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Performable Nations: Music and Literature in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century

Cuba, Brazil, and the United States

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

by

Bethany Renee Beyer

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Performable Nations: Music and Literature in Late Nineteenth-and Early Twentieth-Century  
Cuba, Brazil, and the United States

by

Bethany Renee Beyer

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Elizabeth Marchant, Chair

As key examples from Cuba, Brazil, and the United States show, ideology can play a significant role in how literature is adapted into dramatic musical works such as zarzuela or opera. The chosen literary texts and musical works in this inquiry differ greatly and come from distinct language traditions. Yet, each reveals parallel narrative anxieties about national origin and racial identity, and attempts to resolve those anxieties. Each example also shows how cultural products such as operas can be used to reshape and narrate the past for ideological purposes. Questions of adaptation—particularly those involving turning the literary genre into the dramatic—affect a work’s presentation and life after the stage lights have dimmed. Who sponsors a work, what means of communication advertise it, and what reviews it receives also matter greatly in how a piece is perceived.

The works in this study vary from the nineteenth-century “national” novels of Cuba (Cirilo Villaverde’s *Cecilia Valdés*, 1882) and Brazil (José de Alencar’s *O guarani*, 1857) to a play from the Harlem Renaissance (Langston Hughes’s *Emperor of Haiti*, 1936) and their respective adaptations into zarzuela or opera in the 1930s. During this decade artists in the three nations revisited fundamental nineteenth-century texts and historical events, reworking them into musical theater works. In recent years, many scholars have explored the foundational nature of nineteenth-century novels in the Americas, focusing on how narratives can create and refigure stories of national formation. Others have examined the development of opera or zarzuela, often concentrating on a single nation per study. These investigations have illuminated questions of performance history, circulation of cultural forms, and exchanges between “high” and “mass” culture, among others. Yet, a lacunae exists in terms of understanding why composers and librettists chose these particular texts and how they transformed them from the literary to the dramatic genre by reworking characters, conveying stories through song and dance, and heeding or flouting operatic or zarzuelistic norms. This dissertation puts non-musical texts and dramatic musical works from three nations and language traditions into dialogue with one another within a comparative and diasporic frame. The interdisciplinary analysis demonstrates that performance proves to be as important as literature in forging bonds of community and also as powerful a medium for reinventing the past for ideological purposes.

The dissertation of Bethany Renee Beyer is approved.

Adriana Bergero

Jorge Marturano

Roger Savage

Elizabeth Marchant, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

To my familia

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## BIBLIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

Bethany R. Beyer holds a B.A. in Comparative Literature and Latin American Studies from Brigham Young University, as well as Master of Arts degree from the same institution. She served as the Teaching Assistant Consultant in the UCLA Department of Spanish & Portuguese and was the recipient of the department's Del Amo Fellowship and the Ben and Rue Pine Travel Grant. She was awarded a FLAS Fellowship for Portuguese. She has published on issues relating to Latin American literature and has co-organized conferences on Cuban Studies and Judeo-Spanish Studies.

La sangre hierve en mis venas,  
soy mestiza y no lo soy.

The blood boils in my veins,  
I am mestiza and I am not.<sup>1</sup>

Cecilia Valdés, Agustín Rodríguez and José  
Sánchez-Arcilla, 13, Cuban zarzuela,<sup>2</sup> 1932

## INTRODUCTION

### FROM PRINT TO PERFORMANCE IN THE AMERICAS

One afternoon, as I sat in Old Havana near the colonial-era Palacio de los Capitanes Generales I observed a small group of musicians seated in the shade, softly conversing with one another and waiting for passing tourist groups for whom they would play. Their usual repertoire, as I had noted after several days of eating my lunch nearby, included “Guantanamera” and songs from the *Buena Vista Social Club* CD, popular with foreign visitors. Although no tourists were near, to my surprise the musicians spontaneously began playing “Yo soy Cecilia” from Gonzalo Roig’s zarzuela *Cecilia Valdés* (1932), known to many Cubans but likely unknown to most tourists that stroll up and down Obispo Street. The song ended, and was soon replaced by more standard fare. The epigraph above, which comes from this song, presents a moment when the protagonist, Cecilia Valdés, reveals her uncertainty about her identity, an uncertainty tied to her race and position as a biracial woman living in colonial Havana. Given the zarzuela’s historical and cultural significance as a canonical Cuban work, the quote brings to the forefront *mestizaje*, a subject of importance in Cuba and throughout the Americas.

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<sup>1</sup> This and all subsequent translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Zarzuelas are theatrical presentations that originated in Spain. They can be either tragic or comedic, usually vary in length from one to three acts, and include scenes with music, spoken dialogue, and sometimes dance.

