirit necessary to survive.

Invocations of blues *loa* find their way into African American poetry in a variety of ways. Besides the practice of naming and calling upon specific *loa*, blues music and lyrical influences are often alluded to or incorporated into poems. Even when the structure of a blues verse is not overtly introduced into a poem, the ambience of blues often permeates African American poetry, and this flavor is accompanied by certain existential orientations. These include, for example, disposition of the blues *loas*, who maintain that life should be lived intensely and celebrated, even in the face of the most harsh circumstances; that good food, good wine, good music, family, community, rhythm and dance are still life's most cherished gifts. As T-Bone Walker sings: "You can't take it with you/that's one thing for sure/'Cause ain't nothing wrong with you, baby/That a little T-Bone shuffle can't cure" (1970). Homage to the disposition of the Blues *loa* is illustrated by Clifton in the

following lines:

> "my daddy has paid the rent/and the insurance man is gone/...and they is good times/good times/good times/my mama has made bread/and grampaw has come/and everybody is drunk/and dancing in the kitchen/and singing in the kitchen/oh these is good times/good times/...oh children think about the/good times" (24).

Al Young's collection, *Dancing,* revolves around the primacy of dance as a spiritual and philosophical modality for engaging contemporary, postmodern life as an African American man. Most of the poem titles relate to dance and cover a wide spectrum of topics, and many of the poems invoke jazz and blues *loas*. Some of the titles include, for example, "A Dance for Militant Dilettantes," "Dancing Day to Day," "A Dance for Li Po," "Dancing Together," "Dancing in the Street," "Dance of the Infidels (in memory of Bud Powell)," and "The John Coltrane Dance." The book is structured so that the reader is taken on a journey through dance; not simply invited, but compelled to join Young in his ecstatic dance of celebration and surrender. This is nowhere more evident than in his "A Dance for Ma Rainey," a passionate prayer to the renown blues *loa*, in which the speaker surrenders to the Rainey spirit in bitter sweet adoration; a move that recalls supplicants possessed by *loas* during Vodou ceremonies.

> I'm going to be just like you, Ma
> Rainey this monday morning
> ....
> I'm going to hover in the corners
> of the world, Ma
> & sing from the bottom of hell
> up to the tops of high heaven
> .... (14)

But just as other elements of Hoodoo are critically interrogated in black poetry, so too are components of Blues theology. In fact, it is a common practice for contemporary women poets to question and critique patriarchal stances embedded within the system.

Rita Dove's work can be considered, among other things, an exploration of how an aesthetic/religious orientation, influenced by social, historical and racial factors, impacts on gender issues. It becomes highly significant, then, in ways that have not yet been noted, that Dove's *Thomas and Beulah* revolves so much around allusions to music, food and dance (symbols of the mandolin and canary, for instance). The blues *loa* and the motif of magical, conjure woman are fiercely critiqued in this collection. Thomas, the main character of the first half of the book, is identified with his mandolin and the sweet seductive music he can play. However, his life is not ultimately redeemed through his music and the blues *loa*. Instead, Dove's suggestion is the Blues theology and praxis are sadly inadequate for addressing the concerns of black people in an increasingly industrialized and urbanized society. In particular, it does not facilitate the kind of sensitivity and insight that would lead to fulfilling relationships between romantic or marital partners; to the contrary, its male orientation works against such quality of relationships. Few stones are left unturned in this critique, and poems comment on such issues as ritualized costuming and dress, and dance and food rituals. Nor does Blues theology offer Beulah, the focus of the second half of the book , any more fulfillment than it does

Thomas. The poem, "Magic," for example, depicts a young woman's continued efforts to summon her magical powers, and her disappointing failures. The failure is not simply an inability to conjure, but an inability to fully imagine her powers. Rather than offering the reader characters who have maintained some positive and magical connection with their Africanness, Dove's characters are more reflective of a post modern sense of displacement; they struggle in a displaced limbo between the older black communities and theologies and the disorienting realities of industrialization and integration, between conflicting desires for "home" and fantasies of traveling abroad and fitting into mainstream society. The poem, "The Charm," captures some of this tension, as Thomas is at mealtime thinking about his close friend, Lem, who died many years ago.

....
Sunday mornings
fried fish and hominy steaming
from the plates like an oracle.
The canary sang more furious
than ever, but he heard
the whisper: *I ain't dead.*
I just gave you my life. (34)

Finally, elements of music, dance, and entering trance are embedded in the texture and form of African American poetry. Beginning with the Black Arts Movement, there has been an emphasis on writing poetry that captures the dynamic tonal and textural aesthetics of African American culture. This is adamantly expressed in Baraka's now-famous "Black Art": "Poems are bullshit unless they are/teeth or trees or lemons piled/on a step.../Fuck poems/and they are useful, wd they shoot/come at you.../Poems that shoot/guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys..." (116). One finds find in this tradition an emphasis on language that is in motion, that lifts off the page, that leaves the reader's *body* as well as their mind stimulated, pulsating, tingling. Much of this emphasis evolved out of the Black Arts Movement, which placed such a premium on performed poetry that utilized the rhythms of black musical and oral traditions and dialect of the street. Consider the rhythmic innovations of Sonia Sanchez or Jayne Cortez's poetry, which create even for the eye, before reading, a vibrant and dynamic effect. Or the repetitive chants of Madhubiti's poems, which have much the same effect on the reader as does music that *makes* you tap your feet. These elements are symbolic invocations of New World *loa*, on the one hand; but, they are also on a very literal level function to bring audiences more into their bodies and to induce moments of surrender and entranced exultation. We can compare them to the sermons and song performances in the black Baptist church.

Conclusion

As I have argued throughout this paper, if one is to seriously engage African American poetry[6] one must consider it within the context of New World African religion, which influences its prosodic features, content, conceptual framework and performance styles, and voices and personas. While we certainly cannot ignore elements of European poetics, we must look further than these to fully appreciate the craft and meanings in African American poetry. We must recognize that Vodou-related components lie at the center of the most critical issues

addressed in this poetic tradition, e.g., identity, relationship to community and society, healing and empowerment, and even the process of creativity itself. A knowledge base that includes New World African religions then becomes imperative. This suggestion implies the need for different theoretical perspectives from those currently available, and opens up the study of this poetic tradition to completely new kinds of inquiries.

While my discussion suggests the many ways in which Vodou influences African American poetry, the considerable task of in-depth analysis of particular poems and poets from this vantage point remains. By way of example, Audre Lorde's poem, "Call," is an invocation to the "Holy ghost woman," "Rainbow Serpent" deity Aido Hwedo, the wife of the Vodou god Damballa. Lorde writes, "Holy ghost woman/stolen out of your name/Rainbow Serpent/whose faces have been forgotten/ Mother loosen my tongue or adorn me/ with a lighter burden/Aido Hwedo is coming" (1986: 73). The line, "Aido Hwedo is coming" becomes a refrain, a chant, ending each of the stanzas, and repeated three times to end the poem. Obviously, an explication of the poem requires a familiarity with the deities Aido Hwedo, Damballa, and Mawu and an understanding of the Vodou pantheon and the relationship between specific *loas*. A scholar examining this poem would also need to explore the connections between these African-derived symbols and the African American *loa*, "The Holy Ghost"; as well as the role of women relative to the *loas* and the rituals surrounding them. Finally, a critique of the poem would demand some insight into the primacy of the chant, incantation and prayer as linguistic and performance modalities in Diasporan cultures, as well as African liturgy and the centrality of spirit possession as a healing practice and device for subversion, resistance and revolt —significantly different methodological tools than many poetry critics are currently equipped with. In short, the analytical model I propose is not an easily acquired one; however, critics will be unable to do justice to much African American poetry without such a radically different theoretical perspective and knowledge base.

University of Missouri-Columbia

Notes

[1]A few scholars have noted connections between African cultures and African American poetry; for example, the similarities between African griots and New World poets (Redmond 1976). These connections, however, are always very general.

[2]One might note the recent media interest in Vodou during the weeks leading up to the Super Bowl, hosted by New Orleans. There were frequent newspaper articles, some of which brought notoriety to Vodou priestesses in New Orleans who commented on a variety of topics, such as who would win the game. There are also now several Vodou communities that have web sites and can be reached through the internet.

[3]I am not arguing here that artists or others are active practitioners or participants in any kind of formal Vodou ceremonies or rituals. Indeed, many would be insulted by the suggestion that their practices or beliefs are related to Vodou, e.g., many members of the Black Church. My contention is rather, that the aesthetic principles that underlie African American art and other cultural forms are Vodou-related, although artists or others may not be conscious of this influence.

[4]Obviously, as Bourguignon notes in her study of possession (1991), there are other religions that also have these features. I have given a generalized description here for lack of sufficient time to develop a more detailed discussion.

[5]I have visited such shops while conducting fieldwork in cities such as Los Angeles, Oakland and Philadelphia.

[6]I am arguing for a tradition, but not that every African American poet chooses to rely upon this tradition, or that any poet relies exclusively upon it.

Works Cited

Barnes, Sandra T. ed. *Africa's Ogun: Old World and New*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997 [1989].

Baraka, Imamu Amiri, (LeRoi Jones). *Black Magic: Poetry 1961-1967*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969.

Bell, Bernard. *The Folk Roots of Contemporary Afro-American Poetry*. Detroit: Broadside Press, 1974.

Bourguignon, Erika. *Possession*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc., 1991 [1976].

Chestnutt, Charles W. *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993 [1899].

Clifton, Lucille. *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969-1980*. New York: BOA Editions, Ltd., 1987.

Cosentino, Donald J. *The Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou*. Los Angeles, CA.: UCLA. Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995.

Deren, Maya. *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. New York: McPherson and Company, 1991 [1953].

Dove, Rita. *Thomas and Beulah*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon University Press, 1986.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. In *Three Negro Classics*, New York: Avon Publishers, 1965 [1903].

Dumas, Henry. *Play Ebony Play Ivory*. New York: Random House, 1974.

Feinstein, Sascha and Yusef Komunyakaa, eds. *The Jazz Poetry Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Finn, Julio. *The Bluesman: The Musical Heritage of Black Men and Women in the Americas*. London: Quartet, 1986.

Gaines, Ernest. "A Long Day in November." In *Bloodline*, New York: Bantom Books, 1970: 3-63.

Henderson, Stephen. *Understanding the New Black Poetry: Black Speech and Black Music as Poetic References*. New York: William Morrow, 1972.

Herskovits, Melville. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. New York: Harper, 1958.

———. *The New World Negro*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966.

Hernton, Calvin. *Medicine Man*. New York: Reed, Cannon & Johnson, 1976.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. New York: Harper & Row, 1990 [1938].

———. *Mules and Men*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990 [1935].

Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo Conjuration -Witchcraft- Rootwork*. vs. 1-8. Hannibal: Western Publishing Inc., 1970.

Jahn, Janheinz. *Muntu: African Culture and the Western World*. New York: Grove Press, 1990 [1961].

Jones, Patricia Spears. *The Weather That Kills*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1995.

Komunyakaa, Yusef. *Dein Cai Dau*. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1988.

Komunyakaa, Yusef, and William Matthews. "Jazz and Poetry: A Conversation," moderated by Robert Kelly. *The Georgia Review* 46:4 (Winter 1992), 645-661.

Lorde, Audre. *The Marvelous Arithmetics of Distance: Poems 1987-1992*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993.

———. *Our Dead Behind Us*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986.

McCarthy Brown, Karen. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Naylor, Gloria. *Mama Day*. New York: Random House, 1988.

Neal, Larry. From "Statements on Poetics," in *The New Black Poetry*, ed. Clarence Major, pp. 141. New York: International Publishers, 1969.

Olmos, Fernández Margarite, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, eds. *Sacred Possessions: Vodou, Santería, Obeah, and the Caribbean*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Raboteau, Albert. *Slave Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Redmond, Eugene. *Drumvoices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry*. New York: Anchor, 1976.

Reed, Ishmael. *catechism of d neoamerican hoodoo church*. London: Paul Breman Ltd., 1971 [1968].

———. *Mumbo Jumbo*. New York: Bantom Books, 1972.

Smith, Theophus H. *Conjuring Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Spencer, Jon Michael. *Blues and Evil*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993.

Troupe, Quincy. *Avalanche*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1996.

Young, Al. *Dancing*. New York: Corinth Books, 1969.

Walker, T-Bone. "T-Bone Shuffle." (ST-A-69 1797 PR) Atlantic SD-8256, 1970.

Entrevista a Daisy Rubiera Castillo autora de *Reyita, sencillamente*

por Hossiri Godo-Solo

Hossiri Godo-Solo: ¿Me puedes hablar del trabajo en el centro cultural Fernando Ortiz y la cultura africana y afrocubana?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Estuve un tiempo trabajando como especialista de cultura de la dirección provincial de cultura (Santiago de Cuba). Allí estudiamos todo lo relacionado con la cultura popular de esta provincia, que era un trabajo que estaba encaminado al área de la cultura popular del país. Estando en estas funciones se me comunica que había una intención del compañero que atendía en aquel tiempo lo que era la problemática de África, desde el comité central del partido comunista de Cuba, de hacer en Santiago de Cuba, una institución que fuera algo parecida a la Casa de África de La Habana.

Con la dirección de mi organismo me dieron esta tarea a finales del 1987. Desde entonces hasta primera parte de 1989 me di a la tarea de hacer un proyecto encaminado a fundar una institución que independientemente tuviera que ver con las raíces africanas, pero de una manera particular y propia a la región donde se iba a enclavar. En esta dirección elaboré un proyecto encaminado a hacer de esta institución un centro que reflejara no solamente la presencia de la cultura africana en la cultura cubana sino que reflejara la presencia de la cultura africana a través de los estudiantes africanos que había en Santiago de Cuba estudiando. Entonces concebí este centro con tres objetivos: un objetivo investigativo encaminado a estudiar profundamente la presencia de la cultura africana en la cultura cubana en general y en la de Oriente, en Santiago de Cuba en particular.

El otro objetivo era estudiar la influencia de la obra de Fernando Ortiz en toda la problemática cultural santiaguera y de allí el nombre del centro Fernando Ortiz. El tercer objetivo era brindar desde esta institución un apoyo a estos estudiantes africanos como si esta institución fuera su propia casa. Aquello nos permitió organizar y participar en celebraciones culturales organizadas por asociaciones de estudiantes africanos de los diferentes países con la ayuda del cuerpo diplomático y el club de internacionalistas, que ya no existe. Una de las actividades que teníamos era una peña los fines de semana presidida por una actriz, la directora del cabildo teatral de Santiago, se llama Fátima Paterson. En esta peña se narraban cuentos africanos que habíamos recopilado de las versiones de los africanos y narrábamos cuentos negros de Cuba y el pueblo santiaguero acudía con frecuencia a estas peñas.

Dirigí esta institución durante cinco años. En el año 1992 hicimos la primera conferencia científica sobre cultura africana y afro-latinoamericana. El segundo taller, quisimos ampliar la temática e incluir a Rómulo Lachatañere, santiaguero, de paso. Para mí era importante, pues lo veía como un compromiso que tenía con mis antepasados, con la historia.

Hosssiri Godo-Solo: Hablas con nostalgia de la peña y de los cuentos africanos y afrocubanos que se narraban en esta peña. ¿Sabía tu madre algunos de estos cuentos? ¿Sabía ella narrar?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Yo pienso que mi mamá era una narradora por excelencia, era una cuentera. Porque yo recuerdo de niña nos hacía muchos cuentos y muchas historias. En aquel momento no podía relacionarlo con nada que tuviera que ver con el continente africano. Pero cuando yo comencé a hacer las investigaciones del jugo de literatura oral para el acta de la cultura popular tradición de Santiago de

Cuba, entonces me di cuenta que las historias que me hacía sí tenían que ver con África. En los encuentros que teníamos entre los trabajadores del centro y los miembros del club de internacionalistas, nos dimos cuenta que algunos cuentos que contaban eran diferentes versiones de los que conocíamos aquí en Cuba y de los que contaba mi mamá. Así pienso que mi mamá sí era una narradora y que tenía guardado todo lo que le enseñó su abuela Tatica. Yo lamenté mucho no haber tenido esta intención mucho más temprano para recoger esta información de viejos y viejas negras que conocí en Santiago. Ésos pudieran haber brindado un testimonio bastante rico de sus vivencias y de la presencia de esta cultura en su vida.

Hossiri Godo-Solo: ¿Cómo expresaba o vivía tu madre el legado africano que le venía de su abuela?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Yo pienso que no se puede perder de vista el miedo al negro que siempre ha habido en este país históricamente, desde que Carlos Manuel de Céspedes llamó a los africanos hermanos y les dijo que la patria necesita de todos sus hijos. Esto era al principio de la guerra del 68. A partir de este momento a los criollos blancos les entró un temor bastante grande. Eso quedó demostrado cuando la Guerra Chiquita, pues a los negros se les quita el mando de la guerra--a Antonio Maceo se le quita el mando y se le da a Calixto García. Entonces los negros y las negras tuvieron que vivir bajo la influencia de la cultura dominante, lo negro era marginado entonces; durante mucho tiempo toda la cultura negra estuvo guardada, tapada.

Le voy a hacer una anécdota para que vea: mi mamá, de joven, era una gente con una religiosidad muy grande, entraba en un trance y hablaba dormida pero hablaba en lengua y para nosotros lo que hablaba era una jerigonza,pues no sabíamos. Más adelante supe que era una de las tías africanas que murió y que era ahora su espíritu protector. Pero mi mamá dormida hablaba en lengua y mi papá se aterrorizaba. Él era incrédulo, saltaba de la cama y decía, aquello no tiene nombre, y que su mujer con esta cosa de los negros. Con el tiempo mi mamá dejó de recibir la influencia de su espíritu protector; y nunca más se presentó. Unos meses antes de morir, mi madre estuvo aquí en La Habana. La llevé a hacer una visita a una señora santiaguera que era religiosa y ella le dijo que su espíritu protector se había alejado porque ella no lo atendía. Así yo me puse a pensar que hasta que punto tenía presente esta cultura que aprendió de su abuela, y cómo podía hablar en esta lengua. Entonces deduje que lo tenía guardado para sí, tapado, como lo hicieron otras personas de su edad, quizás para no ser discriminados o marginados. Si hubiesen sido escritores o poetas podía haberlo manifestado.

Hossiri Godo-Solo: ¿Cómo relaciona su obra con la novela testimonio, el testimonio, o la novela testimonial?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Yo no soy escritora ni poeta, soy historiadora, por lo tanto mi novela no la relaciono con todo esto. Mi trabajo es una historia de vida donde yo quise dar voz a una mujer negra cubana, la historia real y la oralidad de mi mamá me dieron esta posibilidad. Yo no me considero una escritora. Era necesario dar voz a Reyita, porque hoy algunos de los valores nuestros se están perdiendo y hay un resurgimiento de esta problemática racial. Era el momento oportuno para hacer hablar a esta mujer, porque el discurso de la mujer es totalmente

diferente. Es la que ha transmitido nuestros valores, las costumbres y todos los conocimientos que la mujer y sobre todo la mujer negra almacenaba.