The identity of a people—whether constructed in terms of race, ethnicity, or nation—is often impacted by music and print texts. Musical works are as important as literature in forging bonds of community, and that they are equally as powerful a medium for reinventing traditions. Music’s affective power makes it a “key resource for realizing personal and collective identities” (Turino 221). It can evoke nostalgia and memories, provoke emotion, and signal recognition, all important aspects in maintaining an identity, be it personal or collective. Print texts and print languages, as Benedict Anderson has explained in *Imagined Communities*, have contributed greatly to the idea of “nation” in the Americas and beyond. This study considers a selection of print texts shaped by specific historic, political, and social conditions that were adapted into zarzuela or opera in Cuba, Brazil, and the United States in order to understand why the texts were adapted, what narratives the dramatic musical works project, and how such pieces were used ideologically.

Exploring works from different nations and genres proves essential to understanding the cultural tensions that arise and the both productive and deleterious resolutions that result from adapting literary texts into dramatic musical forms. The print texts vary from the so-called national novels of Cuba and Brazil—*Cecilia Valdés* (1882) and *O guarani* (1857)—to a Harlem Renaissance play about the Haitian Revolution, *Emperor of Haiti* (1936). The 1930s musical adaptations considered in this study transform these texts about racial and national identity by changing and/or streamlining key plot elements, and in doing so, they attempt to assuage anxiety over how such identities are constituted. They include the Cuban zarzuela *Cecilia Valdés* (1932), the Brazilian opera *Il Guarany* (1870, and a distinct version in 1935), and the Harlem Renaissance operas *Ouanga* (1932) and *Troubled Island* (1939).

The two nineteenth-century novels (and their respective musical adaptations) treat events from invented, fictional pasts. *Cecilia Valdés*, by Cirilo Villaverde, presents a tangled web of family relationships and shows the ominous results of racial, social, and gender inequality in Havana in the early 1800s. *O guarani*, by José de Alencar, takes place in sixteenth-century colonial Brazil and presents a series of conflicts between indigenous and European groups that eventually end with an indigenous-Portuguese union that brings into being a new “mestizo” Brazil. The play *Emperor of Haiti*, the basis for the opera *Troubled Island*, imaginatively re-presents events and historical characters from the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and tells the story of revolutionary leader Jean Jacques Dessalines’s meteoric rise to power and his abysmal fall. The opera *Ouanga*, completed a few years before *Troubled Island*, is not an adaptation but an original work and also narrates Dessalines’s life and provides a valuable point of comparison to *Troubled Island*.

Over time artists in the three nations have reacted differently to legacies of colonialism and slavery, and have contributed to creating distinct identities through cultural products in literature, music, the plastic arts, etc. These cultural expressions contribute to shaping identity by determining which racial, ethnic, or national groups are included in or excluded from the “national” family, fashioning heroes and villains, and establishing common foundational stories. The literary texts and musical works examined in this study represent significant examples of cultural products that have been strategically deployed by governments (in the case of Brazil) or by the artists themselves to shape ideas about who belongs to the national family.

In each nation the desire to construct a unique identity impacted the written texts and their dramatic musical adaptations. In her discussion of slavery and subjugation in the United States, Hartman enquires as to the “political imperatives . . . [that] informed the construction of

national memory” (11). A similar query applies to Cuba and Brazil, two nations with legacies of slavery, colonialism, and strategically constructed national memory. Such legacies impacted artistic expression. Nineteenth-century Cuban artists living under colonialism worked to differentiate themselves from Spain, and their heirs attempted to do the same in the next century, with the United States. In the 1800s Brazilian artists sought recognition from Europe, and in the 1900s the government encouraged the construction of a Brazilian identity that hearkened back to nineteenth-century monarchism and its preferred cultural forms. In the 1920s and 1930s, Harlem Renaissance artists explored the history and heroes of a nation, Haiti, which celebrated its African heritage and asserted freedom and equality for enslaved persons long before their own nation. In doing so they went against the “political imperatives” that had impacted the foundation of their nation’s memory, and projected an alternative national narrative.

Gema Guevara asserts that a desire for uniqueness affected Cuban artists’ and intellectuals’ narration of their cultural history in the early twentieth century (270). This observation could equally apply to intellectuals in Brazil and the United States: at distinct historical moments artists narrated the histories of their respective nations through cultural products such as literature, zarzuela, and opera. The operas and zarzuela under consideration were the products of an international context, influenced by the cultural forms and traditions of various nations, and can be best understood by taking into account the specific historical and cultural conditions that led to their production. All of the examples represent historical storytelling; such storytelling, Ricoeur argues, is justificatory and hence ideological, although not necessarily dissimulating.

In presenting their narratives, the print texts and musical works in question justify a great deal for ideological purposes. Storytelling can strategically monumentalize the past in distinct

ways, to the benefit or to the detriment of a specific group. For example, the novel *Cecilia Valdés* presents Cuban slavery somewhat ambiguously and punishes its Afro-Cuban heroine for breaking with established societal codes. *O guanari* glosses over the genocide of indigenous peoples that it deems as “villainous,” and dissembles the conquest of Brazil. The play *Emperor of Haiti* sanitizes and glorifies Dessalines’s violent rise to power and the consequences of his forceful leadership in order to present the Haitian Revolution as a utopian choice. These particular non-musical texts and their musical adaptations work with or against the powers in each nation as they monumentalize the past.

When composers and librettists put nationalistic narrations to music, they orally retell stories that are aesthetic experiences and that can be employed strategically. Such narrations can contribute to shaping the national narrative and construct a past according to the artists’ visions. Ricoeur’s discourse on narratives and forgetting aids in understanding how cultural expressions like operas and the songs in them can be strategically deployed by those in positions of power, be it a composer or a president. “The strategies of forgetting,” Ricoeur states, can be employed in order to “recount differently, by eliminating, by shifting the emphasis, by recasting the protagonists of the action in a different light along with the outlines of the action” (448). Such strategies can be implemented literally in musical dramatic works to reshape ideas through performance. The questions of who supported such works, and how they were received merit careful attention, especially since these expressions of cultural identity also had political and/or social impacts.

By capitalizing on the aesthetic experiences created by the dramatic musical works, the narratives can function as social and political vehicles. Adapting the narratives to music not only allows for their expression in a musical genre, but also allows for their wider dissemination

through theatrical performances and radio presentations. In some cases (as with the Brazilian opera, *Il Guarany*), the stories' popularity has made them politically useful. Government leaders used the familiar tunes of the opera *Il Guarany* to help dissimulate a "heritage of founding violence" and foster a "belief in [an] authority" Ricoeur (82, 83). In other words, they sought to persuade the public of their authority, authenticity, and legitimacy. Yet, strategic deployment of these selected narratives was not limited to politicians alone. Community leaders and artists have also used the narratives to help shape identity in manifold ways.

## BINDING HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL TIES

Many historical and cultural connections link Cuba, Brazil, and the United States. Although the nations' specific histories differ greatly, they are tied together by the African Diaspora, plantation cultures, the effects of slavery, and the late abolition of slavery (Cuba 1886, Brazil 1888, and the United States 1865)<sup>3</sup> in comparison to most parts of the Americas. Separated by only 145 kilometers, Cuba and the United States have long witnessed an exchange of goods, people, and ideas across the Straits of Florida. Despite the professed desire of some in the United States to annex Cuba in the 1800s (which a portion of the Cuban population supported with the aim of escaping Spanish colonialism) the 1898 Spanish American War and the 1901 Platt Amendment passed by Congress assured Cuba's independence. The decree also guaranteed the United States' continued involvement on the island. Brazil, geographically far from both Cuba and the United States, nevertheless held many attractions for the latter nation's population.

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<sup>3</sup> Handley notes that, "Throughout the Americas, slavery was typically abolished in stages, beginning with the trade itself and then moving toward varying methods of enacting full emancipation" (2).



In the early twentieth century Black leaders encouraged immigration to Brazil since it was perceived as a racial democracy compared to the segregated United States (Stam 52).

Literary exchanges brought new ideas across borders. Spanish-language newspapers and periodicals grew in number in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *El Espejo*, run by Cirilo Villaverde's son Narciso Villaverde in the late 1800s, and *La prensa*, a Spanish-language newspaper founded by José Campubrí in 1913, are just two of the period publications that catered to a Spanish-speaking audience in New York City (Lazo 169). Cultural magazines published in the United States "placed the Hispanic immigrant community of the United States on the international cultural map" and some of the publications circulated abroad (Kanellos 232). As an examination of early twentieth-century periodicals at Havana's Biblioteca Histórica Cubana y Americana "Francisco González del Valle" shows, several Cuban art magazines, including *Fígaro*, reported on cultural events in the United States and Brazil<sup>4</sup>; *Pro-Arte Musical* included a "Movimiento Musical Mundial" ("Global Musical Movement") section that published notable musical happenings from around the world, including the United States and Brazil.