Mi libro es entonces una historia de vida con un concepto amplio de la problemática genérica, para dar a conocer a través de la historia de mi madre la vida de todas las mujeres negras cubanas y de muchas blancas también, porque las blancas pobres fueron también discriminadas bastante desde el punto de vista racial y clasista. Y mi mamá, a pesar de todo esto, la primera cosa que sintió era respeto hacía todas estas personas que describe en el libro y que todos desdeñaban: las prostitutas y los homosexuales. Ella me decía que siempre había una forma de ganarse la vida, y que cada uno tenía el derecho de hacer de su vida lo que quisiera, así como la preferencia sexual. Mi mamá sentía que como madre tenía cierta responsabilidad por personas que en aquellos momentos eran tan malmiradas que sus familias las sacaban del árbol genealógico. Eran mujeres solas, deprimidas, y ella le brindó el cariño y el apoyo maternal que ellas necesitaron.

Ahora, en estos momentos, unos de los personajes del libro se fueron para los Estados Unidos hace un tiempo, y ha llorado leyendo el libro y ha dicho que no le hubiera importado que dijéramos su verdadera identidad. Es una persona que quiero mucho porque convivieron con nosotros como si fuéramos familiares. Me hubiera gustado encontrarme con ella porque la quise y ella a mí también. Nosotros nunca tuvimos estos prejuicios. Mi mejor amigo, de mi primer año de universidad, fue homosexual, se fue para el norte y a pesar de esto con él mantuve una correspondencia hasta que se murió. Y eso fue la influencia de mi mamá que nos enseñó mucho eso, que lo más importante era el ejercicio de la humanidad.

Hossiri Godo-Solo: ¿Cómo se escribe *Reyita*?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: No se hizo con magnetófono a modo de la investigación sociológica, no, se hizo de otra manera sencillamente por la relación madre e hija. No hubo cuestionario preelaborado, fue una coincidencia, fue una conversación íntima, fue mi mamá y yo acostadas por la noche con la grabadora puesta, pero como si no existiera, y ella contándome sus secretos, hablándome de esas cosas que ella guardó de sus anhelos, aspiraciones, deseos, de todo lo que quiso ser y no pudo. Eso fue el procedimiento utilizado, era una conspiración entre ella y yo sola, casi siempre de noche conversando sobre estas cosas, ni siquiera con el resto de las hermanas y de los hermanos.

En una primera etapa conservamos mero confidencial porque yo no estaba pertrechada todavía del concepto de género. Lo primero que hice fue una biografía —muy lineal, desde el día que nació hasta el día que murió—cuyo hilo conductor era la discriminación racial, que es algo que me interesaba destacar con esto. Esa etapa se hizo en un año de trabajo y, Reyita que era diabética sufrió mucho, pues se ponía mala con frecuencia. Tuve que consultar con el endocrino para eso, tuve también que hablar con una socióloga que me aconsejó que usara mucha paciencia y que no la forzara. Entonces seguí los consejos de la socióloga y me tomó un año para hacer la biografía de Reyita. Después estos cobraron otro sentido, cuando dos años o un año después decidí retar con todos estos conocimientos y así el libro abrió otra puerta. Aparece Reyita la mujer negra, con su subjetividad, su conciencia de ser

humano. Eso es lo que me permitió lograr un conocimiento; entonces allí sí mis conversaciones eran confidenciales, porque yo le hacía otros tipos de preguntas. Sobre todo quería comparar su vida y sus pensamientos con los de su madre y de sus abuelas. Ella tuvo una abuela que influyó mucho en ella, es la abuela materna Mamacita, una mujer decidida. Y el resultado de todo eso es el libro, que pienso que fue muy necesario y se dio en el momento oportuno

Hossiri Godo-Solo: ¿Estás presente en la obra como narradora?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Yo lo que hice es ordenar—tengo toda la grabación —en cuatro capítulos: la Reyita niña, joven, la Reyita mujer, y el último, que está destinado a su autonomía. Claro, quizás esté yo allí, porque soy parte de la historia que además averigüé con conversaciones y entrevistas con mis hermanos. Yo me fui a los lugares donde vivió, y entrevisté a personas y a testigos. Yo me fui al encuentro con la familia blanca--que ninguno conocíamos, para averiguar lo que decía Reyita; fui a averiguar hechos históricos de la época. Es posible que haya de mi influencia en el testimonio en el libro, pero lo más importante es que me queda la satisfacción de haber grabado a Reyita. ¡Qué lástima que no pueda enseñarte el video de Reyita hablando, la misma Reyita del libro, y no es como dicen algunos críticos: que lo mejor que hice fue no coger la voz de Reyita como si hablara bozal, o algo así. No, era su voz y esto se puede apreciar en el mismo video. Entonces, cuando leí como una lectora más, me sentí como una tercera voz, es que no podía ser diferente; soy parte de la trama.

Hossiri Godo-Solo: ¿Por qué piensan algunos críticos o lectores que no recogiste la voz o lenguaje 'bozal', la forma de hablar de Reyita?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Hay muchos que no pueden pensar que una mujer negra de noventa años podía tener una dicción como la que tenía Reyita, eso es un prejuicio. Sin embargo mi madre como autodidacta leía mucho, se leía libros sobre las historia de los negros en Cuba, y además a veces manifestaba cierto ganas de encontrase con algunos de los autores para darles su opinión de lo que habían escrito.

Hossiri Godo-Solo: En el libro mencionas la presencia de la mujer con las tropas mambises y sin embargo hay poco escrito sobre su participación o sobre el papel desempeñado por la mujer en la guerra de independencia.

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Hace poco comentábamos lo difícil que es encontrar materiales sobre este tema. Hay una gran necesidad de estudiar las historias y el papel de todas estas negras africanas que vinieron de esclavas a Cuba, y que tuvieron un papel predominante en las guerras y en la manigua. No hay documentos, quizás porque nuestras historias se hacían a partir de la transmisión y porque están basadas en la transmisión oral. A pesar de esto hubo dos esclavas Carlota y Fermina, que participaron en el alzamiento del Triunvirato, y por eso Carlota fue el nombre que le pusieron a la operación de Angola, pero le debían haber puesto Fermina en vez de Carlota porque Carlota fue capitana de Fermina.

Hossiri Godo-Solo: ¿Por qué empiezan los capítulos con versos de Georgina Herrera?

Daisy Rubiera Castillo: Hace tres o cuatro años que la conocí, y me impresionó mucho porque sentí cierta identificación con ella, y porque su poesía

ahora se interesa por la problemática de la mujer de descendencia africana. Es muy interesante y un poco atrevida, porque emplaza muchas veces a los hombres, pero es muy poco difundida.

La Habana, Cuba
3 de octubre de 1999

Una conversación con Juan Tomás Ávila

por Marvin Lewis

Marvin Lewis: Se dice que Guinea Ecuatorial no es una nación, a causa de las diferencias étnicas. ¿Qué opina?

Juan Tomás Ávila Cuando se piensa y se pregunta así es porque se cree que las naciones desarrolladas, las naciones que sí son una "nación" no tienen minorías o mayorías étnicas, o sea, que la etnia es un modo de agruparse exclusivo de África. No es así. Se cree que el atraso de África es por la balcanización derivada del hecho étnico. Diferencias étnicas siempre habrán, derivado de las diferentes culturas de las distintas etnias. Lo que ocurre es que la gestión del Estado no puede estar en manos de un solo grupo étnico ni este grupo debe intentar imponer sus métodos a los demás. Sea así o no en Guinea, lo que es innegable es que las leyes que están escritas aquí, leyes cuya obediencia crearían armonía entre las etnias, no se cumplen, y un grupo étnico tiene más posiblidades de desobedecerlas sin miedo a que alguien le pida cuentas. Las leyes no son étnicas, ni siquiera de la etnia mayoritaria; son de derecho común universal, por lo que su cumplimiento o no, no puede achacarse al problema étnico. Lo que hace que no seamos nación es la impunidad. Dudo, además, que hubiera más paz en un país con un solo grupo étnico, cuando la impunidad es de curso legal. La capacidad del hombre para crear grupos pequeños es infinita. Siempre habrá aventajados y aprovechados, sean todos de la misma madre.

Marvin Lewis: Como editor de *El Patio*, ¿cuál es su desafío más difícil?

Juan Tomás Ávila: La revista *El Patio* debe crecer y poder mantenerse con la aportación de sus colaboradores. Hemos conseguido que suscite la suficiente atención para que la tomen en serio, al menos en círculos reducidos. También hemos conseguido apartarla de la tentación de servir de medio de comunicación para difundir las actividades de los que mandan, sean de donde sean. La mayoría de las revistas africanas no consiguen alejarse de las corrientes gubernamentales y constituirse en foco de difusión de sus actividades. No somos tampoco una revista de oposición política. Si estos dos pilares se mantienen, independencia e interés para contentar mínimamente a los que quisieran publicar en ella, la revista sobrevivirá. Un vicio en el que podemos caer es llenar nuestra revista con artículos "fusilados" de otros medios o de internet. Estos son tres pilares que debería tener en cuenta los que en un futuro se hagan cargo de ella.

Marvin Lewis: ¿Cuál es el futuro del Centro Cultural Hispano Guineano en Malabo? ¿Qué papel ha tenido en el desarrollo de la literatura guineana.

Juan Tomás Ávila: Con la construcción, en fase avanzada, del Centro Cultural Español de Malabo, podemos decir que hay esperanzas en una continuidad de actividades. Por otra parte, el Centro Cultural es la única institución con sede en Guinea con interés por la literatura de este país y la única que ha hecho algo por ella. Pero una institución no es nada sin personas que estén interesadas por ciertos temas. En esto podemos dudar: puede haber dónde reunirse, pero que no haya nadie que lo quiera hacer.

Marvin Lewis: Como el escritor guineano más importante que reside en África, cuáles son sus responsabilidades con la próxima generación.

Juan Tomás Ávila: Yo soy de la próxima generación. Mi cometido es mantener el fuego para que los que nazcan ahora sepan que hemos intentado algo y

que ellos lo deben enriquecer. En la literatura pesa mucho el pasado. Si dentro de diez años no hay ninguna huella sobre lo que se hace, la próxima generación encontrará más difícultades para saber sobre novelas geniales e importantes como *Ekomo* o *Los poderes de la tempestad*. Si leen algo mío, sé que dirán que no soy el primero, por lo que debe haber algo más. Así me constituyo en el nexo entre la generación perdida, la de Donato, y la nueva que está por venir.

Marvin Lewis: ¿Cuál es la importancia de la literatura en la construcción de una identidad nacional?

Juan Tomás Ávila: La literatura es algo de minorías, por lo que no se le puede exigir algo tan serio como la construcción de la identidad nacional. Pero como en África, y en Guinea, está muy acentuado lo étnico, una literatura producida en una lengua común, como el español, puede hacer que todos se identifiquen con una fuente de atención y se arrinconen los complejos o susceptibilidades étnicas. Esto es un trabajo de maestros y profesores de universidad. Se hará si se tiene interés en aglutinar a la gente en torno a hechos comunes. Sin embargo, sé que la literatura no basta para la construcción de la identidad nacional, pues las limitaciones para acceder a ella son muchas en Guinea.

Marvin Lewis: ¿Qué significa Hispanidad?

Juan Tomás Ávila: Ahora todos los analistas de todas las disciplinas científicas modernas creen que la próxima potencia será China. No lo dudan. Pero lo que muchos no saben es que este potencial descansa en una de las armas más poderosas, la lengua. Quizá no serían tanto si muchos no hablasen una misma. La hispanidad es un concepto político, sin entidad real, y uno lingüístico social, con grandes potencialidades. Cuando ciertos sectores reaccionarios de los Estados Unidos propugnan el uso único del inglés es porque saben lo que significa que tantos millones de habitantes puedan entenderse en español. Por eso, es paradójico que naciones con algo tan poderoso pueden estar continuamente malavenidos. Si se cree que la inmensa diversidad étnica de África dificulta su desarrollo, la generalidad del español para América debería ser un bien preciado. Eso es lo que entiendo por hispanidad.

Marvin Lewis: ¿Cuál es la contribución más importante de Guinea Ecuatorial al mundo?

Juan Tomás Ávila: La misma que cualquier nación aporta. La cuestión debería empezar con el catálogo de lo que la humanidad cree que es importante. Hecho este inventario, se vería que cada nación, pequeño o grande, ha contribuido en el conocimiento del ser humano. No olvidemos, además, que Guinea Ecuatorial es un país de África, continente cuya contribución al conjunto de los logros de la historia del mundo es inapelable.

Marvin Lewis: Qué papel tienen las compañías multinacionales en el desarrollo de Guinea?

Juan Tomás Ávila: Se supone que las multinacionales no son organizaciones de ayuda al desarrollo de los países pobres. Si no, no serían multinacionales. Cada país debería saber cómo administrar sus recursos y trabajar para obtener los contratos más ventajosos en la explotación de los mismos. Si eso se consigue, no se esperaría de la buena fe de las multinacionales. Entonces, si en el caso de Guinea se espera de la acción de las multinacionales es porque se da por hecho la incapacidad y desidia de la clase

gobernante. Y es que el problema está ahí: no estamos preparados para administrar nuestros recursos. Entonces surge la necesidad de pedir una resolución del contrato hasta que podamos tomar decisiones acertadas. Y por este camino, llegaríamos a pedir la dimisión de nuestros gobernantes, cosa que no permitirían los jefes de estas multinaciones, pues sus beneficicios estarían en peligro. ¿Cuál es su papel, pues? El de eternizar nuestra miseria.

Malabo, Guinea Ecuatorial
5 de marzo de 2002

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel es un escritor guineano y editor de ***El Patio, Revista del Centro Cultural Hispano-Guineano.***

Adulteration and the Quest for Black Male Legitimacy

by Florence Marfo

[...] an old black ram
Is tupping your white ewe.
[...]
[...] your daughter
and the Moor are making the beast with two backs.
William Shakespeare

Johnny Stoddart's eyes popped and his face drained color [...]I put the gun to his heart and pulled the trigger three times [...] Then I saw the woman's face and it was stretched in vertical lines with the mouth opening and closing soundlessly [...] I felt good, fine, wonderful [...]
Chester Himes

Chester Himes' *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* and Romeu Crusoé's *A Maldição de Canaan (The Curse of Canaan)*, broach the thorny issue of Black male/White female sexual relationships. Written several decades after Abolition in North America and Brazil, these novels illustrate the polemics of citizenship for Black Americans. In the vein of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, they are naturalist in their depiction of the social creation of misfits. They are also psychological in their exploration of individuals tortured by internal conflict. As such they explore both the social fallacies of abolition and its personal challenges for individuals descended from the recently enslaved.

Published in 1945, *If He Hollers* is Himes' first book. In its presentation of circumstance and circumstantial evidence that dictate the hero's fate, it has the seeds of the detective novels that Himes is more commonly associated with. *If He Hollers* is arguably inspired by the author's personal experiences of work in shipyards and his own bi-racial marriage. Bob, the protagonist, is a leaderman at Atlas where he faces the issue of an inter-racial sexual relationship with Madge, a southerner. In contrast to Himes' relative renown, Romeu Crusoé is a little-known Afro-Brazilian probably most acclaimed for the play *O Castigo de Oxalá* published by the Teatro Experimental do Negro. Despite Crusoé's relative obscurity, *Maldição* is a landmark text in its depiction of Black Brazilian experience from a particularly male perspective. Crusoé dares to challenge the fallacy of Brazil as a racial democracy by depicting a universe in which his hero, Ricardo, is discriminated against on several fronts. Ricardo's feelings of alienation are enacted in his personal relationships with White women.

In 1940's Los Angeles where *If He Hollers* is set, inter-racial marriage is illegal. In spite of this, LA's anti-segregation laws inevitably result in racial mixing rendering significant the potential for racial tension in this war-manufacturing climate of mass migration from the agricultural south. Southern migration foretells of tensions in the integrated working environment. The concentration of young adults who have left their extended—and even nuclear —families to make money suggests the construction of temporary lifestyles (longer working hours, makeshift accommodation, extra marital relationships). The work place as the focal point is uniting through the work ethic yet

divisive as a community junction.

In contrast with North American statutory racial divisions of the 1940s, Brazil has less stringent prohibitive racial legislation. Interracial marriage has been sanctioned by both church and state for centuries. White/Black sexual relations are invariably perceived from the perspective of the country's mulatto ideology of racial democracy; best expressed by Freyre in the early twentieth century. This ideology promotes 'constructive miscegenation', a practice that reinforces White domination. It is based on theories of natural selection and the equation of biological with cultural whitening. It offers social mobility to successive generations of Black people by their being increasingly absorbed into higher levels of the existing power structure through engaging in mixed race unions. This conditional institutionalisation of equality renders increasingly redundant racial antagonism as the (supposedly culturally homogenous) race of mulattoes increases. Racial hierarchies, instead of being obliterated, are merely disguised and consequently reaffirmed. This reaffirmation is accentuated by the selectivity of Freyre's White male/Black or indigenous female prototypes that conform to existing:

> [...] relations of dominance and subordination between owners and owned in which racial and gender roles [are] commodified in accordance with the preferences and choices of slaveowners.[1]

Sex is another form of servile labour rendered by the workingwoman to the White male. The absence of a Black male/White female equation to this ideal reinforces existing power relations suggesting a latent, unacknowledged threat of Black masculinity (and other mixed race unions that are irreducible) to phallocractic Luso-Tropicalist assimilation. In keeping with Brazil's assimilationist racism of absorbing potential antagonism through the recreation of an imposed racial homogeneity, *Maldição* articulates a similarly neutralised landscape. Reference in the text's introduction to the story's universality gives it a cosmic relevance. This magnitude dilutes the potential potency of future references in the text to Brazilian race relations. Notwithstanding, Brazil is directly named on several occasions and the anonymous landscape that does emerge is intensely race conscious. It is the backdrop against which school and work environments (in which the Ricardo struggles to be integrated) fade into the background as a seedy underworld (in which he functions with comparative ease) assumes the fore. In an interesting representation of Brazil's self-professed racial democracy, Ricardo embodies the mulatto ideal as an unacknowledged fallacy. Although Ricardo is treated as though he were (Black according to Brazil's racial lexicon), his mentioning that his deceased mother was a *parda* (the equivalent to a mulatta in North America) and his later defining himself as mulatto signal that he is in actual fact closer to the mulatto ideal than his experiences of racism suggest. In a further ideological contortion, Ricardo has indeed bought into the lightening ideal. He doggedly pursues Maria Alice and the white world that she represents despite her/its vehement rebuttal of him.[2] In addition, he is also, ironically, cognizant of the ideal's ineffectiveness in creating racial harmony. His consolation at the premature death of his child with Maria

Alice is a poignant indication of his recognition of the fallacy of *morenidade* (an ideology supposedly extolling the dark skinned):

> The child had your traits, but he was also mine, he was mulatto. I, having suffered so much because of my color, know what he would have undergone in this world of prejudice. Why yet another unhappy person in this world, [Maria] Alice? God was merciful in taking him.[3]

Despite the rhetoric, Brazilian racial ideology seems to resemble more the White/Black one drop rule of North America's stringent race categorizations than the purportedly mercurial colour/race spectrum of a race/colour blind Brazil. Accordingly, Ricardo interprets the death of his child as an act of Godly compassion.