Cultural ties between the nations abound during the period in question, as can be seen from the transnational cultural forms such as opera and zarzuela that are common to all three. European opera flourished in Latin America early on. Many such European operas were performed in Brazil and Cuba during the nineteenth century, beginning in Cuba as early as 1776 (MacCarthy 41). Although imported operas were most often performed, domestic works also began to be performed. As Cesetti relates, Brazilian composers wrote twenty-one operas (107) during the nineteenth century. A handful of the operas by Brazilian and Cuban composers featured indigenous characters and focused on themes of nation building, including Carlos

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<sup>4</sup> One example is the article "La Vida Hispano-Americana en New York." *Fígaro*, 13 Nov. 1921.

Gomes's *Il Guarany* (1870) and Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes's Cuban opera, *Yumurí* (1898). Despite the American subject matter, composers most often chose to follow European operatic norms, and frequently wrote in Italian, although vernacular opera was officially encouraged in Brazil, and *Yumurí* is written in Spanish. Opera similarly found eager audiences in the United States, where colonial composers began writing oeuvres in the 1700s.

Zarzuela developed in Spain in the seventeenth century and had a presence in all three nations. Many Spanish American colonies presented zarzuela and Cuba and Venezuela “developed their own zarzuela genres”; although in Cuba zarzuela became distinct in that it drew on Cuban theatrical traditions and Afro-Cuban music (MacCarthy 16). Brazilian theater also featured zarzuela, and Heller-Lopes ascertains that the first nineteenth-century national operas drew heavily on Spanish zarzuela and Italian *opera buffa*, a comedic musical form (3). In the United States, as Sturman explains, during the nineteenth century Spanish-language theater was strongest in areas where considerable Spanish-speaking populations dwelled, such as the southwest, but audiences viewed Cuban and Mexican zarzuelas along with French and Italian operas and Spanish melodramas (57).

Performance circuits linked the three nations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as artists travelled throughout the Americas. In the 1800s opera companies often came first to Havana before going on to perform in other nations, including the United States (Díaz 4). In the late nineteenth century minstrel troupes from the United States, including all-Black troupes, toured through Mexico and Cuba (Abbott and Seroff 115). The number of international exchanges increased in the twentieth century. For example, “Touring companies from Mexico, Spain, Cuba, and occasionally Argentina or another Latin American country traveled along circuits that connected the East and West Coasts of the United States... Troupes taking northern

routes typically began in New York, frequently after a run in Cuba, and then moved through Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago . . . ending in Los Angeles” (Sturman 58). In June 1930 the Havana magazine *Social* reported on the Cubanacán revue/ballet troupe, directed by composer Eliseo Grenet, and its successful tour in Buenos Aires, Santiago, Lima, Montevideo, and Rio de Janeiro (“Los negros cubanos” 42). Troupes often included popular songs from opera and zarzuela in their repertoire, further disseminating songs from both musical traditions.

Even when troupes of artists did not travel internationally, cultural products did. *Il Guarany*, which premiered in Milan in 1870 and subsequently played in many European and Brazilian cities, also later came to the United States. It joined the United States’ operatic circuit with its premiere in San Francisco on August 27, 1884 (“Guarany, II”). Although the fully-staged opera likely did not have other premiers in the United States, given the lack of evidence for such debuts, specific songs proved popular in concerts. An examination of New York’s Metropolitan Opera Archives reveals that the duet “Sento una forza indomita” (“I Feel an Untamed Force”) was featured in an April 1895 concert along with pieces from the operas *Tannhäuser*, *Die Walküre*, and *Le Prophète* (“Metropolitan 1895”).<sup>5</sup> A March 1899 concert opened with the Overture to *Il Guarany*; no listings for subsequent performances of any pieces from the opera exist (“Metropolitan 1899”). Selections from *Cecilia Valdés* appeared on a Metropolitan Opera program in 1965 (“Metropolitan 1965”). In addition to performances, printed music also introduced audiences to Cuban composition. For instance, efforts to educate the United States’

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that while the April 21, 1895 concert program lists Gomes’s name next to the *Il Guarany* entry, no similar appellations accompany the other composers’ featured songs from operas including *Tannhäuser* (1845) and *Die Walküre* (1870) by Richard Wagner; *Le Prophète* (1849) by Giacomo Meyerbeer; *La Gioconda* (1876) by Amilcare Ponchielli (1876); and *Carmen* (1875) by Georges Bizet. Despite his popularity in Brazil, Gomes was likely not well known enough to audiences in the United States to merit excluding his name from the program. The 1899 concert program follows a similar pattern.

public about Cuban music resulted in the Cuban government-sponsored publication *Popular Cuban Music: Eighty Revised and Corrected Compositions* (1939) by composer Emilio Grenet (Guevara 260). Grenet particularly hoped to stop the “reckless disregard North American composers” including George Gershwin had for Cuban musical genres, which shows the extent to which U.S. composers “borrowed” Cuban songs (Guevara 261).<sup>6</sup>

The need for such comparative projects that take into account hemispheric relations in conversation with the Middle Passage and the African Diaspora has been highlighted by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), and by Brent Hayes Edward in *The Practice of Diaspora* (2003). Positing the significance of extra-national studies, Gilroy emphasizes the importance of studying the “history and practice of black music” outside of a national tradition (77). In his work, Edwards stresses the importance of “tracking the transnational contours of black expression” (3) in the inter-war period, wherever it may occur. This study will explore the nationalist element of the selected works, giving heed to such contours.

The “contours of black expression” may be most apparent in Harlem Renaissance works, and may at first be less obvious in the selected musical works of Brazil and Cuba. After all, the Brazilian and Cuban composers and librettists in question were white. Still, the zarzuela *Cecilia Valdés* explores miscegenation and other racial questions, and takes place in pre-abolition Cuba, where the socio-economic order was based on slave labor. In contrast, the opera *Il Guarany* excludes Africans and Afro-Brazilians, and presents a white-indigenous foundation for the Brazilian nation.

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<sup>6</sup> Gershwin in fact used part of Ignacio Piñeira’s song “Échate salsita” in “Cuban Overture” (Ledón Sánchez 84).

While ideas expressed in writing can have a broad reach, music offers opportunities for identity formation that the written word alone does not. Music does this in part because it makes ideas transportable. The physical and metaphorical “transportability” of music allows it to enter more spaces than writing or even performance. For example, while the novel *O guarani* was translated into Spanish and gained popularity in some Latin American countries, its impact was arguably considerably less than that of its musical adaptation. The music of *Il Guarany* has not only traveled the world opera circuit, where it has presented a specific image of Brazil to audiences, but it has also played on radio worldwide and graced pop concerts and ballets. The novel *O guaraní*, by comparison, has yet to be translated into English more than 150 years after its publication.

Different ideological considerations motivate specific works. My first chapter explores the differences between Villaverde’s novel *Cecilia Valdés* and the homonymous zarzuela in order to understand these ideological motivations. Although the dramatic musical work follows the basic plot of the novel, and takes place in a world fraught with the effects of slavery and colonialism, it treats the heroine, Cecilia, very differently from Villaverde’s book. Rather than punishing her for her *mulata* status, the zarzuela ensures her redemption by mixing nationalism, *mestizo* identity, and religion together in one grand finale. Cecilia does not escape her past—she triumphs over it. And as a symbol for the Cuban nation (as *mulata* figures so frequently have been), she provides hope for a Cuba fraught with the problems that the 1930s brought.

In my study of Brazil, chapter two, the historical specificities and ideological motivations involved with the publication of *O guarani* and the premier of *Il Guarany* come to light. Each artist’s text, whether novel, opera, or opera-ballet, served to bring attention and glory to the Brazilian nation or its leaders. Even six decades after its operatic premier, the “founding myth”

of the Brazilian nation was again reinscribed in order to help persuade the citizens of Brazil of their leader's authority as an heir to the nation's former king. The malleable story has served on many different occasions to tap into the mytho-poetic core that Alencar exploited and that Gomes and Vargas continued.

The third chapter examines how Langston Hughes's 1936 play *Emperor of Haiti* and its operatic adaptation looked to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) for an alternative national narrative, one that celebrates Africa. During a time when mainstream portrayals of Haiti were often negative and focused on exoticism, the choice of Hughes and William Grant Still to elevate Haitian heroes and history shows the different view Harlem Renaissance artists (including those who produced the opera *Ouanga*) had of the former colony of Saint Domingue, famed as an independent Black republic.

Why do these pieces under consideration matter so much? Ethnomusicologist John Blacking asserts that "music cannot express anything extramusical unless the experience to which it refers already exists in the mind of the listener" (45). The chosen musical works problematize this assertion because they go far beyond the print texts in order to "perform" the nations—Cuba, Brazil, and Haiti—onstage and to reinvent and selectively remember the past. This performance creates a new experience in the mind of the viewer/listener through plot, music, and spectacle. As the plot unfolds, a world is created onstage, and the sense of immediacy is intensified. Music adds another dimension to the stories, heightening the affective force and sense of the melodramatic. In the case of the novel *Cecilia Valdés*, the Cuban public was likely familiar with it, and a great deal may have existed in the minds of "listeners" who saw the zarzuela or heard its music. Yet, the dramatic musical work fashioned a very different ending for its heroine, and created an experience (and provided a national narrative) for audiences regardless of their knowledge of the novel's plot.