Indeterminacy in *Maldição*—physical location, the inconsistencies between racial theory and practice in the physical form of Ricardo and even the premature death of his child that eludes further analysis of these inconsistencies—evokes the fluidity of Brazilian racial debate. Similarly, the setting of *If He Hollers* is ambient of North American approaches to racial polemics and taboos, for the concentration of institutionally disparate southerners has associations of confrontational racism.

The culturally specific settings of *Maldição* and *If He Hollers* as appropriate contexts for the ensuing conflicts underscore both ways in which Ricardo and Bob, although individuals, are products of their respective cultural environments.

The taboo of Black male/ White female sexual relationships is longstanding in Western societies. It dates back to European intrigue with West African male genitalia; the reducibility of genitalia to sex; associations of heat with lust; sex with bestiality and beasts with sexuality.[4] The White woman is antithetical to the Black male in her representation of virtue that is opposed to unbridled sexual pleasure in the Judeo-Christian world. The virtuous White woman and the bestial Black man are the backdrop against which the taboo of Black male/White female relationships is set. However, taboo as Freud indicates, is less descriptive of organically generated opinions than prescriptive of attitudes required in order to ensure the continuation of social norms. According to Freud and Northcote Thomas whom he quotes:

> ... the earliest human penal systems may be tracked back to taboo.[...] 'The violation of a taboo makes the offender himself taboo...' [...] Behind all these prohibitions there seems to be something in the nature of a theory that they are necessary because certain persons and things are charged with a dangerous power, which can be transferred through contact with them [...][5]

In the case of the relationships being discussed here, the dangerous power is the simultaneous corrupting element of Black male sexuality and the consequential transferal of social power from White to Black men. These dangers are inter-linked. Black male sexuality is corrupting to the White woman as virtuous and as a regenerative tool for the propagation of White masculinity.[6] White masculinity is undermined by Black male corruption of the White woman through sexual activity and usurpation of the White womb. Taboo

supports the status quo, and is well engrained within the social fabric. Despite social evolutions suggesting equality, and freedom of choice, transgressors of taboo face social penalties.

If penalization is a universal response to taboo as Freud indicates, it seems surprising that individuals would willfully engage in taboo activity.[7] The potential rewards, however, are the motivating forces generating taboo action. The White woman becomes sexual and sexually desired in a way hitherto denied her by the sexless tag of virtue. She ceases to be defined by White male ideals and becomes the author of her newfound identity. Further, as a vehicle through which the Black man attains social equality, she is potentially sanctified by him and her virtue therefore cedes to an equally awe inspiring quality.

For its Black male participants, inter-racial relationships represent a taste of forbidden fruit. Through this act of defiance, the Black male endeavors to ascend the limitations imposed on him as Black. They are twofold: He is an inferior both socially (he is impotent) and conceptually (he is beast-like). The refusal of Ricardo's entry into a restaurant illustrates both the conception by others of his inferiority and his impotence to reverse both their conception and consequent decisions. It is mirrored in *If He Hollers* by the more confrontational scene in which, despite Bob's reserving a table at the best hotel in town, he is eventually seated by the pantry door and later given a bill with a forewarning of future refusal of entry.[8] He, like Ricardo, is reduced to a social inferiority that is justified by notions of his intrinsic inferiority that together abate fears of his potential power.

It is through a consenting sexual relationship with the White woman that the Black man acquires power. Ricardo's infatuation with Maria Alice is his longing for personal freedom in a society wrought with interdiction based on social divisions:

> I would go to dances of my social level [...] but this, instead of satisfying me, emphasised the constraints that I felt, because it reinforced the contrast between the milieu that I was forced to belong to and the one that I tried to gain access to. Ill-at-ease, I would seek more elevated things in order to achieve my aspirations, and all of those led to [Maria] Alice.[9]

Maria Alice is the personification of the world that he desires. She is a vehicle for his surpassing the social limitations imposed on him and attaining a sharing of power with the White man and consequential greater self-realization. This redistribution of power is as much personal therefore as it is public. As the psychologist Fanon observes in his writing about Black male/White female relationships:

> By loving me she proves that I am worthy... I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization[10]

The equation of the White woman's giving love with a man's meriting love is paralleled with that of the yielding of power with the legitimacy of power. As symbolic of the White male's capacity to receive the noble love of a virtuous woman, an intimate relationship with the White woman is the ultimate potential for

love. This ultimate love is freedom from externally imposed restrictions. However, in its relativity to a culture in which Black is the negation, it is also an acceptance of White superiority. This implicit Black inferiority is exemplified in *If He Hollers* where despite Bob's apparent irreverent reflections on European-American culture, he seems in actual fact to have a deep-seated desire for it. His pride in his girlfriend, Alice, 'the whitest colored girl [he] could find' is one based on her reflection of Whiteness.[11] His cynical attitude towards her assimilated lifestyle is countered by his pride in:

> [...] the way she looked, the appearance she made among white people; [...] what she demanded from white people and the credit they gave her [...] (p.8)

He places particular importance on Alice's physical appearance and its associations. They are indeed the source of her high social standing. Similarly, Madge's affected self-conscious Whiteness as she flirts with him has an overwhelming impact:

> She wore a maddening, teasing smile and her eyes were laughing at me. I went so blind mad I was petrified. Not mad at her; at myself for being pushed around by a notion. If you could just get over the notion, women were the same, black or white. (p.161)

Bob is incensed at his feelings of inferiority intensified by Madge's use of her Whiteness as a 'plate of armour' that evokes the ideological barrier of White supremacy. He determines to overcome these feelings by effacing and then replacing the White man. At one stage, he considers sleeping with Madge 'to get even with [...] the peckerwoods out at the yard'.[12] Such sought after substitution, if realised, however, would render him an honorary White in the same way that Ricardo's quest confirms his racial self-negation. The espousal of ideals deemed White actually reduces Bob and Ricardo to White counterfeits and self-renounced Blacks. Mere rejection of these ideals (without the proposal of a separate ideological system) reinforces Eurocentric racism by upholding Euro-centric values.

The protagonists' dichotomy of assuming either the position of the honorary White or the inferior Black is challenging to the construction of individualized characters. Such antagonism illustrates the struggle for the Black male of (re)creating himself in a society in which he is effectively invalidated. However, use of the first person narrative facilitates the construction of the protagonists' subjectivity. This confessional, self-absorbed mode enables psychological exploration and is exploited at the outset of both texts by the mood of foreboding that prefigures an as yet unidentified taboo. Ricardo begins the recounting of his life story at a moment of personal crisis that encapsulates the issues surrounding his future conflicts. He sees his sister's affair with the town cad (a mature married man with children) as a personal affront, for he has striven to safeguard his only asset (his humble yet thus far respectful family name). His sense of his family's fall from grace is confirmed by the spreading of malicious rumor. His violent act against Luzia's lover is an expression of his indignation. It consequently reinforces his social ostracism by resulting in his detention in police custody. Sex as illicit, the yearning for social acceptance, society's discriminating principles and physical

violence as an expression of internal pain, constitute the psychological web in which Ricardo is entangled.

In *If He Hollers,* Bob's psychological fixations are evoked through his three consecutive dreams in the opening pages. They prefigure White/Black conflict in the work place; the myopia of the challenging Black man who inevitably falls fowl of the system, and the acceptance of commonly held ideas that are ill-suited to a particular environment. All of these are interlinked; Bob challenges the restraints that the White world places on him both at work and at social functions. The freedom of the White world is beyond his grasp, yet he pursues it in the form of Madge only to realise at moments of impending tragedy that this pursuit is fated. What is interesting about the use of dreams in this way is that they suggest that the events that later occur are re-enactments of deep-rooted propensities. Bob's remark upon awakening signals their overwhelming impact:

> I felt torn all loose inside, shrivelled, paralysed, as if after a while I'd have to get up and die. (p.3)

His dreams simultaneously presage and propel him to his ensuing demise. His rationalisation of the fear that the dreams generate and attribution of this fear to the current war reinforces his divorce from his hidden drives. This device of creating a character whose unacknowledged impulses spur his waking experiences allows for heightened subjectivity in the persona. Similarly, Ricardo's reaction to his sister's predicament seems slightly misplaced once the reader becomes aware of his own treatment of women. It does, however, illustrate a true-to-life individual for whom public values are subjective. Indeed, Luiza's situation quickly fades into a remote background as Ricardo's thoughts are increasingly focused on. Retrospectively, the opening pages of *Maldição* underscore Ricardo's future self-absorption that exemplifies his limited objectivity. These insights emphasise the characters' individuality.

Their individuality accentuates their social alienation. The reader becomes aware of the impact of their psychological fixations on their social transgressions. This has the effect of creating credible (although anti-social) characters. If the key transgression of the texts is the Black male/White female taboo, the same power relations are contravened in corresponding relationships. Bob pursues the challenge of replacing the White man in the incident with the symbolic Aryan—blond haired blue-eyed Johnny Stoddart who beats him up for supposedly cheating at a betting game. Bob's response is less one of revenge—of equalising the affront—than of irreversibly altering the power relations.

> What the hell did I want to fight him for? I wanted to kill the son of a bitch and keep on living myself. [...] I wanted him to feel as scared and powerless and unprotected as I felt every goddamned morning I woke up.[...] I was going to kill him if they hung me for it [...] A white man, a supreme being. Just the thought of it did something for me; [...] I felt relaxed, confident, strong [...] just like I thought a white boy oughta feel; I had never felt so strong in all my life. (pp.43-45)

Bob seeks to appropriate the White man's power by annihilating him and filling the void, a reversal of the feelings of impotence that emanate from his dreams.

Unconcerned with an escape plan or the penalties to be incurred, he simply aims to triumph over his fear of the White man. His pursuit is ultimately the pursuit of power; the greater self-realisation denied him as an African American. It is therefore doomed. His quest is mirrored in *Maldição* by Ricardo's struggle with society's ubiquity. Ricardo's sadistic beating of Laura upon heightened suspicion that she is seeing Anastácio is the prime example:

> I ripped her clothes to bits. [...] Seeing her white skin, I got more excited and started striking her more frequently and with greater force. So White men despised me? That didn't matter— Laura's white skin was now at my mercy. [Maria] Alice, Rodrigo, Laura; Laura, Rodrigo, [Maria] Alice. [...] I began to realise that I was metaphorically beating Rodrigo and [Maria] Alice. Poor Laura, she served as an instrument for my revenge. (pp.88-89)

Laura's white flesh is a metaphor for the White superiority both of the affluent Maria Alice, who has shunned his advances, and of Rodrigo whom she is dating and 'whose racism you could feel'.[17] Laura is an appropriation for the White domination that Ricardo wishes to debase. He becomes intoxicated by the power of bringing White Brazil to its knees in the form of her submission. Brute force enables him to impose his will (on a society that has oppressed him). Laura and Stoddart are incidental to the decisions and actions taken by Ricardo and Bob. These decisions and actions exemplify the unleashing of inter-related repressed desires or impulses resulting from the confrontation or contravention of the taboo of Black male/White female relationships.

According to Freudian definitions of taboo, an individual's conflict with society (that is also manifested as his struggle with self-imposed limitations wrought by social conditioning) can only be temporarily triumphed. This is illustrated in *If He Hollers* where reprisals are guaranteed by the mere suggestion of transgressive behaviour. Bob doesn't actually sleep with Madge, but the accusation of attempted rape is tantamount to a positive conviction. According to North America's sex-race discourse, Madge's word is superior to Bob's just as her virtue, however slight (she seems to have a reputation for being promiscuous), is the pure state that his bestiality threatens to contaminate. The power dynamics of their relationship are those of superior vs. inferior and virtuous innocence vs. corruptible bestiality. Sex (or the suggestion of sex) between the Black man and the White woman constitutes rape both of the superior White world by the inferior Black and the virtuous woman by the beast-man. Indeed, within the socio-historical context of North American sex-race relations, this is the common denominator of Black male/White female sexual or intimate liaisons. In Himes' *Une affaire de viol* (*A Case of Rape*), the now platonic relationship between (White) Elizabeth and (Black) Scott is automatically sexualised and her death in the seclusion of his hotel room construed as the culmination of her rape. This is ironic given that the real rape in the text results from Elizabeth's White husband's forcing her to take cantharidis —a urogenital drug that enslaves her to his sexual desires. Yet, in the face of an apparent affront, White male America must retaliate against Bob and Scott.

Ultimately, Bob perishes because Madge (as White America) deems him to. The events that follow his chance encounter with her in a secluded room at work where she had been napping between shifts illustrate how his rejection (an affront) of her advances (a concession) has a near fatal result:

> 'I don't want no part of you, that's final'. And I meant it.
> 'You're a liar', she hissed. [...] Madge came into me from an angle, caught me off guard, flung me toward the bunk. [...] *'Help! Help! My God, help me! Some white man, help me! I'm being raped.* '[...] I felt buck-naked and powerless, stripped of my manhood and black against the whole white world.[...]
> 'I'm gonna get you lynched, you nigger bastard.' (p.224)

Bob finally resists the intoxication of Madge's colour (a personal triumph), only to have her dismiss the idea that a Black man would willingly reject the White world that she represents and that she freely offers to him in exchange for her fulfilling her fantasy of 'being wanted by every Negro man in the joint'.[13] Her retaliation of accusing him of rape is met with his pursuit by his White male colleagues irrespective of his innocence and initial efforts to explain.

In the same way that Madge incites Bob's White male colleagues to retaliate by her voicing the sentiments of White male America, Maria Alice similarly assumes the position of White Brazil in her indignation that Ricardo wants to date her. This attitude is expressed at the beginning of her chance encounter with him during the period of social unrest that witnesses mass flight to the wilderness:

> Black man, what are you thinking! [...] You nig' ...brute.[14]

Her echoing commonplace attitudes, however, is soon replaced by other responses. Displacement from society serves as an opportunity for her to be ideologically removed from it, evaluate its rules, and act according to her own innate impulses. The ensuing metamorphosis from Maria Alice's 'conserving her mania of racial superiority' to acknowledging her attraction to Ricardo underscores the social construction of racism. Her brother's appearance at the moment of her relenting to her own desires acts as a metaphor for the pervasiveness of social stipulations and constraints.

Significantly, it is only after Maria Alice becomes a prostitute that she involves herself with Ricardo. At this stage, she is arguably governed by humility and a wistful longing to reconfirm her erstwhile desirability. More significantly, Ricardo's inferior race is now equal to her inferior social standing; her demise constitutes a regressive metamorphosis from White towards Black. Her willingness to engage in a relationship with Ricardo is met with his reluctance. The prospect of an intimate relationship with her is void of the same appeal. As a prostitute, she no longer represents the world of White male superiority that once enticed him.

> My good situation and her bad situation suppressed my disadvantage, compensated for my racial inferiority; we were equal [...] Why should I have to be irrevocably content with the White man's leftovers in the banquet of life?! (p.200)

Ricardo questions the merits of savouring

the leftovers. A relationship with the socially marginal Maria Alice conforms to the racial/class pecking order reminiscent of practices in Brazil's slave era where:

> the general tendency was for upward social mobility to be coupled with a "purification of the blood", so that wealthy blacks aspired to marry women whiter but poorer than themselves'.[15]

Ricardo seems to repudiate this inferiority. His present physical rejection of Maria Alice, however, is no less coupled with his desire to establish a relationship with her. He seeks to recapture the aura and superiority of Maria Alice that once rebuffed him because of its very supremacy. Thus he rekindles her desirability by deconstructing Mariazinha —the alias under which she operates as a prostitute. In establishing a home for the two of them, Ricardo creates an environment in which he ferments a pseudo spiritual attraction for her. Only after reconstructing his ideal of White desirability is he ready to consummate his relationship. If he once described Maria Alice as 'that body whose soul repudiated me', he now possesses her, body and soul. His remark after her bathing following their first night of passion illustrates his semi-deification of her:

> [...] pale skin adorned with crystal-like water drops. Magnificent nymph escaped from heaven via hell! (p.209)

Where Bob perishes brutally after supposedly transgressing society's laws, Ricardo remoulds his desires to fit existing limitations. Without successfully subverting the taboo therefore, Ricardo does, however, achieve a sense of self-realisation through this compromised fantasy. With lucidity he asks:

> Why was I alone reserved the leftover food, to go and eat it hiding in the kitchen? (p.200)

Nevertheless, he eventually becomes reconciled with the idea of engaging in a relationship with the twice-remoulded Maria Alice. This compromise of his fantasy with reality is the construction of an inferior alternative that is bolstered by his creation of cocoon environments that enable him to heighten his sense of fulfilment. Thus, once Solange (a previous girlfriend) moves in with him, he is reluctant for her to go out and work. Given that these nuclei are recreations of an unreal world, however, they are constantly subject to contamination by external influences. Laura's contact with Anastácio and Maria Alice's with Luis refuel Ricardo's insecurity. They necessarily result in a fragile fulfilment because of their dependency on the impossible absence of White male Brazil.

It is in *If He Hollers* that an alternative relationship irreducible to White male domination is suggested. This is the hint of a lesbian affair between Alice and Stella, a plausible alternative for Alice yet one that obviously undermines Bob's relationship with her. The furtive, hazy presentation of this affair to the unsuspecting Bob is like a vortex that propels him to an abyss of despair:

> Things began getting a little blurred.[...] The room began spinning [...]. I felt shocked, sickened. I went back into the room and said to Alice, 'You can't do this to me.'
> She gave me a look of raw hatred. (p.82)

His violent retaliation of striking Alice and her consequential cold, calm assertion

of his inability to 'make [her] cry' reinforces his impotence. Bob is as negated here as within the broader social fabric. Other alternative relationships similarly reinforce the marginality of—or undermine—Black masculinity and Blackness in general. One of these is Alice's ambiguous relationship with Leighton. He represents the face of liberal America: sensitive to the plight of Black people, championing their causes within the limitations of the system, indeed benefiting from the system and denying (its own) racism. His trips with Alice powdered up to pass for White suggest his condoning *branqueamento* (whitening). His facile equation of race divisions with class divisions: his collusion with racism. Alice's quest for assimilation signaled by her personal aesthetics is the apparent antithesis of Bob's response to the restrictions imposed on him. She conceives a happy future for herself in a way that Bob, with his apparent radicalism (even though he dates a White racist) does not. If her racial osmosis ultimately reinforces racism, it does at least potentially enable her to enjoy a semblance of an enriching life in the present. As she explains to Bob:

> Love and marriage, children and homes. Those we control. [...] spiritual values, intrinsic values, which are also fundamental components of our lives. (p.209)

Like Ricardo, she has limited her position of social powerlessness by adjusting to racism. Her attitude of compromise contrasts with Bob's intransigence and her socially upward mobility highlights the fatefulness of his position. Interestingly, the question of the subjectability of Black heterosexual relationships is raised by Alice's social conformity on the one hand and her seeking a lesbian alternative on the other, both of which reinforce Black male exclusion. Similarly, Bob's fixation with the White world through the White woman marginalizes his relationship with Alice.

By virtue of living in society, Ricardo and Bob are destined never to triumph over its laws. Self-realisation that conflicts with society's mores is necessarily fleeting and tumultuous. Further, if Bob exemplifies an individual's quest for fulfilment, he is no less influenced by society ('I'd learned the same jive that the white folks had learned'). Social taboo and prohibition spur him on almost recklessly, but his actions are not limited to a desire for agitation. He has internalised society's values and is as much in awe of White America as is Alice. Where she seeks acceptance or tolerance, his is a macho response of triumph and conquering. Ricardo represents the Brazilian Black man who beseeches Brazil to live up to the racial democracy that it claims. Where Bob pursues the prohibited Madge in order to stamp his Blackness in an affront to White America, Ricardo pursues his White girl-friends in order to dissolve his Blackness. Thus he shares feelings of love and resentment towards them: he loves them because they represent his desires: he hates them because his desires are destined to be unrealised.[16] Like Bob therefore he is a product of his society, his responses reflect the agony and torture of an individual who espouses society's dreams whilst being denied them.

Ricardo's and Bob's unfulfilled relationships are microcosms of the divorce between their aspirations and

realities and of their very alienation as individuals functioning in a society where they are destined to be Other. They provide a plausible insight into the duality of Du Bois' schizophrenic Negro, yet they react as individuals according to the fusion or collision of internal and external influences. Ultimately, the taboo in question is a metaphor for associations of the Black male as mal-adjusted and mal-adjustable to North America and Brazil and the limitless horizons of phallocratic, Eurocentric domination.

Inherent to the idea of the Black male's search for legitimacy is the myth of the American dream of self-recreation unhinged to a past—of a remote, virginal space limited only by the scope of human aspirations. Fulfilment of this dream depends on an adjustment for Black people to the limitations imposed on their race. This is tragic given the lucidity with which Bob and Ricardo eventually confront this ideological hypocrisy ('there never was a nigger who could beat it').[17]

University of Bristol

Notes

[1]*Orpheus and Power*, p. 53.

[2]There is a constant association of the woman that he desires with the world that he desires (see p.83). See also p.106 where Ricardo seeks assistance from Maria Alice (and her world) to a social ascension that has been defined for and by her world.

[3]*Maldição*, p. 231.

[4]See Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812*, pp.3-43.

[5]*The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works on Sigmund Freud, translated from German under the general editorship of James Strachy in collaboration with Anna Freud* vol. 13 (1913-1914), Totem and Taboo and other works, 1955, 99. 20-21.

[6]This description of the White woman is appropriate for both pre-permissive and pre-feminist Western societies.

[7]Unlike literary representations, however, real life is subject to innumerable complexities, that when taken in isolation, lose their overall shape. However, for the purposes of this study and in keeping with the texts discussed here, there will be a somewhat restricted analysis of taboo.

[8]See pp.55-76.

[9]*Maldição*, p.83.

[10]*Black Skins, White Masks*, p.63.

[11]*If He Hollers*, p. 57.

[12]See *The Critical Response to Chester Himes* ed. by Charles L. P.Silet, p.29.

[13]N.B. this is used to describe the 'white chick' (p.91), but is also appropriately relevant to Madge's attitude towards Black men.

[14]*Maldição*, pp. 103-4.

[15]*To Be a Slave in Brazil, 1550-1888*, Katia M. De Queirós Mattoso, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, first published in French by Hachette in 1979, (1996), p. 109.

[16]See *The Black Atlantic*, p.161.

[17]*If He Hollers*, p.185.

Bibliography

CRUSOÉ, Romeu. *A Maldição de Canaan*, 2nd edition (Rio de Janeiro: Irmãos Di Giorgia & Cia, 1955). First published in 1950.

DEGLER, Carl N. *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*, 2nd edn. (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986). First published in 1971.

Du BOIS, W.E.Burghardt. *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Conneticut, Fawcett Publications, 1961). First published in 1903.

FANON, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann, (London, Pluto Press, 1986). First

published in 1952.

GILROY, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, 3rd edn. (London: Verso, 1996).

HANCHARD, Michael George. *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* 4th printing and 1st paperback printing (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1998). First published in 1994.

HIMES, Chester. *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999). First published in 1945.

———. *Une Affaire de Viol*, (Marseille, Collection rive noire, 1999). First published in 1963.

JORDAN, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (Baltimore, Penguin Books Inc. 1973).

MATTOSO, Katia M. De Queirós. *To Be a Slave in Brazil, 1550-1888*, (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1996). First published in 1979.

SHAKESPREARE, William. *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice* ed. by Alvin Kernan (New York, Signet Classic, 1963). First published in 1603.

SILET, Charles L. P. ed. *The Critical Response to Chester Himes* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1999).

STRACHY, James & FREUD, Anna ed. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works on Sigmund Freud*, vol. 13 (1913-1914), *Totem and Taboo and other works*, (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis), 1955.

Regino Pedroso and *Nosotros*: De-colonization and Reconstruction of the Self

by Debbie Lee

"Centenario de Regino Pedroso. En esta casa residió Regino Pedroso (3/3/1896–7/12/83) iniciador de la poesía proletaria en Cuba. UNEAC, Asamblea Municipal, Playa, 3/3/96."

The plaque upon which these words are written serves as a testament to Regino Pedroso, a man whose works and life exemplify both socially and ethnically the Cuban struggle since colonization. Not only was Pedroso an exceptional, innovative writer, his very manner of life emulated the ideas that he advocated. In *Literatura cubana* (1983) it is said, "La gran significación de su obra radica no sólo en la calidad literaria, sino además, en su amplia temática y sobre todo en que es en ella donde se da, por primera vez en nuestra poesía, la visión conscientemente clasista del obrero cubano" (144). Indeed, long before Fidel Castro or Che Guevara, Pedroso's poetry and ideas of life petitioned for the betterment of the Cuban working class.

Nicolas Guillén, a long-time friend, relative by marriage and writing contemporary of Pedroso, reflects on the nature of Pedroso's works. In the prologue to *Poemas: antología* (1966), Guillén remarks on not only the strong socialist nature of Pedroso's works but also on their ethnic content. He points out that there are indeed three Regino Pedrosos: Pedroso the modernist, Pedroso the socialist and Pedroso the Chinese poet (7-8).

This paper analyzes the socialist and Chinese elements of Pedroso's poetry through an examination of *Nosotros* (1933), a volume of his early writings. The significance of *Nosotros* as a defining text in the course of Pedroso's writing career rests upon two premises. First, it chronologically corresponds to the philosophical and thematic changes in Pedroso's literary production. Secondly, it serves as the first text in which Pedroso is provided a space for discussion and incorporation of themes of the marginalized, whether ethnically or economically.

This author asserts that Pedroso underwent a process of de-colonization by consciously choosing to ground his art as well as his outlook on life in his own subjectivity and the experiences that make up his life, elements which come together in the form of *Nosotros*. Through my analyses of selected essays and three poems from *Nosotros* ("Los conquistadores", "Conceptos del nuevo estudiante", and "El heredero"), the reader will recognize not only the artistic strength of Pedroso's poetry but also better understand the mindset that created these and subsequent works.

The concept of de-colonization utilized in this essay is an indirect reference to what Franz Fanon spoke of in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon asserts that writers from countries that underwent colonization pass through three phases. He writes that in the first phase "[The colonized writer's] inspiration is European...This is the period of unqualified assimilation" (222). In the second phase "the native is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is" (222). Finally, in the "fighting phase" "he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence becomes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature" (223). The trajectory of Pedroso's works passes briefly through phase one on to phase three, virtually skipping phase two. A careful reading of Pedroso's body of prose and poetry

demonstrates an understanding on his part of the marginalizing effect that race and class struggle, two inextricably linked issues, had on Cuba and his own personal life.

In an essay entitled "Cubanismo, americanismo y humanismo de la Revolución Cubana" (1960) Pedroso recounts the colonizing and destructive history that Cuba and the Americas have had to endure. He mentions the indigenous groups, beginning with Hatuey: "Nuestra inmolación de tierra India comienza con Hatuey, el primer cacique indígena que iluminará con su carne en hoguera de martirologio el primer grito de libertad que se eleva en nuestra Isla" (*Regino Pedroso* 401). Pedroso speaks of the Africans: "Eran esclavos, vivían, producían y morían bajo el latigo esclavista, y su aspiración era la libertad" (402). However, rather than remand them to the position of passive victims, he rewards the suffering that they underwent by proclaiming them the first promoters of Cuban liberty.

Pedroso asserts that Cuba is not truly a nation, however, because of the inequality that exists. He writes, "Lejos estamos de todo concepto de nación, no asoma aún ningún fermento integral de pueblo con unidad racial y política definida" (402). The struggle is ongoing; therefore, he takes it upon himself to re-define his Cuba and his position within Cuba. It is this Pedroso that materializes in *Nosotros*.

Nicolás Guillén describes the Regino Pedroso discussed in this essay in the following manner: "Segundo Regino Pedroso. Es el primero y más importante. El de *Nosotros*, libro que abre el camino a la poesía social, o de la poesía social cubana" (*Poemas: antología* 7). Pedroso himself describes his new focus as "una búsqueda de la justicia, de fraternidad con lo humano" (*Literatura cubana* 146). The publication of the poem "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico" (1927) marks the beginning of this phase of Pedroso's career. Although not the first to treat the subject of the Cuban working class, the poem reflected Pedroso's new approach to both literature and life. Osvaldo Navarro describes the poet of "Salutación fraterna al taller mecánico" as "un hombre armado con la teoría de la lucha de su clase" and that he "escribe una poesía surgida desde los mismos problemas que le atañen como trabajador" (15).

The emergence of the Pedroso described by Guillén and Navarro reflects the transformation that the poet underwent. The first Pedroso was the Spanish American modernist, the creator of *La ruta de Bagdad y otros poemas* (1918-1923). Guillén describes this figure as the "Regino artificial y enjoyado" (8). Pedroso found no solace in the modernist images of swans and ivory towers that were incapable of representing his situation. He desired a style that emulated his historical circumstances. Pedroso's earlier life was remarkably different from that of the images depicted in his poetry. He recounts the history of his life in an autobiographical essay entitled "Vida y Sueno" (*Regino Pedroso* 1975). He was born in 1896 in Matanzas, the child of a Chinese man and African woman, both of whom died during his formative years. His father abandoned his family and returned to Canton, China, to die shortly after his return to his homeland. His mother also died prematurely, worn out from her struggles to take care of five children alone. Pedroso, after a brief stint in Havana, remained at home until age 11 when the need to work and earn a living took precedence over education and family.

He made his way through the countryside working at whatever jobs were available on tobacco farms and in sugar mills. These experiences would later become fodder for his poetry and influence his ideas concerning "race", class, and society.

It was only when Pedroso arrived in Havana in 1918 that he received the chance to share ideas with the literary intellectuals of the day and formulate a philosophy of writing and ultimately, living. He was encouraged by Rubén Martínez Villena, a young intellectual of the Cuban Vanguard who realized the genius of Pedroso's writing, to explore his poetic inclination. Through Villena he came to know other Vanguard writers: Félix Pita Rodríguez, Raúl Roa, Emilio Ballagas, José Tallet and Nicolás Guillén, to name a few. The vanguard, although not particular to Cuba, was a decisive artistic and political movement in Cuban history because it precipitated both the *negrismo* movement and the Revolution of 1933. The *vanguardia* in respect to Cuba is described in *Iniciación a la poesía afro-americana* (1973) as a movement that facilitated "modúlos de ajustes estéticos a los desajustes sociales...y vías de nueva expresión para la vieja agonía cuando la intensa depresión económica afectaba a todos los países e imponía cierta acritud a la lucha de clases" (9). Pedroso, affected by the ideas of the times as well as his own historical circumstances, admitted the futility of his earlier writings. He wrote, "Llego al templo erguido, no encuentro nada lo que deseo, a lo que anhelo de justicia, de equidad, doy la espalda y me voy"(*Literatura cubana* 145).

In an essay entitled "Guillén y yo" (1929) Pedroso expresses his new ideas in the guise of an interview in which Nicolas Guillén questions him about his thematic change. Pedroso debates against the idea of "art for art's sake." Guillén asks, "¿De manera que Ud. condena por inútil todo arte que no sea político y que no esté al servicio exclusivo de las masas?" Pedroso responds, "Es un anacronismo querer encastillarse ahora en nuevas torres ebúrneas...¿Al fin no estamos ya de acuerdo en aceptar que el arte debe ser hijo de su época e interpretar su época?...Todo arte que ha perdurado a través de los tiempos ha tenido un carácter marcadamente social" (*Regino Pedroso* 354-55). Pedroso assures that he is not calling for the separation of art and freedom of expression. "Y ya se ha dicho: el artista, no por ser artista debe dejar de ser hombre. Hasta los dioses de la antigüedad descendían del Olimpo para vivir sobre la tierra" (355). He accepts, however, that he personally must make a choice. Pedroso ends the essay with his resolution to change his course. "¿Qué hacer? Me sacrificaré. No obstante mis juramentos por Homero y Apollinaire, me sacrificaré. Al fin, nuestro abuelo Adán se perdió por una manzana, y el bermejo Esau por unas míseras lentajas" (359). *Nosotros* is a product of this new attitude.

While *Nosotros* reflects the plight of the worker as Pedroso interpreted it, the collection also portrays an appreciation of the poet's ethnic heritage. Pedroso was an ethnic mix of the two non-indigenous groups that had been physically and economically exploited on the island: the Africans and the Chinese. Cuba's history of colonization reveals that the racial prejudice exhibited towards the Africans was also directed towards the Chinese. Pedroso's *mestizaje* doubly alienated him from Cuban society. In his essay "Vida y sueño" Pedroso speaks fondly of both sides of his ethnic heritage. In regards to

his mother he writes, "Explorando las más remotas aguas de mi memoria, descubro junto a mi una joven mujer negra de blancos dientes y ojos grandes muy vivos, que unas veces me acaricia y otras, ironicamente, me reprende" (*Regino Pedroso* 39). In reference to his father he writes, "Veo ahora un amarillo rostro sonriente de alargados ojos que pellizca suavemente mis mejillas" (39). While his works incorporate both sides of his ethnic past (he is often listed as an Afro-Hispanic writer), he became the first Cuban poet to actively explore his Chinese legacy. The novelty of the idea is manifested in this work as it converges with opinions, memories and events from Pedroso's life in *Nosotros* to create a new ideology.

The prologue of *Nosotros* is entitled "Auto-Bio-Prólogo". It verifies the historical circumstances of the poet as well as his new perspective on life. It reads like a *curriculum vitae*: "Nombre... Lugar de nacimiento... Raza... Profesión... Lugares de estudios... Ideología... Auto-crítica... Proclama" (9). Its categorical structure is very methodical, by nature a contradiction from the freedom of poetry. Pedroso defines the character of the poet who has written the poems that follow. However, the ironic and blunt nature of his words makes the reader realize that Pedroso is not being frivolous.

Pedroso begins simply enough with his name. Then he speaks of age, which by his own admission is a category of a relative nature. He writes, "Por lo que he esperado, soñado, vivido, 100 años; por la revelación de la verdad realista, 5 años; por la sola fatalidad biológica, nací en 1898" (9). It is the category "Raza" that should receive attention in order to demonstrate a point made earlier. His *mestizaje* is a definite element through which he interprets the world around him. Under "Raza" he writes: "Humana; pigmentación: Negro-amarilla. (Sin otra mezcla)" (9). Not only does Pedroso affirm his ethnicity, he calmly rejects any claim to European ancestry. The "(Sin otra mezcla)", seeming to refer to the European blood mix that is a part of so many Cubans, reveals that it plays no part in the Afro-Chinese man who is Regino Pedroso. His self-alienation from the body that originally alienated him frees him from the restraints, thus placing the power of self-definition in his own hands. Pedroso continues this embracing of self in the category of "Ideología". He refers to his complete historical condition:

> Hijo de América. Nacido en un país económica y políticamente esclavizado al imperialismo yanqui; clasificado por tradicionales conceptos de religión, filosofía y ciencia burguesas, como individuo de raza inferior-etiópico asiático-; perteneciente-proletario-a la clase más oprimida y explotada...(9)

In regards to *mestizaje* and the blending of cultures Trinh T. Minh Ha urges the *mestizo* to take advantage of this wonderful combination. In *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (1991) she writes, "The potency of the hyphen, one is born over and over again as hyphen rather than as a fixed entity, thereby refusing to settle down in one (tubiculous) world" (159). Pedroso does not relegate himself to one narrow position but rather opens himself up to become a complete subject, embracing his status. Thus, the Pedroso that writes the following poems is conscious of his situation. It is this recognition that will be discussed in three poems from this collection: "Los

conquistadores", "Conceptos del nuevo estudiante", and "El heredero."
The first poem, "Los Conquistadores," serves two functions. First, it represents the poet's contempt for the colonial system that Spain established on the island. Moreover, he associates the colonial system with the neo-colonialism of the "Yanquis." Secondly, by mentioning the 'coolie' trade, Pedroso the poet is showing that he is well aware that both sides of his family came as compromised people. The poem reads as follows:

Por aquí pasaron. Mezquinas epopeyas
Llameaban en sus ojos ebrios del mar Atlántico
y del Pacífico. Venían con férreas botas,
el largo fúsil sobre los hombros,
y el continente bárbaro.
¿Qué verdad predicaban a los hombres?
¿Qué evangelio de dichas al sufrimiento humano?
¿Qué salmo de Justicia, por las tierras inmensas,
alzaban a los cielos sus cañones blindados?

En nombre del derecho y de la paz venían...
Iban hacia los pueblos llamándoles hermanos:
y como en la Escritura, la América fue el Cristo,
que vióles repartirse sus tierras por vestidos,
y disputar la túnica libre de su destino!

Por aquí pasaron.
Venían con un nombre de democracia nueva:
¡y hasta las altas cumbres de los Andes durmieron
bajo un pesado sueño brutal de bayonetas!

Por aquí pasaron.
Con nuevos postulados de libertad venían:
¡y hasta la vieja tierra de Li Tai Pe, llegaron,
sobre los rascacielos flotantes de sus "dreadnoughts",
entre un clamor de débiles pueblos despedazados!

Por aquí cruzaron.
Ahora hacia sus cuarteles de Wallstreet:
al fardo de dólares al hombro
y el continente bárbaro. (23-24)

The poem is divided into six stanzas. Four of the six begin with simple statements: "Por aquí pasaron" or "Por aquí cruzaron." The shortness of the statements is in contrast to the explanation of what they did after this happened. The opposition is interesting because the speaker places into the syntax of the sentence the significance that this brief encounter had on this hemisphere: the chance meeting by a man who was lost (Christopher Columbus) has produced the following. The assertion that it was ill-fate on the part of the Americas is revealed by using "pasaron" and "cruzaron." Also, the use of the preterit shows it to be a single, completed action, limiting it to a particular instance. The first, fourth and fifth stanzas contrast the preterit with the imperfect by continuing with the verbs "llameaban", "venían", and "iban", stressing even more the effect that can stem from one particular cause.
The second and third stanzas explain the premise of the conquistadors. The second serves as the poetic voice's questioning; the third is his understanding of the answers to the questions. "¿Qué verdad predicaban...? ¿Qué evangelio...?¿Qué salmo de Justicia...?" The answer: "En nombre del derecho y de la paz..." Yet the poetic voice continues by demonstrating that this was not the case. Images of violence abound: "el largo fúsil...sus cañones blindados...sueños brutal de bayonetas...pueblos despedazados." The

poetic voice illustrates this violence perfectly in the third stanza when America is compared to Christ: "y como en la Escritura, la América fue el Cristo,/ que vióles repartirse sus tierras por vestidos,/ y disputar la túnica libre de su destino." America, like Christ, was innocent and undeserving of the fate that was to befall her.