The cultural products in question represent significant examples of adapted texts because of how each has been strategically deployed to shape identity. Differences between written, musicalized, and performed texts and the utilization of narratives for specific purposes all affect *how* and *why* such stories are told. Presenting these works onstage brings to light important aspects of the (adapted) stories and allows the “nation”—whether Cuba, Brazil, or Haiti—to be performed. The questions of who supported and patronized such works, and how they were received merit careful attention, especially since these expressions of cultural identity also had political and social impacts.

This work attempts to begin a comparative discussion on the importance of studying adaptations of literature into zarzuela and opera, two genres that helped shape the American cultural landscape. Beyond that, however, is the even greater question of how such pieces have been strategically deployed, especially in terms of shaping the national family and constructing the past.

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¿No te ciega el fulgor de aquellos ojos?  
Esa virgen de bronce que allí ves  
de talle escultural y labios rojos,  
¡es Cecilia Valdés!

Doesn't the brilliance of those eyes blind you?  
That bronze virgin you see there  
of shapely figure and red lips,  
is Cecilia Valdés!

*Cecilia Valdés*, Agustín Rodríguez and José Sánchez-  
Arcilla 12, Cuban zarzuela, 1932

## CHAPTER ONE

### REJECTION AND REDEMPTION: *CECILIA VALDÉS* OFF- AND ONSTAGE

The woman described above—the “bronze virgin” with flashing eyes and carmine lips—is indeed Cecilia Valdés, the *mestiza*<sup>7</sup> protagonist of the popular melodramatic novel and zarzuela that bear her name. Despite its tendency toward wordiness and detailed description, the novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) fashions a narrative that captivates readers with its tale of intrigue, love, incest, and tragedy. Set in colonial Cuba during the chaotic 1810s-1830s, a period shaped by slavery, sugar, and Spain’s control, the text reveals anxieties about racial origin and national identity. Given Cuba’s social and political situation in the 1880s, it comes as no surprise that such narrative anxieties should surface. Cuba had recently lost a hard-fought war of independence to Spain (1868-1878) and was hesitantly moving toward possible annexation by the United States, a nation riddled with its own racial angst. Interrogations about Cuba’s colonial condition, and conceivable alterations to that status, abounded as individuals and groups worked

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<sup>7</sup> The terms “mestiza” and “mulata” have been treated and defined by numerous authors. Although some distinguish them as referring to a woman of white and indigenous heritage, or white and African heritage, respectively, others use them interchangeably. The terms are remarkably difficult to pinpoint because of their (at times) interchangeability or changing usages. Cecilia has been described historically by scholars using both terms, and characters use both terms in the zarzuela. For the purposes of this study, both terms will be used to describe Cecilia as a woman of white and African heritage. Suzanne Bost’s excellent work *Mulattas and Mestizas* provides an in-depth discussion of the issues surrounding the terms.

to change or maintain this status. Considerations of racial relations occurred as well, as Cuba slowly implemented policies of abolition through 1886. In *Cecilia Valdés*, author Cirilo Villaverde (1812-1894) responds to these issues by promoting a specifically white *criollo* Cuban identity that excludes Spain and Africa, reflecting contemporary desires to create distance from Spain and ignore African influence on the island. He does this by creating a plot that puts forth the “genealogical claims of the *white family* on the national patrimony” (Handley 9, emphasis added), not allowing anyone with African heritage into the family tree. The novel’s bi-racial heroine, Cecilia, wishes to escape her socioeconomic status and makes a claim on that patrimony, to her detriment.

Over time the novel has become a Cuban “cultural artifact” (Lazo 177), as can be seen from the book’s many editions and the numerous adaptations it has inspired, including the zarzuela *Cecilia Valdés* (1932) by composer Gonzalo Roig and lyricists Agustín Rodríguez and José Sánchez-Arcilla. The zarzuela draws on the novel’s melodramatic plot but provides a different end for the “tragic mulatta” figure, Cecilia. Far from idealizing African culture or heritage, as *Troubled Island* does (discussed in chapter three), the novel promotes an ideology that preserves whiteness and relegates non-whiteness to suffering. The zarzuela, on the other hand, offers unity to all Cubans regardless of race, by employing a national religious figure as an amelioratory symbol. By doing so, the zarzuela allows the heroine—a symbol of the nation—to figuratively atone for past sins and face a more hopeful future than the novel permits.