The cleverness of this poem, however, lies in the double meaning of the signifier "conquistador." It is not merely another poem vilifying the colonizers. The sign is expanded to include the new villain and threat to the Americas: the United States. In the fourth stanza, a vision of the Spanish-American war emerges with the phrase "Venían con un nombre de democracia nueva." In the fourth stanza the comparison of the "dreadnoughts" of the ships that brought the slaves and 'coolies' with "rascacielos" shows that the poetic voice is moving through history. The conquistadors of the past have been replaced by new ones. This is proved in the last stanza with the placing of the conquistadors in the present day world: "Ahora hacia sus cuarteles de Wallstreet: al fardo de dólares al hombro." The "fúsil sobre los hombres" has been replaced by "dólares." Moreover, the image of the "continente bárbaro" is still the same. The land and its people have thrown off one master only to have it replaced by another.

The second point that becomes evident in this poem is the arrival of the Chinese to Cuba. The poetic voice says, "y hasta la vieja tierra de Li Tai Pei, llegaron." Although it is only one phrase, it is very significant. Pedroso affirms his Chinese ancestors. Normally the African slave trade evokes an image of the oppression and violence that have occurred in the Americas. Also, the fact that Pedroso is of African descent would give reason for mentioning the plight of his black ancestors. Pedroso affirms with pride his "negritud" as he says in the Auto-Bio-Prologo that he is "etiópico-asiático." Pedroso uses this change of attitude as a means of representing the part of his history that has had no representation. The inclusion of Chinese elements and the 'coolie' trade will impose upon the reader, as well as himself, this facet of Latin American history that often goes overlooked.

The next two poems divulge Pedroso's exploration of this past through poetry. However, he is exploring the orientalized past as depicted through the exotic images of the West. He is not embracing the fanciful images that have been concocted and propagated through the modernist discourse to which he once adhered. Moreover, his dexterity at blending various images from separate strands of thought within one poem, as was demonstrated in the previous poem, becomes evident once more. The realm of signification seems to multiply exponentially as various meanings converge to form one totality. Therefore, two threads of thought that seem to be constant in these poems should be discussed. The first is that of Pedroso's personal search to understand his Chinese past. The second is his affirmation of a new ideology.

It should be noted at this point that the idea that Pedroso would concoct a way to understand his Chinese heritage is understandable when one realizes that he had virtually no memories of his father. His father abandoned the family when Pedroso was quite young. The only real memory recorded of his father is recounted in "Vida y sueño." He writes:

Todos los días, al oscurecer, mi padre toma de la mano a mi hermanito menor y a mí, y silenciosamente, sin decir palabra alguna, nos lleva a un retirado santuario del Casino. Ya allí nos arrodillamos ante diversos ídolos que vemos, ante todo el que está en el altar principal, uno muy bello y hermoso, que no sé si es un hombre o una mujer; repetimos en voz baja sin entender las palabras que en chino pronuncia nuestro padre; tocamos luego con nuestras frentes el suelo, y cogiendo finas varillas de bambú las prendemos y las dejamos humeantes en los anchos ceniceros. No sabemos por qué nunca le hacemos a nuestro padre preguntas sobre esto ni él tampoco; aunque nos habla de muchas cosas, de esto nunca nos dice nada. (*Regino Pedroso*, 1975, 40-41)

Left with no source from which to learn what it meant to be Chinese, Pedroso turned to poetry as a medium through which he could reconstruct this unique quality of his ethnic make-up. The poems that follow, along with the others that appear in *Nosotros*, are his first attempts at creating a source of self-identification. The first poem, "Conceptos del nuevo estudiante" reads as follows:

Yo fui hasta ayer ceremonioso y pacífico...
Antaño bebí el té de hojas maduras del Yunnan
en fina taza de porcelana;
descifraba los textos sagrados de Lao-Tseu,
de Meng-seu,
y del más sabio de los sabios, Kung-fu-Yseu.

En el misterio de las pagodas
mi vida transcurría armoniosa y serena;
blanca como los lotos de los estanques,
dulce como un poema de Li-tai-Pe,
siguiendo en los crepúsculos,
el "looping the loop" de un vuelo de cigüeñas
perfilarse en el biombo de un cielo de alabastro.

Me ha despertado un eco de voces extranjeras
surgido de las bocas de instrumentos mecánicos;
dragones que incendían con gritos de metrallas
-antes el horror de mis hermanos,
asesinados en la noche-
mis casas de bambú
y mis pagodas milenarias.

Y ahora, desde el avión de mi nueva conciencia,
atalayo las verdes llanuras de Europa
sus ciudades magníficas,
florecidas de piedra y de hierro.

Se ha desnudado en mis ojos el alba de Occidente.
Entre mis manos pálidas,
la larga pipa de los siglos,
ya no me brinda el opio de la barbarie;
y hoy marcho hacia la cultura de los pueblos
ejercitando mis dedos en el gatillo del máuser.

En la llama de ahora
cocino impaciente la droga del mañana;
quiero profundamente aspirar la nueva época
en mi ancha pipa de jade.
Una inquietud curiosa ha insomnizado mis ojos oblicuos.
y para otear más hondo el horizonte,
salto sobre la vieja muralla del pasado...

Yo fui hasta ayer ceremonioso y pacífico...
(45-46)

The poem begins and ends with the anaphoric phrase "Yo fui hasta ayer ceremonioso y pacífico...." This phrase reiterates what is suggested by the title: he is a new student, a new person. One can assume that the poetic voice is no longer "ceremonioso y pacífico" as he uses "fui." However, that does not allow the conclusion that he has become the opposite of fun and peace loving. The

poem continues by guiding the reader through the transformation of the poetic voice.

The first two stanzas describe the exotic China that is understood through Western reflection. The tangible images of "té", "textos sagrados", "lotos", "pagodas" and "cigüeñas" depict the items that are associated with Chinese culture. Moreover, the characteristics such as "sabio", "armoniosa", and "serena" are personality traits that Westerners stereotypically apply to the Chinese as a whole. Basically, Pedroso is expressing what he has been taught to understand about his Chinese ancestors. He has not been to China at this point in his life, and his understanding of China comes from the little time he spent with his father as well as Western representations of the Far East.

The third stanza describes a scene quite opposite of the idyllic one that is presented in the first and second. The harmony is broken by the "voces extranjeras". Instruments such as "instrumentos mecánicos" and "dragones que incendían con gritos de metrallas" violate his surroundings. The result is death ("mis hermanos, asesinados en la noche") and destruction ("incendían...mis casas de bambú y mis pagodas milenarias"). The fourth stanza insinuates that these invaders are the Westerners when he says "atalayo las verdes llanuras de Europa." The contrast is great. His houses of bamboo are quite different from these that are "florecidas de piedra y de hierro." The fifth stanza affirms this as it begins "Se ha desnudado en mis ojos el alba de Occidente." The images presented in these three stanzas are powerful for the reader can empathize with the 'coolie'. The scenes seem to depict the manner in which many 'coolies' were brought here: the assaults on their homes and person, their kidnappings, and their voyage to the West.

The end of the fifth stanza reveals a poetic voice that no longer lives in the land of the Ming, of the Chi'ing, of pagodas and swans. The speaker is ready to move forward: "y hoy me marcho hacia la cultura de los pueblos." However, he is still carrying in his hands "la larga pipa de los siglos." The past will always be a part of him. He says in the last stanza "quiero profundamente aspirar la nueva época/ en mi ancha pipa de jade." The poetic voice is, as Ortega y Gassett said, himself and his circumstances. Therefore, a harmonious blending of the past and his present would benefit him, a serene acceptance of them both. However, he refuses to live in the past. The last stanza reveals this. He says, "Cocino impaciente la droga del mañana." He is prepared for what may come. The speaker realizes that to understand and accept the future, he must accept the past and move forward: "y para otear más hondo el horizonte,/salto sobre la vieja muralla del pasado." The idealized past of his ancestors no longer exists in his realm; his is another world and he must become one with it.

When viewed in conjunction with Pedroso's ethnic background, the line of thought seems to be a positive move forward. The poetic voice recognizes that his life, in another time and place (China), would have been different. Perhaps he would not have struggled so hard. Perhaps he would not have had to witness the death and destruction he saw if the foreigners had not arrived. But they did, and the speaker is now in a different place (the West), with new experiences and a new way of life. The past no longer supports his present, and although he will always remember and

revere it, it is not his destiny. The future is; therefore, he must follow it.

If one views this poem according to Pedroso's newly affirmed literary and political ideology, it retains the same idea, i.e., a moving away from the past and a change of direction, yet the signifieds shift. The first two stanzas represent the Pedroso of his modernist stage, the writer of "La ruta de Bagdad", the creator of fanciful, exotic images: the orientalizer. The third stanza marks his realization of the violence perpetrated against his brethren because of ethnic and economic inequality. This realization negates Pedroso's usage of those images of before, of "casas de bambú" and "pagodas." His pen "la larga pipa de los siglos" becomes his weapon or "el gatillo del máuser." He will aid the people or "el pueblo." The "salto sobre la vieja muralla del pasado" maintains his shift in ideology. The title confirms this de-colonization process. It serves almost as an ideological statement: "Conceptos del nuevo estudiante." Pedroso is a new man.

The next poem "El heredero" expresses the same points as the preceding. The exotic images abound once more as the poetic voice answers the question presented to him by his uncle, "el sabio mandarín de botón encarnado."

Mi anciano tío,
El sabio mandarín de botón encarnado
—aunque yo soy un hijo de la Revolución,
son mis antepasados ilustres—
me dice, ya casi moribundo:
—Hijo mío, de todos mis tesoros, ¿qué ambicionas, qué anhelas?—

Yo le respondo, con el corazón
trémulo por la angustia como un avión sin rumbo entre la tiniebla:
—¡Oh sabio, tres veces sabio, Wey-tchung-tseu!
No quiero tus riquezas.
Desdeño tus palacios de jade
rodeados de jazmineros nevados de luna
y claros estanques,
donde el cielo de nácar florece en las tardes de lotos y estrellas...
No anhelo tus altos bambúes flexibles,
a cuya sombra,
henchidos de orgullosa opulencia burguesa,
su gemario abren los pavos reales.

Desprecio tu oro
—trasmutación de sangre y de sudores de culíes—
No ambiciono tus lacas ni tus porcelanas de Kin-te-tchin,
ni tus túnicas de seda,
ni tu lecho de márfil.
Sólo quiero tus libros,
tus manuscritos raros de los tiempos de Hoang-hi;
quiero la página no desflorada por tu conocimiento:
aquella que penetre el ojo del corazón,
más hondo que el de la inteligencia.

En los ópalos de tus pupilas moribundas,
lechosas como el humo del opio,
crepesculiza un pasado lleno de encanto exótico y gracia genuflexiva;
y yo quiero,
ahora que el dragón de un sol nuevo se despereza en la mañana,
regar la simiente de amor y justicia que tú no sembraste,
la que no cultivaste en tus predios,
cuando avara del rico tesoro de los días
dabas sólo a los pobres las míseras monedas
de las noches de hambre.

Todo lo almacenaste sórdidamente:
Pacíficos de oro e Himalayas de máximas profundas.
Yo abriré para el hambre ignara del culí
el opimo granero de tu cosecha d cultura.

La "film" de tu existencia

cruza ahora por la pantalla de nuestros tiempos;
y eres, en episodio de arcaica ideología,
un celuloide de otra etapa histórica.

¡Oh, sabio, Wey-tchung-tseu, tres veces sabio!
Del fondo de las aguas dormidas del pasado
ha surgido la nueva inquietud de tifones,
que, escapando a la antena de tu sabiduría,
desde sus luminosas estaciones mentales
presagiaron los viejos filósofos...—

Y con tradicional ritual ceremonioso
beso sus mortecinos dedos mandarinescos,
donde una gema arcaica de un príncipe Ming fulge
—pues aunque soy un hijo de la Revolución
son mis antepasados ilustres!—(47-49)

The first stanza opens the poem with the question: "—Hijo mío, de todos mis tesoros, ¿qué ambicionas, qué anhelas?" The uncle says this "casi moribundo" or at the point of death. The question is about the inheritance, hence the title "El heredero." The poetic voice expresses his connection to and distance from this relative in the phrase "—aunque yo soy hijo de la Revolución,/ son mis antepasados ilustres." The poetic voice accepts that this figure represents his past; however, his future is that of the Revolution.

This is substantiated further in the two stanzas that follow. The poetic voice answers nervously. He rejects any and all of the riches that are normally associated with the Chinese culture. Once more, as in the previous poem, the exotic, orientalized images emerge. He responds, "No quiero tus riquezas...tus palacios de jade...tus bambúes flexibles...tu oro...tus túnicas de seda." The poetic voice is minimizing the East as the West has constructed it. Instead, all he wants is the knowledge that his uncle possesses, the intangible, non-monetary items that represent the philosophy of the culture to which his uncle belong. He affirms:

Sólo quiero tus libros,tus manuscritos raros
de los tiempos de Hoang-hi;
Quiero la página no desflorada por tu conocimiento:
aquella que penetre el ojo del corazón,
más hondo que el de la inteligencia.

These texts, for the poetic voice, bear the mysteries of life as that are unblemished by worldly things. The poetic voice indirectly accuses the uncle of having abandoned the teachings hidden within. First, when he says he does not want the uncle's gold, he adds that it is the "Trasmutación de sangre y de sudores de culíes." It could be that the uncle was a Chy cha tau, a "swineherder" who kidnapped and sold his own people. Or it could be that the China this uncle represents is the China that allowed the trade to exist. Regardless, the poetic voice does not want "blood money." Secondly, the poetic voice asserts that the philosophy of this uncle is not that of his ancestors. He says, "Quiero la página no desflorada por tu conocimiento." Essentially, the uncle, with all of his material possessions, has been corrupted, and therefore his writings or manuscripts would not possess the purity of those of the ancestors.

It appears that the poetic voice is making a distinction between the opulent and wealthy and the poor within China itself. He tells the uncle that he sees reflected in his eyes "un pasado lleno de encanto exótico y gracia/genuflexiva." The speaker alleges that this uncle was greedy and stingy, that his only donation to the poor was "las míseras monedas/ de las

noches de hambre." The fifth stanza declares that not only were the physical needs of the poor overlooked but also their access to learning. He writes that he will open "para el hambre ignara del culí/ el opimo granero de tu cosecha de cultura." The poetic voice avows that his is not the path of his uncle. He states, "y yo quiero,/ahora que el dragón de un sol nuevo se despereza en la mañana,/regar la simiente de amor y justicia que tú no sembraste." As in the previous poem, the poetic voice is leaving the past behind him. The future is his tomorrow.

The sixth stanza affirms this new direction. The speaker tells his uncle:

La "film" de tu existencia
Cruza ahora por la pantalla de nuestros tiempos;
Y eres, en episodio de arcaica ideología,
Un celuloide de otra etapa histórica.

The use of "film" and its representation of the uncle are very significant. A film is nothing more than a superficial image of something that once was. It is not real; its projection serves as a memory. The uncle is the same. He is the manifestation of a past and way of thinking that no longer fits, that is no longer significant. His desire to leave an inheritance for the poetic voice is in essence his desire to prolong this "arcaica ideología." The poetic voice wants no part of this past.

The poetic voice ends his discourse with the uncle in the manner in which he began. He praises the uncle for his wisdom and kisses his hand. He also reminds the uncle that times are changing. It was predicted by "los viejos filósofos", hidden within the pages of their works. Yet the speaker follows the ceremony of saying good-bye to his uncle for, as he ends the poem "pues aunque soy un hijo de la Revolución/ son mis antepasados ilustres."

The correlation of this poem with the life of the poet helps exhibit the strength of his convictions and the self-reflection that he has undergone. Pedroso is very open about his Chinese ancestors. However, he is also well aware that his Chinese-Cuban ancestors were impoverished men of indentured servitude. Therefore, he has no connection to the orientalized exotic wealth that is so often relegated to *all* Chinese. This poem emulates his understanding of his reality. Pedroso accepts what he considers to be his true birthright: the philosophy of a millennia-old culture and the wisdom that it conveys. He acknowledges that he is Cuban (hijo de la Revolución) first and foremost, but that does not erase his link to his "antepasados ilustres."

In regards to a reflection of his new ideology of life and literature, Pedroso is once again demonstrating his philosophical change. This poem is a metaphorical representation of Pedroso's divergence from Spanish American Modernism to his dedication to the plight of the oppressed. His respect for the uncle symbolizes his admiration for the poets whose works have inspired him. Pedroso, however, restates that he cannot find anything that resembles himself or his life in their style and must therefore create a style that would speak of him.

The previous analyses reveal to the reader a Pedroso that serves as a model of Post-colonial redefinition. *Nosotros* demonstrates his poetic agility at rewriting history and questioning its official version. His creative use of language affords him the space to interrogate on varying levels the society from which he

came alongside with those which Pedroso imagined. His very personal inclusion of elements of his own life does not detract from the big picture, that is, the plight of the masses to which he dedicated his life. Pedroso manages to de-marginalize himself mentally by allowing sincere exploration into his own self, allowing him to complete the decolonization process about which Fanon and many critics after him have spoken. Pedroso's ethnic pride of being Afro- Chinese Cuban and his defense of the down-trodden remain a constant in the works that follow. When he changed course, he may have thought he was making a sacrifice. The quality and thematic profoundness of Pedroso's work make the reader only too glad that he did.

Southeast Missouri State University

Works Cited

Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press Inc, 1963.

Fernández de la Vega, Oscar and Alberto N. Pamies. *Iniciación a la poesía afro-americana*. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1973.

Literatura cubana. Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1983.

Navarro, Osvaldo. "Introducción". *Regino Pedroso: colección órbita*. Habana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas, 1975.

Pita Rodríguez, Félix. "Regino Pedroso y la nueva poesía cubana". *Regino Pedroso: obra poética*. Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, unknown.

Pedroso, Regino. "Cubanismo, americanismo y humanismo de la Revolución Cubana". *Regino Pedroso: colección órbita*. Habana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas, 1975.

———. "Guillén y yo". *Regino Pedroso: colección órbita*. Habana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas, 1975.

———. *Nosotros*. 1933. Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1984.

———. "Prólogo". *Poemas: antología*. Habana: Ediciones Unión, 1966.

———. "Vida y sueno". *Regino Pedroso: colección órbita*. Habana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas, 1975.

Trinh T, Minh Ha. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

The Historical Development of Afro-Uruguay's Intellectual Movement: A Coalition in Black and White

by Caroll Mills Young

Both black and white intellectuals sparked the collective literary, artistic and journalistic movement in Afro-Uruguayan culture. While this movement has been given serious attention by scholars who study the contributions of black writers in Uruguay, few have analyzed the role white intellectuals played in the artistic and social growth and development of Afro-Uruguay. This history is chronicled in the periodicals, *Nuestra Raza* (1917, 1933-1948), *Bahía Hulan Jack* (1958-1999) and *Mundo Afro* (1988-). This essay will evaluate the complex interplay of white intellectuals such as Alberto Britos in the evolution of the black cultural movement. Although many other white individuals were key in the movement and merit attention, my primary objective is to show how Britos' influence helped to shape the contours and patterns of Afro-Uruguay's literary and cultural history. To better understand this relationship, I will provide a brief summary of the above three periodicals, the cultural politics which surrounded them, and the institutional contexts in which Britos and the Afro-Uruguayan community collaborated.

White historians like Russell H. Fitzgibbon, who lived in Uruguay during the heyday of *Nuestra Raza*, reported that Uruguay had absolutely no black or Indian population. His 1953 account, *Uruguay: Portrait of a Democracy*, considered the first complete general survey for the laymen of the "Switzerland of Latin America," (1) gives us an example of the dominant attitudes about blacks in Uruguay:

> Uruguay is integrated ethnically. The Indian population is, for practical purposes, nil, and the Negro population small...The Negro is potentially perhaps more assimilable than the Indian. Brazil has had a remarkable experience in fusing the African and European elements. But again Uruguay escapes whatever problems would be presented by the presence of that large, ethnically alien element.
>
> The country has few Negroes, Montevideo almost none. Some Uruguayans will point out, with perhaps a small and unconscious air of superiority, that the United States has much more of a Negro "problem" that had Uruguay. There is some ground for belief that this pattern of reaction may be Communist-inspired, but it is true that no Mydral could ever find "an Uruguayan dilemma" stemming from the mutual impact of Negro and white on each in the same society. Racial homogeneity precludes the sharp cultural tensions, which exist in many countries in Latin America (265-266).[1]

In contrast to Fitzgibbon's report, a 1940 census suggests that Uruguay's population was estimated at 2,500,000 inhabitants with approximately 60,000 black Uruguayan citizens, the majority living in Montevideo (Jackson 95). Both accounts, nonetheless, illustrate a complex and contradictory perception of the black presence and condition in Uruguay.

Yet, from such reports, one can piece together the societal environment in which Afro-Uruguayans lived. There were many underlying negative assumptions of the dominant culture about the black Uruguayan community. Few paid attention to what the black intellectual movement had to offer. The black community was either a toy of the elite class to be played with during carnival or a principal source for low paid domestic

labor. Against this backdrop, the literary and cultural interpretation of the Afro-Uruguayan community emerged.

Several white intellectuals like Ildefonso Pereda Valdés (1889-1996) set the stage for studies on the Afro-Uruguayan experience. His groundbreaking work challenged the traditional concepts of the black community and introduced the Afro-Uruguayan intelligentsia to an international audience. In the preface to the 1965 edition of Pereda Valdés' seminal study, *El Negro en el Uruguay*, Ralph Steele Boggs points out that Pereda Valdés was the pioneer white defender of the Afro-Uruguayan community:

> Una de las páginas más asombrosas de la historia mundial es la de la trasplantación de la raza negra al Nuevo Mundo. Ningún movimiento entre las razas humanas ha creado problemas más difíciles e interesantes. La inteligente comprensión de esos problemas y de la cultura y del folkore de la raza negra la han alcanzado pocos eruditos blancos americanos. Entre los pocos que han tenido éxito es Ildefonso Pereda Valdés quien sobresale no solo por su profundo conocimiento de la raza negra, sino también por el generoso sacrificio de tiempo y ganancia y por el desprecio de todo punto de vista prejuicioso que ha demostrado. Es el deber moral de todos los que sienten la responsibilidad de la conciencia social de comprender y superar esos problemas. Por medio del fino intelecto de Pereda Valdés daremos un paso en esa comprensión (3)
>
> [One of the darkest pages in our world history is the transportation of slaves to the New World. No movement in this world has created more difficult and complex problems. The intelligent understanding of these problems and that of black culture and folklore has reached few white scholars. Among them, the most successful is Pereda Valdés, who is outstanding not only for his profound understanding of the black race but for his generous sacrifice of time and his deep scorn of racial prejudice. It is a moral obligation of everyone to understand and to conquer these problems. By means of his intellect, Pereda Valdés takes us one more step toward that goal...]

Pereda Valdés lamented that the intellectual achievements and contributions of black Uruguayans were suppressed and had escaped serious notice. Fighting against the marginality of the black community, his approach was to show how the general social, cultural, political, and economic contours of Afro-Uruguay came into being. Pereda Valdés began by publishing *La guitarra de los negros* (1926), a collection of poems on black folklore, and in 1929 published *Raza Negra* , an anthology of poetry and songs about black life in Montevideo. *Raza Negra*, published by *La Vanguardia* (1928-1929), one of the earliest black newspapers in Montevideo, is the first book published by a black press. In *Antología de la poesía de la raza negra americana* (1953) Pereda Valdés introduced the writings of four black Uruguayan poets whom he believed deserved consideration, Pilar Barrios, Juan Julio Arrascaeta, Carlos Cardozo Ferreira and Virginia Brindis de Salas. His comprehensive exploration of the black experience, *El Negro en el Uruguay: Pasado y Presente* (1965), highlights the importance of other Afro-Latin writers like the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, the Ecuadorian novelist Nelson Estupiñan Bass, and the Afro-Colombian poet Candelario Obeso. Because of his work, Pereda Valdés forced

Uruguay to rethink its literary and cultural history and to broaden its view of the Hispanic literary canon.

Other white writers like Francisco Merino (1911-1982), founder of Teatro Negro Independiente (Independent Black Theater) in 1963, Andrés Castillo (1920-), who wrote six plays for Merino's Teatro Negro Independiente (Cordones Cook 32), and Rubén Carámbula who began writing on black Uruguayan themes in 1952 (*Negro y Tambor*) and whose most recent work *Candombe* (1995) documents black life in colonial and present day Montevideo, provide their perspectives on the Afro-Uruguayan experience. Their works, like those of Pereda Valdés, reflect the overall interest of the white intellectual community in Afro-Uruguay, their relationship with the black intellectual movement, and define, in particular, the reference points in which black cultural expression by both black and white writers began.

Although Pereda Valdés and I discussed his work and his relationship with the black Uruguayan community,[2] it was Alberto Britos (1915-1999) who captivated me and convinced me that before one could fully understand the Afro-Uruguayan experience, one must explore the role white intellectuals played in the development of this unique literary and cultural movement. Like Pereda Valdés, Alberto Britos spent more than half a century as an ally, advocate and literary defender of the Afro-Uruguayan intelligentsia. A musician, poet, art patron, and teacher, he was the key white patron and contributor to *Nuestra Raza*, *Bahía Hulan Jack*, and *Mundo Afro*. Resultantly, Britos was a consistent link between the black and white communities until his death in 1999.

I met Alberto Britos in Montevideo in October 1991 at the first international conference on Afro-Uruguayan literature, culture and history organized by Beatriz Santos, the black activist and writer. Britos lectured on the literary history of Afro-Uruguay while providing many details of his relationship with the black community, especially with Pilar Barrios, the dean of black letters in Uruguay. However, at the close of his essay, he challenged the authorship of Virginia Brindis de Salas' collections of poetry, *Pregón de Marimorena* (1946) and *Cien cárceles de amor* (1949). Because of his position, I proposed in the article, "Julio Guadalupe vs. Virginia Brindis de Salas: A Question of Authorship" (*Afro-Hispanic Review*, 1993) that Brindis de Salas, the lead female writer of the Afro-Uruguayan intelligentsia, was indeed, the true author of her poetry. Our international literary debate sparked a long friendship. With each visit to Uruguay, he would explain to me the webs of relationships, cultural details of the black community, and the intellectual threads that shaped Afro-Uruguayan discourse. Because of the complexity of the Afro-Uruguayan community and the intertwining of both black and white intellectuals, a close rereading of *Nuestra Raza*, *Bahía Hulan Jack* and *Mundo Afro* documents his role in the literary and cultural shaping of Afro-Uruguay. As a feature writer for *Nuestra Raza*, Britos began his journalistic career with the black press in the 1930s.

In surveying the Uruguayan press in Montevideo during the 1930s and 1940s, Fitzgibbon notes that there were ten daily and three weekly papers, two weekly, one bi-monthly, and one monthly review (186). Several papers such as *El Día*, *El Diario* and *La Mañana* which date from

1917 (the initial year of *Nuestra Raza*) were rather influential and extremely popular. However, Fitzgibbon neglected to mention that at the same time, there were at least five black periodicals in circulation. Based on my research in the national library, the following newspapers were published by the black press: *Rumbo Cierto*, 1944-1945, *PAN*, 1937, the periodical of the first black political party, *Renovación*, 1939-1940, *Revista Uruguay*, 1945-1948, *Orientación*, published in the city of Melo from 1941 to 1945, and *Nuestra Raza*, 1917, 1933-1948. Although most of the black newspapers were short-lived, each was an attempt at responsible journalism and cultural leadership.

Nuestra Raza, the most stable of all the periodicals, provided a model of what could be achieved by black Uruguayans. The paper was regarded as a "periódico social, noticioso-órgano de la colectividad de color" (a social and newsworthy periodical, an organ of the black community). As its mission, it clearly stated that it represented writing from a unique black news perspective "de la raza, por la raza y para la raza" (of the black race, by the black race, for the black race). Like the major Uruguayan papers, *Nuestra Raza* was political, internationally conscious and sports minded. It contained social commentary, book reviews, biographies, historical essays, poetry, plays, and book reviews by both black and white writers. Nonetheless, it attacked the status quo of the period and was itself rooted in the historical antecedents of black Uruguayan history.

Owned and run by the Barrios family, Ventura, Pilar and their sister, María Esperanza, the journal debuted in 1917 in the small village of San Carlos in the Department of Maldonado, an area east of Montevideo on the Atlantic side. Because of operational matters and budgetary constraints, the journal lasted for only twelve months. After its initial debut, the Barrios family reorganized their efforts and in 1933 moved the journal to Montevideo. The first issue of the journal's second stage was published on August 25 of the same year. From the outset, *Nuestra Raza* was directed to those creative intellectuals whom the staff identified as bearing the historic communal responsibility for the cultural and intellectual leadership of black Uruguayans. Pilar Barrios, now editor-in-chief, fostered the original mission of the journal while emphasizing racial solidarity and the advancement of the black community.

As a model, the managerial and editorial staff closely followed the black intellectual movement of the Harlem Renaissance. Therefore, the literary discourse found in the pages of *Nuestra Raza* became a part of the new wave of black expression of the 1930s and 1940s. Along with the poetry of Pilar Barrios, the newspaper introduced the works of other black Uruguayan writers such as Lino Suárez Peña, Isabelino José Gares, Juan Julio Arrascaeta, José Roberto Suárez, Carlos Cardozo Ferreira, Iris Cabral, and Virginia Brindis de Salas while combining them with the works of African and Caribbean writers like Senghor, Leon Damas, Aimé Césaire, Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes, the United States black writer. Together they collectively expressed their racial ideologies and pride in their African ancestry while at the same time challenging the literary and cultural stereotypes in which many white writers had shaped of the black community. This new wave of black expression brought

white and black intellectuals together. White intellectuals like the young journalist Alberto Britos, immediately took notice of the movement and saw the value in the journalistic and literary efforts of the Afro-Uruguayan intelligentsia. Following the steps of Pereda Valdés, Britos began to fight against the aesthetic prejudice of his white contemporaries. But, revising the cultural, literary and journalistic panorama of Uruguay would be a complex and difficult one for many years.

The literary and journalistic discourse of Afro-Uruguay reached a high artistic level during the 1930s and 1940s; yet, the economic and social climate of the period changed the course that the *Nuestra Raza* group would take. Preoccupied with World Wars I and II, the Spanish Civil War, the intervening worldwide economic depression, altering national and international political perspectives and race relations, the staff focused on global affairs, the mood of the country and the political agenda of the black community. For example, in 1937, the *Nuestra Raza* group became even more disillusioned with national politics and the lack of concern for equal opportunity and civil rights. As a result, the members and supporters of *Nuestra Raza* founded the first national black political party, Partido Auctóctono Negro. Considered a militant splinter group, the goals of the party were to help to champion the oppressed and the poor. In the same year, the party declared *Nuestra Raza* as one of the official organs for communication. The journal's responsibility was to convey party and political news to its constituents and to present the political and social views of the Afro-Uruguayan community.

When the party prepared its 1938 slate of delegates and representatives to the National Parliament for the upcoming election, Alberto Britos was asked to serve as an official delegate. In a 1980 interview, Britos explained his participation as the only white member:

> "Fui delegado de mesa electoral, conocía su propaganda, leía lo que publicaba NR sobre el asunto. Vinieron y me dijeron: -Usted tiene que ser Delgado de mesa, - Sí perfecto, no hay nigun [sic] problema." (Graceras 21)
> [I was a delegate of the electoral table, I knew its propaganda, and I used to read what *Nuestra Raza* published about the matter. They came to me and told me: You have to be a delegate- I said yes, of course, no problem].

A winning and strong vote on behalf of the black community would symbolize a progressive black culture and a break from the colonial bondage that stunted its growth. It was estimated by the members of the party that in Montevideo alone there were some 5,000 black citizens who were able to vote. However, with Britos and other white sympathizers as supporters, the party only received 84 votes of the total votes counted for the election. The majority of black voters chose to support the traditional political parties rather than emphasize their racial identity at the ballot box. Consequently, the political loss of the party weakened the concept of black leadership and advancement.

Both the *Nuestra Raza* group and its white allies felt that bringing the educated classes of both races together for cultural and political exchange would lead to the dismantling of racism and would enhance the political clout of the organization. The dream of racial solidarity and unity in

Afro-Uruguay was a dream for which the party longed. Its goal was to define the political, economic, and cultural requisites for black advancement and to recognize even more the uniqueness of the Afro-Uruguayan condition and cultural self-definition. The apparent failure of the 1938 election meant continued struggle for political recognition. Despite the party's political loss, it labored to survive for seven years. Nonetheless, the lack of a convincing and consistent sociopolitical commitment within the black community weakened it even more. The party announced its dissolution in the July 1944 issue of *Nuestra Raza*.

After the dissolution of the party, *Nuestra Raza* reflects an increased preoccupation with the arts although racial concerns were still at the forefront. The result was an expanded paper with a wide range of articles that displayed the talents of black artists at home and abroad, along with local, national, and international political and social events. One new feature was a "book review" column by Alberto Britos. In June 1945, Britos explained to the readership the purpose of the new column, "Libros y Revistas":

> Nos guía el propósito de presentar a los lectores y amigos de NUESTRA RAZA El panorama más completo que nos es dado exponer, de aquellos libros y revistas o periódicos que de una u otra manera contengan material, citas o elementos que a nuestro juicio sirvan para y lorar y acrecentar el conocimiento de la raza negra en todos los campos de la actividad humana. Con ello creemos o aspiramos, por lo menos esa es nuestra intención, a propender dentro de los lectores de NUESTRA RAZA y a sus simpatizantes una mayor comprensión y documentación de todo lo que signifique una valoración para así todos unidos y capacitados con el arma del saber y la justicia poder aspirar a un mundo mejor junto con todos los hombres de todas las razas y de todas las creencias religiosas o sociales (5).
>
> [It is our purpose to present to our readers and friends of *Nuestra Raza* the most complete panorama of books, magazines, newspapers or any other publication that will enhance the knowledge of the black race in every aspect of society and in every professional field... with this column we hope, at least that is our intention, to give the readers of *Nuestra Raza*, a greater understanding of what it means for all to be united, armed with knowledge and justice in order to create a better world for all men and women...]

In his column, Britos reviewed the works of prominent United States and Caribbean black writers such as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, Wallace Thurman, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Nicolás Guillén, Regino Pedroso, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver. By examining these black role models, Britos and the *Nuestra Raza* group wanted to show its readership the breadth and scope of the black intellectual movement. They hoped that the *Nuestra Raza* audience would become interested in having the same aspirations and in achieving the same goals as aspiring progressive black intellectuals abroad.

The year 1946 spearheaded another significant achievement in the history of *Nuestra Raza*, the founding of "El Círculo de Intelectuales, Artistas, Periodistas y Escritores Negros" (CIAPEN). Its main goals involved uniting the creative talents of black intellectuals under one body, thus

their attempt to evolve as the cultural leader of the black Uruguayan community. Since the overwhelming majority of white publishing houses showed absolutely no interest in publishing the work of black authors, the organization decided that it would bring to light the "authentic" cultural talents of Afro-Uruguay in book form. In the July 1947 issue of *Nuestra Raza*, the editorial staff announced the publication of its first book, *Piel Negra*, an anthology of the poetry (1917-1947) of Pilar Barrios with the prologue written by Alberto Britos. In his prefatorial essay, Britos outlines the history of blacks in Uruguay noting the literary achievements of black writers like Juan Julio Arrascaeta, Virginia Brindis de Salas, Horacio Botaro and Elemo Cabral. Britos offers an introduction to Barrios' poetry, and concludes the essay with the hope that this book would inspire others and serve as a concrete example of black intellectual productivity:

> Que "Piel Negra" sea un paso hacia la liberación de la raza negra en el Uruguay y Pilar Barrios habrá ganado su lugar entre los que tuvieron visión en nuestra tierra que tanta sangre ha brindado por la libertad y la independencia política y económica como lo aspira el fundador de nuestra nacionalidad a quien también preocupó grandemente la liberación de la raza negra y su mejoramiento económico y social, y por ende, en lo relativo a la cultura que corren paralelos. (*Piel Negra* 1)
> [May *Piel Negra* be a step toward the liberation of the black race in Uruguay, and may Pilar Barrios earn his rightful place among those who had a vision in our land, may he be hailed among those who shed their blood for our freedom and our political and economic independence, who like our founder shed his blood for our nation...]

Britos' essay and the publication of *Piel Negra* had a profound impact on the Uruguayan literary community. Because of Britos's overwhelming support and his contributions to the newspaper, the *Nuestra Raza* group paid homage to him for his outstanding service. With a full-page photograph of Britos and front-page headlines, the November 1947 issue hailed Britos as an exemplary collague:

> Dinámico integrante del grupo "Nuestra Raza" autor del prólogo de "Piel Negra" y gran animador de todo movimiento que se pronuncie en pro del mejoramiento cultural y social de la raza negra (1).
> [dynamic member of the *Nuestra Raza* group, author of the prologue to *Piel Negra*, great advocate of the movement, which speaks on behalf of the cultural and social improvement of the Black race.]

Britos' support as a white ally helped thrust this remarkable group of black writers into the mainstream of Latin American letters.

Shortly after the appearance of *Piel Negra*, *Nuestra Raza* began to experience a series of obstacles. It was difficult for the *Nuestra Raza* group to duplicate the achievements of black writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the civil rights movements of the United States. Many of the Afro-Uruguayan group's efforts were hindered by the lack of strong financial support, the gradual demise of prominent members of the group and the death of important figures, like the Barrios brothers. As a result, *Nuestra Raza* ceased publication in 1948.

The black intellectual movement of the

1930s and 1940s represented the emergence of a literary sector that would chart the course for a new generation of writers. To that end, *Nuestra Raza*, Afro-Uruguay's longest running periodical, succeeded in laying the foundation for all subsequent depictions in poetry, fiction, drama, and journalism of the modern Afro-Uruguayan experience. During its history, the paper is most noted for organizing the first black political party (Partido Autóctono Negro), the founding of the cultural society, "Círculo de Intelectuales, Artistas, Periodistas y Escritores Negros" (CIAPEN), and the publication of the book, *Piel Negra*. Because of these historical benchmarks, *Nuestra Raza* was the most respected, stable, and entrepreneurial black periodical of the period.