*Cecilia Valdes*’s journey from admonitory tale to narrative promoting Cuban inclusiveness is complex. The original story, written by Villaverde in 1839, was called *Cecilia Valdés; o, Loma del Ángel: Novela cubana* (“Cecilia Valdés; or, Angel Hill: Cuban Novel”).<sup>8</sup> It

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<sup>8</sup> Several scholars refer to this version as the “primitive” *Cecilia*.

features Cecilia, a Cuban heroine of African and Spanish ancestry, who is lured into ruin by promises of love and wealth in Havana. This short story filled only twenty-five pages in two volumes of the Cuban journal *La Siempreviva*, and was a “cautionary tale” about “sexual licentiousness” rather than a story of family secrets and the repercussions of slavery, as subsequent versions were to be (Fischer, “Introduction” xiv).<sup>9</sup> Later that year, Villaverde developed the story into a 246-page novel that included “lengthy descriptions of a popular festival known as Ferias del Ángel” (Lazo 222) and drew on the *costumbrismo* style, discussed below. Over forty years later, from exile in the United States, the author published a greatly expanded, more complex version of the tale (1882). In it the double yoke of Spanish rule and slavery burdens the island, and a twisted family history threatens Cecilia and impacts many others. She is the (unacknowledged) daughter of the rich Spaniard Cándido Gamboa and the poor Afro-Cuban woman Charito Alarcón. As she grows, Cándido provides for his offspring, but never reveals his paternity. Cecilia’s beauty soon draws the attention of her half-brother, Leonardo Gamboa, and the two eventually have a child together, to Cándido’s horror. Although he tries to part them, it is only Leonardo’s marriage to his “social equal,” Isabel Ilincheta, which brings about his and Cecilia’s permanent separation. When Cecilia learns of Leonardo’s impending nuptials she asks her admirer, José, to kill Isabel and stop the wedding. He does so by instead stabbing Leonardo on the church steps; the groom immediately dies, splattering Isabel’s dress with his blood. Cecilia has to live with the pain and suffer the consequences of her reckless request. Dwelling in a world ruled by tradition, the novel’s protagonist flouts societal norms throughout the novel, but pays the heaviest price at its tragic end. Her desperate act to punish the

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<sup>9</sup> *La Siempreviva* was published from 1838-1840. Dedicated to the arts, the journal served as a venue for many writers including Quintín Suzarte, Bachiller y Morales, and Manuel Costales (Ortega “Vida”).

white man who betrays her and the white woman who replaces her reveals cracks in a crumbling cultural framework that calls some slaves, some masters, and others nominally “free.”

The process of converting a lengthy novel to a one-act zarzuela requires that much be left out in the translation from one genre to another, and that new elements be added. The novel is replete with narrative preoccupations—about racial mixture and about losing control of the strictures that divide Cuban society according to genealogy, color, gender, and socioeconomic status. The text, unlike the zarzuela, fails to resolve these issues. The zarzuela exposes some of these anxieties, while eliding many of the longer work’s subplots and the narrator’s commentary. The dramatic musical work also offers redemption for Cecilia, lifting her from the mire created in Cuba and in the Gamboa family long before her birth.

In order to better understand the points above and examine the novel and zarzuela in greater depth, several considerations are necessary. An examination of Cuban history from its earliest days to the 1930s proves essential to establishing a proper framework for understanding the novel and the zarzuela. Within that history, exploring pertinent literary and cultural movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Cuba—from the del Monte literary circle to the *Grupo minorista*—serves to illustrate what influences in literature, music, and theater came into play for Villaverde, Roig, Rodríguez, and Sánchez-Arcilla. The examination of specific points such as the novel’s and the zarzuela’s use of melodrama and their portrayals of *mestizas* shows what cultural attitudes changed or remained the same in the fifty-year span between the two works. Also, understanding how they were received helps demonstrate their impact and the differences and similarities in how critics and the public reacted to the print text and the musical work.

## 19<sup>TH</sup>-C. CUBA, ITS HISTORIES AND HEROES

A brief exploration of Cuban history aids in comprehending the significantly different situations in which the novel and the zarzuela were written. A colony of Spain since the fifteenth century, Cuba formed an important part of the empire. With the arrival of Spain and other European nations, the Caribbean region became a place of transformation and turmoil. Islands changed hands over the decades as colonial powers fought to control them and their wealth-producing capacities. Revolutions in the United States and France also left their mark. The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) created the first Black republic of the western hemisphere, and made waves throughout the Americas. Cuba's white population, which was small compared to its Black and biracial population, feared that Haiti's example would "infect" their island, spread revolution, and lead to widespread miscegenation. Indeed, the "specter of Haiti had loomed large . . . and was a significant factor in the reluctance of the Cuban white elite to participate in Simón Bolívar's wars of independence in 1810" (Handley 41). In the early nineteenth century, the United States also opposed Cuban independence, lest the island become another Haiti (i.e. an independent Black republic) (Lazo 190). Still, a portion of the white Cuban population favored independence, although many were cautious about the possible consequences. These differences of opinion about freedom from Spain play out in Villaverde's novel, as *peninsulares* (people born in Spain) and Cuban *criollos* (people born in Cuba) argue about the merits of cutting ties with the colonial power.