Although the publication of *Nuestra Raza* ended, its lead founder, Pilar Barrios lived until 1974. He along with Alberto Britos and other *Nuestra Raza* advocates kept right on working to start a renaissance of the black intelligentsia. Many attempted to duplicate *Nuestra Raza*, but few of these periodicals survived. It was not until 1958, when the young black activist Manuel Villa (1915-2002) initiated the periodical *Revista Bahía Hulan Jack* that we see another journal that has lasted for more than thirty years. *Bahía Hulan Jack* is filled with articles against racism, discrimination and segregation. Villa's voice became another symbol in the crusade against racial injustice in Uruguay and throughout the world. In addition to Villa's poetry, prose, and editorials, the periodical is filled with articles by Alberto Britos. As he did in *Nuestra Raza*, Britos published book reviews, articles and poetry on black life and culture. Anchored in the black literary traditions, Britos continued to give full voice to the social concerns and problems that faced the Afro-Uruguayan community.

During the publication of *Bahía Hulan Jack*, Britos and Villa lived long enough to see a younger generation chart its course. In 1987, young black activists under the direction of Romero Jorge Rodríguez, began to respond to the social and political problems of Afro-Uruguay, and founded the organization, *Mundo Afro*. Principal among its creators was Alberto Britos who encouraged the *Mundo Afro* group to become guardians of Afro-Uruguayan literature, history and culture and to take the Afro-Uruguayan community to a new level. Upon this foundation, the group initiated the publication *Revista Mundo Afro*. Its first issue was published in August 1988 with Alberto Britos serving as advisor. Much like *Nuestra Raza* and *Bahía Hulan Jack*, *Mundo Afro* represented the ideologies, global concerns, and culture of the Afro-Uruguayan community. An important aspect of the paper was the emergence of new voices such as Beatriz Santos, Beatriz Ramírez, Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, Francisco Guatimi, Rubén Galloza, and Miriam Tamara de la Cruz. Pioneer writers like Ildefonso Pereda Valdés, Manuel Villa and Alberto Britos appeared as guest columnists. In general, the objective of this new generation is to educate the Afro-Uruguayan community about the importance of their contributions to the field of Uruguayan art, literature, history and culture. Most important, *Mundo Afro* stresses the economic and political development of the black community and continues to fight against its marginality.

The economic, political and social conditions of Afro-Uruguay had changed very little since the days of *Nuestra Raza*.

There still were no booklists of mainstream white publishing houses that espoused interest in the works of the Afro-Uruguayan intelligentsia. Therefore, faced with this dilemma, Alberto Britos encouraged *Mundo Afro* to publish the works of its own representative poets under one umbrella. Duplicating the format of Barrios' *Piel Negra, Mundo Afro* published in 1990, *Antología de poetas negros uruguayos*, a comprehensive anthology of Afro-Uruguayan poetry. The text, which opens with an historical essay and prologue by Alberto Britos, is a compilation of poetry published primarily in *Nuestra Raza*, along with the works of the new generation of writers such as Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, the granddaughter of Elemo Cabral, one of the members of the *Nuestra Raza* group, Rubén Rada, Rubén Galloza, Jorge Emilo Cardoso, Manuel Villa, and Tamara de la Cruz. It is now, forty years later, that we find a second book that highlights black achievement.

Mundo Afro's first attempt at publishing a book was very successful. The book received both national and international attention. Because of its popularity, Britos inspired the group to publish a second volume of poetry. In 1995 with Britos as editor, the *Mundo Afro* group expanded the second volume with a prologue by Romero Rodríguez, reviews about the first volume, and an essay by Britos, which summarizes the literary history of Afro-Uruguay. The publication of the book caught the attention of journals outside Uruguay, and Britos makes a point in acknowledging the journal, the *Afro-Hispanic Review*, published in the United States, and other American, European and Uruguayan scholars who brought Afro-Uruguayan literature to a more universal audience. Most important to Britos and to *Mundo Afro* is the overdue recognition given them by the Uruguayan literary community. Critics from *El País* and *La Mañana*, now two of Uruguay's oldest newspapers, hail Britos and *Mundo Afro* for their outstanding efforts. For the first time, the president of the National Academy of Uruguayan letters has acknowledged the literary contributions of Afro-Uruguayans and Britos' work as editor. Arturo Sergio Visca, president of the academy writes:

> *Antología de poetas negros uruguayos*, texto que constituye un aporte sustancial conocimiento socio-cultural de la colectividad negra en el Uruguay...de la cual es autor don Alberto Britos Serrat" Arturo Sergio Visca, presidente de la Academia Nacional de Letras del Uruguay (9).
> [*Antología de poetas negros uruguayos*, is a text that represents an important contribution to the socio-cultural understanding of the black Uruguayan community]

Because Afro-Uruguay has a depository of neglected works and writers, Britos promises a third volume of poetry:

> Esperamos seguir recogiendo material producido antes y ahora por los artistas que han sido ignorados permanentemente por el grupo dominante para formar un tercer tomo de esta antología (15).
> [We hope to continue collecting material produced by black writers who have permanently been ignored by the dominant culture for a third volume of poetry.]

Since the publication of *Nuestra Raza*,

there have been impressive changes in the literary landscape of Uruguay. Even though many of the economic, political and racial problems the *Nuestra Raza* group faced were still with the *Mundo Afro* generation, Britos encouraged this aspiring group of young black intellectuals to avoid the pitfalls of the past and to resolve the important unfinished business that the *Nuestra Raza* group began. Unfortunately, Britos did not live to see a third anthology and the future of this new black cultural and literary renaissance. He died at the age of 84, on October 27, 1999.

From the early 1930s until his death, Alberto Britos, was the foremost white representative of the Afro-Uruguayan community. Perhaps one of the most significant things that can be said about Alberto Britos is that he demanded that Uruguay reflect the reality of its demographics and the true cultural pluralism of his country. But most important, he insisted that the legacy of the *Nuestra Raza* movement would not die. His commitment to the African presence in Uruguay and to the advancement of the Black intelligentsia was at the center of his life. For that reason, he will always be remembered as a strong voice of social, political and ethnic conscience for the Afro-Uruguayan community.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Note

[1]All translations are my own.

[2]I began my relationship with Pereda Valdes in the early 1980s, corresponding by mail, to discuss his work with the Afro-Uruguayan community and his relationship with black writers in the United States.

Works Cited

"Alberto Britos." *Nuestra Raza* November 1947: 1.

Barrios, Pilar. *Piel negra: poesías (1917-1947).* Montevideo: Nuestra Raza, 1947.

Britos, Alberto. "Libros y Revistas." *Nuestra Raza* June 1945: 5.

———. *Antología de poetas negros uruguayos II.* Montevideo: Ediciones Mundo Afro, 1995.

Cordones-Cook, Juanamaría. *¿Teatro negro uruguayo?: Texto y contexto del teatro afro-uruguayo de Andrés Castillo.* Montevideo: Editorial Graffitti, 1996.

Fitzgibbon, Russell H. *Uruguay: Portrait of a Democracy.* London: Ruskin House, 1953.

Graceras, Ulises F. *Informe preliminar sobre la situación de la comunidad negra en el Uruguay.* Montevideo: Instituto de Estudios Sociales, 1980.

Jackson, Richard. *Black Writers in Latin America.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979.

Prosa y poesía
por Gerardo Behori

La tortuga: Rey de los enanitos

Comenzaba ya a asomar su fresco semblante la época lluviosa, cuando el primaveral crepúsculo matutino empezaba a lanzar su brillante maravilla de luz en el albor de una dulce mñana. Y desde los verdifloridos follajes de los esbeltos árboles, las negriblancas golondrinas imprimían su supremacía, emitiendo, con leves chirridos su estridente voz en los aires.

La tortuga, siguiendo sus acostumbradas andanzas, llegó sin darse cuenta a la misteriosa bahia de los Abba, quedándose asombrada ante la escena que se llevaba a cabo en aquel lugar. Observó con increible perplejidad que a orillas del mar habia decenas de enanitos lamentando y llorando amargamente. Observó de igual manera que en el círculo central de los congregados parecía que se llevaba a cabo un ritual funebre; aspecto éste que pudo intuir, debido a las lúgubres sinfonías que emitían las canciones que cantaban los hombresillos.

De repente, notó que crujieron algunas ramas de los árboles que estaban a su alrededor. Y en un abrir y cerrar de ojos, se dio cuenta de que estaba totalmente rodeada por una docena de enanitos; los cuales estaban escondidos en los densos ramajes de los árboles que le circundaban, armados de flechas, jabalinas y otros instrumentos bélicos. Los enanos la cogieron de pies y manos, y la condujeron posteriormente al círculo central de los congregados.

La pobre tortuga sudaba a cántaros, por el susto que se apoderó de todo su cuerpo. Quiso gritar y gritar, mas notó que su voz no conseguía salir de su garganta. Quiso echarse a la fuga, sin embargo se sentía más amarrada que nunca. Y tras hacer un gran esfuerzo, pudo articular algunas cuantas palabras.

"¡Caramba! ¿qué es lo que está pasando aquí, hermanos?"

Pero los enanitos no le contestaron, sin embargo siguió insistiendo el pobre quelonio.

"¿Puedo echaros alguna mano?," volvió a preguntar la aterrada tortuga, viendo las caras graves, y miradas inquietantes que enfocaban sobre ella todos los congregados, los cuales no cesaban de hacerle contorciones de hostilidad.

"¡Báh!, Miren qué aspecto tiene la que habla de echarnos una mano," respondió uno de los hombresillos con acento amenazador e irónico a la vez; refiriéndose por supuesto a su monumental joroba y sus cortas manos. "Tú, de dónde has venido, que hasta ahora no te has enterado de las muertes que han ocasionado en nuestro pueblo los dos tiburones que custodian la mansión de la malvada sirena Loeba?" replicó otro de los enanitos.

La tortuga no sabía qué decir ante esa lluvia de preguntas, y se mantuvo callada en esta delicada situación, pálida como un tronco de árbol. "¿No sabías que esa bruja del mar se ha llevado raptada a la princesa Sese, y la tiene encerrada en una de sus camaras oscuras?" replicó el enanito más joven.

"¿Has venido aquí precisamente a burlarte de nosotros?,o... Y si a eso has venido, como castigo a tu atrevimiento, te echaremos al mar a fin de que seas devorada por los tiburones de la bruja", objetó otro con acento más amenazador todavía.

Ante esta crítica situación, y aprovechando un ligero despiste de los que le tenían sujetado los brazos, la tortuga se echó a la fuga. Y una muchedumbre de hombresillos la siguió, cual si fueran un enjambre de sedientas abejas. en busca del

dulce nectar de las fibres. Cuando ya le faltaba un par de zancadas para poder alcanzar la orilla del cercano río, ¿cuál no fue su desgracia? Su delicada joroba se atrapó entre las tupidas y enredadoras ramas de un árbol, cayendo aparatosamente al suelo. Fue atrapada, atada de pies y manos, y conducida posteriormente al círculo central de los congregados.

Algunos de los presentes decían que había que enterrarla viva; otros, que debían lincharla y colgarla de un árbol; y otros tantos, los más, optaban en darle por sentencia una muerte en el mar, atada a una gran piedra.

La tortuga al principio estuvo muy aterrada, mas cuando oyó la última opción de morir ahogada, se iluminaron sus esperanzas de poder salir viva de este apurado y crítico trance.

Había transcurrido cerca de media hora sin que los enanitos se pusieran de acuerdo, sobre la clase de muerte que debían dar a la impertinente tortuga. Entre el bullicio y griterío de los agitados minihombres, se oyó la mansa y tranquila voz del más viejo, diciendo a los enfurecidos enanos: creo que en esos casos, antes de tomar una decisión tan drástica, deberíamos probar la culpabilidad de la acusada. Debemos saber qué normativas del pueblo de los hombres de los arbustos ha infringido la tortuga, esto en principio; y después, ya decidiríamos sobre una sentencia.

Unos decían que vino a reirse de su condición de enanitos; otros, que la tortuga había dicho que se contentaba con el secuestro de la princesa. Pero el viejo, con la experiencia que tenía, sabía que la tortuga no había infringido ninguna norma de su pueblo; por eso dijo a todos los presentes: Bien, he escuchado todas vuestras argumentaciones y las tengo muy en cuenta, pero yo daré a la tortuga una oportunidad. Amiga tortuga, dijo el viejo, si quieres salvarte el pellejo, tendrás que salvar antes la vida de la princesa de nuestro pueblo; la cual es mi hija. Y como habrás podido apreciar, es única. ¿Dónde está la princesa?, preguntó la tortuga, como si no había estado escuhando lo que decían los minihombres.

Secuestrada por la sirena Loeba, y la tiene en su mansión de debajo de las aguas del remolino, durante poco más de dos días; y falta un par de horas para que acabe con ella, dijo el anciano rey. Pero... ¿sabes nadar amiga?, inquirió el canoso. Si, no... bueno; no del todo bien, mi rey y señor mío, respondió la astuta tortuga. Pero quiero que me explique detenidamente lo que ocurre, porque no entiendo absolutamente nada. Pues de hecho, yo soy el rey de este pueblo discriminado injustamente por los hombres. Ya soy muy viejo, como habrás podido apreciar; y todos estos días el pueblo estaba preparando la fiesta de la coronación de la nueva reina del pueblo de los hombresillos de los arbustos, tal como nos llaman, con cierto desprecio, los demás hombres altos y de cultura más avanzada, según ellos; y mi única hija, es la que debía ocupar mi puesto; y como tienes ya entendido, fue secuestrada por la sirena, recelosa de ésto; y llevándose consigo el amuleto mágico del pueblo.

Hemos mandado docenas de hermanos para rescatar a la princesa, mas todos perecieron por la boca de los tiburones que custodian la entrada de la mansión de la malvada sirena, dijo el anciano. Por ello, en vez de atarte las manos y los pies a una piedra, y echarte al mar, personalmente he decidido levantarte el castigo propuesto por el pueblo. Sólo quiero que rescates a la princesa. Y si no lo consiguieras, se

mantendría en alto la sentencia exigida por mi pueblo.

Yo no sé nadar muy bien, dijo la astuta tortuga, pero haré todo lo posible por rescatar a la princesa, aunque pierda mi propia vida, pero bajo una condición. ¿Cuál es la condición?, preguntó el anciano. Yo acepto cualquier condición, con tal que me traigas viva y sana a la princesa y el amuleto mágico del pueblo de los hombres de los arbustos; porque debes saber que sin el amuleto sagrado, tampoco mi hija podría gobernar el pueblo. Pues, si salvo a la princesa de las garras de la sirena, recuperando así mismo el amuleto mágico de vuestro poder, pongo como primera condición el casarme con ella; y en segundo lugar, deberéis proclamarme rey del pueblo de los hombres de los arbustos. Pero... ¿tú sabes nadar?, le volvió a preguntar el anciano rey. No del todo bien, volvió a responder la tortuga. ¿Y cómo te va a valer para poder rescatar a la princesa y el amuleto? Pues en gerundio, le respondió la tortuga. ¿Y qué quiere decir esto?, inquirió el anciano rey. Pues rescatándola. Esta es una promesa que he hecho ante todo vuestro pueblo y la cumpliré, aunque me cueste la propia vida.

Antes de hacerse a la mar, la tortuga pidió que le permitiesen ir al bosque para buscar unas hojas y demás sustancias con el fin de hacer un compuesto químico. Se lo permitieron, sin embargo custodiada por unos hombresillos armados con flechas, arcos y demás utensillos bélicos. La tortuga, tras hacer sus compuestos, untó el líquido resultante sobre su joroba, dándola un color rojo brillante y muy pegajoso.

La tortuga, excelente nadadora y conocedora de todas las regiones marinas, se dirigió derechita a un gran remolino de aguas, lugar donde se pasaba para ir a la mansión de la malvada sirena. Una vez que llegó ante el portal de la gran mansión de la sirena, uno de los tiburones, al ver el tinte rojo que lucía sobre el caparazón, se lanzó como una jabalina sobre ella, con la firme resolución de acabar con lo que pensaba que era otro hombresillo de los arbustos, mordiendo y sacando gran porción de la joroba de la astuta tortuga. Y la porción de arbol que componía su joroba, se quedó entre las dos mandíbulas del tiburón, debido al tinte pegajoso de las hojas de su compuesto químico. La tortuga aprovechó esta conyuntura para clavarle un par de aguijones, dejándolo muerto al instante. El otro tiburón, hizo otro tanto, mordiendo y sacando toda la joroba que quedaba de la tortuga; y le volvió a clavar los restantes aguijones.

Tras salvar este primer y único obstáculo, entró tranquilamente en la mansión de la sirena encontrándola dormida. En cuanto a la princesa, observó que estaba atada de pies y manos con unas gruesas cadenas. La desató, atando a la malvada sirena con las mismas cadenas con que estaba atada la princesa, conduciéndola a las orillas del mar ante el mayor asombro de los presentes; los cuales, no cesaban de vitorearla.

Después, volvió a mar arrastrando a tierra a los dos tiburones muertos, llevándose consigo el amuleto sagrado, símbolo del poder y grandeza de los enanos.

Este era el día fijado para la coronación de la princesa, como reina del pueblo de los hombres de los arbustos y cavernas. El anciano rey cumplió su promesa de ofrecerle a la princesa por esposa suya, y el mismo pueblo lo proclamo rey, por sus méritos. Se celebró una gran fiesta, de las pocas habidas en el pueblo de los hombresillos de los arbustos, con vítores

y vivas a la tortuga salvadora, viva la vencedora de los tiburones y la malvada sirena Loeba.

Asaron a los tiburones en presencia de la sirena, la cual estaba atada de pies y manos en una gruesa rama del árbol que se encontraba en el centro de la plaza cultural de la aldea de los hombres de los arbustos, con la cabeza hacia abajo, donde murió de pena y dolor.

La tortuga y la princesa vivieron muy felices, y tuvieron muchos hijos, los cuales, eran muy hermosos. Y como quiera que la tortuga es un animal que vive muchos años, la tortuga gobernó el pueblo de los hombresillos de los arbustos, durante más de dos siglos, siendo rey de muchas generaciones de enanitos, abuelo de muchos nietos, bisabuelo de innumerables bisnietos y tatarabuelo de incontables tataranietos.

POESÍA

Marcha del amado

Y él se fué,
Y sus mezquinos ojos
Rodaron balanceantes
Sobre mi congestionada
Tez, barriendo
Mis azabacheadas pupilas,
Sumidas en el inmolado
Oasis de mi apasionado
Y recóndito gemir.

Y se marchó,
Se marchó robando
Las escarlatas azucenas
De mi ternura, dejándome
Solo el alucinante escozor,
Que burbujea quemándome
Noche y día las entrañas.

Y entre los tétricos
Remansos de la satírica noche
Acudo, rebuscando el sosiego
Dc mi maltrecho suspiro,
Donde mi implacable llanto,
Replegará los tristes tréboles
De su enlutado y triste calvario.

Eternidad

Eternidad,
Remanso de lo continuo
Y constante que no se remonta
En ningún principio ni fin.
Todo fluye radiando
Perpetuidad de lo incorporeo,
Carente de tiempo ni lugar.

Eternidad,
Remanso inmune que soslaya
El tiempo: el presente y futuro.
Todo flota y desliza
En un presente estático; fruto
De una inmensa sabiduría
Ingenua.

Eternidad,
Regazo de penas y consuelos
Tras el óbito de lo cognoscente
Y corpóreo, entreluciendo
El peso de su paso pasajero.

Eternidad,
Coherencia del aliento
En el más allá, prohijado
En la redundancia de la eterna
Y dulce gloria, o en dramático
Y cruel castigo.

¿Dónde estás Africa mia?

La añoranza y la nocturna soledad,
Parecían envejecer más y más aquellos
Corazones, colgados en la desábrida

Tristeza del eterno deambular de su vedada
Existencia. Y postrados ante el altar
De las abluciones, apiñábanse
Las arrugadas y enjutas caritas,
Sollozando y succionando el dolorido pesar
Que pesaba sobre su incierto y
desconocido destino.

II

Las incoloras láminas de sus
desorbitantes
Ojos desplazábanse vertiginosamente
Cual desesperantes torrentes, que se
precipitan
En la certera órbita de su adulterado fortín:
Remanso de su eterna agonía, donde la
sangre
De su esencia se infiltraba tintineante
sobre
Los punzantes suelos de la pestilente
embarcación.

III

Cuando las sombras de la oscura noche
Resbalaban sobre el negrioscuro aroma
De la grotesca crueldad del implacable
océano,
Vertías en ella la huella de tu drástico
recuerdo,
Recordando..., recordando la lejana Africa:
Perdida en La ilusión de tu maltrecha vida.

¡Ay! ¿Quién te sentenció ser, oh esencia
De mi rasgada alma?, esclavo del fúlgido
sol,
Sombra del lucero nocturno, tortura
De Ia inofensiva natura, sellado reflejo
De angustias, y oscura silueta de tu
derrota.

V

La noche loca de sombras y de sangre,
Se desploma desmayándose en sus negros
Espejos de azabache, sumergiéndose bajo
Los andenes de su sombra escarlata.
Tras exprimir la diamantina esencia de sus
días,
Camina enjuto e indómito hacia su propio
martirio,
Dejando en el espacioso tiempo las
borrosas huellas
De su recóndito pasado, donde el rugir de
tam-tam
Confirmaba su real existencia.

Identidad perdida

I

¡Ay que se va!
Que se va perdiendo
Por los requicios
Que el espacioso tiempo
Deja caer en las carcajadas
De sus fecundas caricias.
¡Ay que se nos escapa!
Se nos escapa por esos
Musgosos andenes
De la voluptuosa sinrazón,
Donde el vaho desencajado
Del ruinoso tiempo,
Intenta extender su ondulado
Silencio sobre aquellos
Sesos demacrados y tristes
De nuestros ancestros.

II

¿Dónde estas o luz
De mi perdida identidad,
Que se va diluyendo como gota
De amarga agonía, en la hondura
De la enigmática e inmensa mar?

Perenne prado de valores
Olvidados que se pierden bajo
La desabrida almizcle,
o en la infinidad de la enigmática
Mar como aquel horizonte gris.

III

Del ayer luz y valor.
Hoy sombra de angustias y pesares.
¿Y mañana...? Prado mortal
De esencias olvidadas se convertirá,
Donde la brisa nocturna
En su involuntario rezumar,
Llorará su triste desdicha sin ocultar
Sus tristes recuerdos, que se evaporaron
En su sombra oscura del alma.

IV

Y su luz desmantelada,
Rasgará los sacros imperios
De su demacrado y olvidado
Génesis, martilleando
Con su dulce y tierna agonía
Sus gemidos en la sórdida
Penumbra, en esa penumbra
del remordimiento.
En su livido rostro canta
Huyendo con su melodía
El aullido del viento, silvando
El tenue rumor de esas viejas
Tradiciones, enquistadas
En el baúl de su olvidado pamaso.

V

Su desvencijada alma, algún día,
Recitará en su púlpito su añorada
Identidad, perdida en la penumbra
De su trauma. Y su áureo éxito,
Volará sin ataduras en aquel espumoso
espacio que disipa los descomunales
Brazos de las oscuras sombras.

VI

Soplará el languido viento;
Y en la flor de sutil silbido
Cantará su gloria, en el laureado
Lucero de la desbosquejada
Y colorida senda, derramando
Junto a las oteantes palmeras
Su dulce euforia, que se esparcirá
Por los calcinados albores
De su colondo y policromado augurio.

Anhelo

Cuando se rompa el alba
En diamantinas hiladuras blancas,
Y su mágico carnaval chorree
Desde su divino púlpito
Sus celosos y mosáicos versículos,
Arremangaré los verdosos
Pétalos de las florres, ataviándolos
De floridos garabatos; y no hallaré
Sino en sus sedosos y plácidos
Labios la ternura de mi tierna vida.

Cuando la riscosa primavera
Rompa con su delicado ámbar
Las cadenas de su pálida gruta,
Y los esqueléticos y enjutos
Arboles tiriteen en las carcajadas
De su euforia recobrando
Sus multicoloras floraciones,
Los campos se engalanarán también
De sus verdifloridos ornamentos.

Y yo, rodeado de las ninfas del recuerdo,
Remendaré los adulterados poemas
De los rasgados abanicos del tiempo,
En la linda esbeltez de su apasionado
Suspiro, que adormecerá bajo
Mis humildes y frágiles versitos.

Retrato invernal

El cielo escupe
Cristalinos gajos de percal
Que sesgan la nítida palidez
Del achacoso firmamento,
Ataviándolo más y más de finas
Espumillas de nivea blancura.

Dejan en su atildado
Paso delicadas huellas
De imperceptibles sonidos,
Que rotulan sus finas plumillas
Meciéndose, rítmica
Y cándidamente sobre
Los desnudos brazos de la tierra,
Ebria de blancura,
Por donde abrazan su remanso.

Y el espacio, ataviado
De una increíble frigidez sepulcral,
Estrecha sus heladas hilachas
Sobre su febril y siniestra agonía.

Los días transcurren
Soñolientos; y la retahíla
De coloreados arbustos
Pierde el atavío de sus brazos,
Festejando su desnuda esbeltez.

Germina el aire plomizo
Agonizando en su resuello
De impúdicos garabatos, rasgando
Con sus arremolinados mechones
La frigidez del fatídico tiempo.

Retrato primaveral

Ya están las plácidas
Hojas de nuevo colgándose
De sus demacrados
E hipocondrosos racimos.
Y sus aceitunados retratos,
Estornudan lamiendo lenta
Y rítmicamente el vaivén
De las volátiles
Alas del cándido cefiro.

Y entre los sutiles
Porros de los ultrajados
Barbechos, surge
La verdioliva fragancia
De las níveas azucenas,
Que recrean su dilatado
Y embriagado triunfo,
En la rotonda de su encanto.

Y por ahí, sobre
El lánguido paladar
De la desvencijada
Y rugosa tierra, las níveas
Y sensibles margaritas,
Las bermejas amapolas
Y las rosadas rosas,
Se erigen bordando la florida
Primavera, sobre las púas
De la despeinada plataforma
De los raídos y crispados
Labios de los campos.

Bajo los escombros de mi tierra
(Canción)

I
Con las playas de Formosa,
Con las carcajadas de Iladji,
Quisiera soñar.
Y tras alborear el día,
Las pupilas del tiempo
Quisiera palpar.

II

Y cual si fueran palomas,
Mis herrantes falacias
Volaron sobre el mar.

Y bajo el sol de primavera,
Mi mundana esencia
Estrenó su cantar.

III

Yo sembré una flor
Bajo los escombros de mi tierra,
Que rebusca sin tregua
La amarga ribera de su libertad.
Y después floreció
Como un oasis del desierto,
Que espera anhelante los sordos
Lamentos de los dromedarios.

Silencio

Silencio...
Refracción suspensa
En el meditabundo enigma
Del pensamiento, donde
La dulce voz del alma explora
Los alegóricos avatares
De su existencia.
Sssh..., silencio...

Silencio...,
Sueño aletargado
Del universo. Alucinante
Sosiego del tiempo
Que en deleitoso carnaval,
Retrata su mudo jolgorio
Sobre la inercia de su canto.
sssh..., silencio...

¿Será acaso el silencio
Semilla de paz, oráculo
Del sosiego o suspiro del alma?
No siempre el silencio
Deletrea la ternura y sosiego
Del ser, donde su imperceptible
Eco cante una fugaz melodía
De nardoso encanto.
Sssh..., silencio...

Hay silencios que inmolan
El remoto silabeo
De su propia existencia,
Extinguiendo su anhelada liberación.

Cuando mi alma se desprenda
Del despótico cuerpo, y perciba
En su liberada esencia las verdifloridas
Semillas de lo eterno, navegará hacia
El rítmico y musical silencio, donde
Germinan los encantos de la nítida paz.
Sssh..., silencio...

Naufragio

Entre las recias trenzaduras
Del viento, van los bramidos
Y hondulados latidos del furioso
Gigante; cual enroscados flecos, trepa
Mordiendo las escarpadas riberas
Que relinchan, abrazándose
En escandalosas carcajadas
A las llorosas y barbosas hebras,
Que espolean picando los raídos porros
De las naúfragas y rechonchas costas.

Entre los susurrantes brazos
De las melancólicas olas, ¡Ay qué pena!
Va aleteando en desesperante impotencia
La aterrada silueta de una delicada flor,
Donde el eco de su corcovado chapoteo
Sepulta sus ahogados plañidos,
En el titiritero y fatídico naufragio,
Viendo alejarse el velero volátil
Que intentaba salvar las falacias de sus sueños.

Sorbiendo de tu cáliz

Bebiendo de tu cáliz,

Embriagado me quedé sobre
Tus alucinantes
Y soñolientas orillas, por donde
Ungía las cenicientas
Auroras de tu sino perfumado.

Bebiendo de tu cristalina
Fuente cuando la noche se vuelve loca,
El sacro tiempo deja de existir
Sobre los andenes de su paraíso,
Donde tus eufóricas salmodias
atavíanse de rosadas rosas.

Me diluyo en la hondura
De tu remanso, derritiendo
Mi nivea silueta que,
En tintineante aleteo, riega
Tu ebúrneo jardín en el confuso
Repiqueteo de tus copiosos sollozos.

Me zambuyo en la infinidad
De tus mares, succionando tu fermosura
toda. Y tú, en pausados y sordos
Sorbitos, absorbes mis borrachos
Garabatos que, en enigmático salto,
Se incrustan en la letanía eterna
De tus dulces plegarias.

Bebiendo de tu cárdena belleza
El silencio se vuelve eterno.
Y esas azabacheadas noches oscuras
Tiemblan golpeando con sus lúgubres
Latidos mi triunfante y fiel aurora,
Endulzada por tu rocío matinal.

Cantos de la natura

El crepuscular silbido
Del tiempo percibo,
Bajo la lánguida y errabunda
Natura, que cual lloroso violín
Desgrana sin cesar sus cristalinos
Versos, desde el cenit
De su melódico y azulado púlpito.

La dulzura de sus estrotofas
Voy tejiendo, a través
De las coloreadas sinfonías
De las multicoloras aves
Que, recitan la vehemente melodía
Azul de los que la vida desheredó.

Los arroyuelos muertos
En sempiterna risa, van retrenzando
Su dilatada letanía camino
Del martirio, hundiéndose más y más
En la tierna desnudéz de la mar.

Por doquier, cantan las nardosas
Luciérnagas en sus parpadeantes
Seducciones, dejando
Su bermeja silueta sonidos de flor.

Ya no quiero que se detenga
El tiempo en el atrio de su cosmos;
Porque deseo seguir percibiendo
El sacro rosario de las concordantes
Sinfonías del universo.

POETRY

March of the Loved One

And he left...,
And his stingy eyes rolled
Swaying over my congested
Complexion, biting my jet-black
Trinkets, sunken in the immolated
Oasis of my impassioned
And secret moan.

And he left...,
He left robbing the snow-white
Lilies of my tenderness,
Leaving me only the hallucinating
Affliction that bubbles,
Burning my entrails night and day.

And between the dismal arms
Of the satirical night I attend,
I carefully search out
The serenity of my wounded
Sigh, where my heartbroken
Cry will fold back the sad clovers
From its mournful agony.

Eternity

Eternity, backwater of the
Continuous and constant that
Doesn't return to a beginning
Or end. All flows radiating the
Perpetuity of the incorporeal,
Lacking neither time nor place.

Eternity, immune eddy that
Wards off time, the past and the
Future; everything floats
And slips in a static present, fruit
Of an immense Naive Wisdom.

Eternity, lap of woe and comfort,
After the demise of the understood
And corporeal, showing through
The weight of its fleeting step.

Eternity, coherence of the breath
From the afterlife, adopted
In the redundancy of eternal
And sweet Glory, or in dramatic
And cruel punishment.

Dusk

Already the day goes
Interweaving its
Exodus under the blue-red
Awning of the sky.
It hurries itself trembling
Into the abyss of its
Impotence, and its
Desperate cry folds
Back its grayish face.

Already the day goes
Beating the small defeats
From its wrinkled
Cinder, where embers
Begin the grieving
Sobs of crickets.

And there on a corner
Of sunset, the jealous
Circle dies after the dawn
Serenade, brandishing
its miserable reminiscences.

Faith and Hope

The longed day will arrive,
In which my essence
will fly into the calm
Reign of science,
conquering the evil
Murmur that time
Pours over my awaited
Triumph, where
My emotions are seduced.

The awaited day will arrive,
In which that mundane
Firefly, galloping
On its ethereal way,
Will embellish that cloudy
Twilight of my essence,
Converting it into a grassland
Of brilliant laurels of science.

Beautiful Birds

They fly and fly dreaming
On the summit of their panting
Aspirations, flooding the air
with multiple symphonies.

They fly and fly threshing

The perpetual recital
Of their delightful poems,
That enrich the greetings
Of an intuited creator
Of its natural essence.

Crossing immense valleys,
They search for the fruits
That the pleasing spring allows
To fall from its sensible details.

They dream with their song
On the riverside, nesting
Themselves in the foliage
And valleys of their eternal
And florid spring.

Orphan's Elegy

Pieces of distant echoes
Of fatalist destiny print its
Iron label on the distressing
Heart of tender essence,
Transformed into a mirror
Of sadness, bitterness
Of the sterile memory,
And anxiety of the perpetual
Sob of a tasteless childhood.

Soul suspended
In sleep-walking memory
Of a hated loneliness,
like a drop of bitter sorrow
That bastes the lugubrious
Certainty in constant
Torrents of misfortune.

Oh poor and suffering orphan!
Longing for what he lost
In the unjust semidarkness,
Yearning for the small
Warmth of a kind mother,
And the faithful protection
Of a generous father.

Rivers

Constant zigzag of frigid
And crystalline sheets,
That whisper their fruition
To the leafy warble
Of their vast trance.

Impetuous riverbed
Dead in an eternal laugh
In its involuntary
And constant whistle,
Like incessant and fragile
symphonies of happy
Enchantments, converting
Its congruent leaps
To vast beards, that bubble
Their abundance
and fullness, carefully
Searching for its longed
For backwater under
The rapid sneeze of waterfall.

Whiteness of Morning

On the beautiful crystal of the sky,
And lost beneath the concave and convex
Clouds, it trembles the whiteness
Of morning on its lonesome way, opening
Its eternal fan. Time slips flying
On the forgetful trails of its clotted orbit.

The beautiful whiteness liberates
Its sharp and transparent harmony
Defeating the dark shadow; and wetting
With its soft kisses the eternal dawn
That languishes, whose jealous
symphonies
Attempt to be a new day.

Like an iris of light and splendor,
Crosses and outwits the hollowed space
Of lonely time, traveling the unforgettable
Parnassus of its melodic eddy.

Climb groaning jealously into the
splendor
Of its chords, smiling and fulminating
The black cloud that attempts to darken
The dreams of its life.

Night of Fire

Monotone of jingling
Stars adorn delighting
The beautiful and
awakened night;
And blinking in the limpid
Harmony of the flattering
And coquettish sky,
Mold their lucid humming
In the radiant sneeze of time.

The limpid moon trembles
Beneath its spacious
Fallacy, sprinkling with
Its melodies the dark
Shadows on the road of its
Longed and lascivious fortune.

Songs of Nature

The twilight whistle of perceived time
Under the languid and vagabond nature,
Such as a tearful violin, threshes without
End its crystalline verses from the zenith
Of its melodic and bluish pulpit.

The sweetness of its verses I go touching,
Through the colored songs of the small
Multicolored birds, which recite the
gloomy
Melody of those that life has disinherited.

The rills dead in an eternal laugh go
Re-braiding their dilated litany
Of walks martyred, collapsing more
And more into the nakedness of the sea.

The fireflies sing in their sharply
Winking seductions, leaving their
Vermillion silhouette sounds of flowers.

I do not want time to stop in the
Atrium of its cosmos, because I desire
To pursue perceiving the sacred rosary
Of the concordant symphonies of the
universe.

Gerardo Behori is an Equatorial Guinean activist and writer who resides in Florida.

New Book

Daughters of the Diaspora: Afra-Hispanic Writers

Miriam DeCosta-Willis

ISBN 976-637-077-X
6 x 9 • 432 pages • US$24.95
Ian Randle Publishers, Kingston
Publication date: Fall 2002

Daughters of the Diaspora: Afra-Hispanic Writers is a unique collection of creative and scholarly writing that traces a literary tradition forged by Spanish-speaking women of African descent in the Caribbean, Africa and Latin America. Reflecting upon issues of ethnicity, sexuality, social class and self-representation, these writers shape a revolutionary discourse that questions and subverts historical assumptions and literary conventions.

Unlike most anthologies, this collection includes a variety of genres. It gives voice to writers through interviews and memoirs, provides English translations of representative texts, gives information on the lives of writers, traces the historical evolution of a body of literature and offers theoretical contexts for understanding the literature through interpretive essays by literary critics. Overall, it adds an important chapter to the literary history of women in Africa and the Americas by recovering the texts of forgotten and neglected writers such as Uruguayan Virginia Bindis de Salas, placing seminal figures like Puerto Rican Julia de Burgos and Cuban Nancy Morejon within a broad discursive tradition, and focusing attention on the emerging writers such as Dominican Sherezda Vicioso and Christina Cabral of Uruguay.

ORDER FORM

Order at the special pre-publication price of US$20.00!

Please send me _____ copies of DAUGHTERS OF THE DIASPORA: AFRA-HISPANIC WRITERS

Amt Paid $_____ cheque enclosed ☐ Please send me invoice ☐

Credit Card # _____ Visa☐ MasterCard ☐ Expiry Date _____

Name_____

Address _____

_____

E-Mail _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Mail or fax form to: Ian Randle Publishers
11 Cunningham Avenue, Kingston 6, Jamaica
Phone (876) 978-0745, 978-0739 Fax: (876) 978-1156
E-mail sales@ianrandlepublishers.com
www.ianrandlepublishers.com

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

TO: **PALARA**
Romance Languages
143 Arts and Science
University of Missouri-Columbia
Columbia, Missouri 65211
USA

Institution _____ $20.00 per year

Individual _____ $12.00 per year

Enclosed is my check for _____. **Please do not send cash.**

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____