As independence movements spread across the Americas, Cuba's value to Spain only increased. The colony became a high-yield sugar cane producer in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which added to its importance to the declining Spanish Empire. This increase in Cuban sugar production resulted directly from the Haitian Revolution since the Haitian sugar industry came to a stop during those tumultuous years; as the demand for enslaved

laborers increased, the importation of enslaved persons to Cuba rose dramatically (Casanova-Marengo 21-22). Beginning in 1806, Spain lost other American colonies that fought for and gained independence in the Bolivarian wars and other anti-Spanish revolts.

While Spain managed to hold onto Cuba until the close of the 1800s, the island roiled with unrest as the nineteenth century unfolded. Uprisings against slavery and/or Spanish rule occurred throughout the decades, but would not achieve lasting change until the 1880s and 1890s. Despite the efforts of abolitionists, a “policy of gradual abolition” did not come to fruition until 1880-1886, and Cuban independence came even later (Cuba: Afro-Cubans 341). The 1812 Aponte Rebellion, a slave revolt, was followed by the 1826 independence uprising in Puerto Príncipe, the alleged anti-slavery 1844 Escalera Conspiracy, the 1848 Mina de la Rosa Conspiracy, the 1868-1878 Ten Years’ War for independence, and the 1895-1898 War of Independence from Spain. These rebellions brought consequences: during the 1830s, repression in Cuba increased, as did opposition to Spanish rule. A growing *criollo* identity among Cuban thinkers as well as an expanding sugar industry helped foster a feeling of distance from and resistance to Spain. Intellectuals began to “pensarse como diferente frente a España al parecerle que el sistema esclavista que sustenta la vida colonial hace lucir a la isla como un país incivilizado frente a Europa” (“think of themselves as different from Spain as it seemed to them that the slave system that sustains colonial life makes the island look like an uncivilized country in contrast to Europe”) (Casanova Marengo 3). These feelings of dissimilarity from Spain found expression not only in rebellion, but also in writing.

Because of the atmosphere of insurgence and mistrust in the 1830s and 1840s, writers who contributed to contemporary journals and newspapers had to take great care in what they said, or they would face penalties. Bold—or misconstrued—statements about reform or



independence could bring harsh reprisals. Such threats only increased the *criollos*' feelings of distinctness from the *peninsulares*: a wide gulf separated the colony from the motherland. For members of the famed male-dominated Domingo del Monte literary circle, "The constant threat of censorship under which these writers explored a new realm of fictions meant that they would have to cautiously negotiate their representations of the slave" (Handley 51).<sup>10</sup> Del Monte, a leading Cuban intellectual who opposed the slave trade, was "instrumental in developing... a Cuban proto-national literary scene" (Lazo 171), and encouraged writers to find ways of expressing a Cuban identity distinct from that of the Iberian Peninsula. Vanessa Nelsen notes that:

Del Monte stressed . . . the representation of an independent Cuba that differed from the idealized Peninsular image in which Cuba appeared as a colonizer's utopia or a docile territory that generated prosperity for the motherland. This image of a colonial Cuba was propagated in an art and literature that conspicuously omitted the presence of freed blacks on the island at a time when their presence had never been so statistically significant or politically troublesome for the colonial order. In order to outshine Peninsular rule at its own power game, the del Monte writers adopted a *costumbrista*<sup>11</sup> style of writing, but incorporated a feature previously excluded from these European texts and crucial to disturbing the colonial image: blackness. (57)

Rather than propagate the European vision of a passive, utopic Cuba, the Creole artists sought to celebrate the island, and include the "previously excluded" blackness. This vision of Cuba

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<sup>10</sup> Kutzinski notes that although much may have been written during these years, "not a single antislavery narrative passed the censor until 1875, when Antonio Zambrana's *El negro Francisco* was printed in Cuba" (19).

<sup>11</sup> A literary style focused on local customs and quotidian life.

proved enduring. It is interesting to note that according to G. R. Coulthard, the del Monte group's literary output "formed the foundation for later portrayals of Afro-Cubans in the 1920s" (Mullen 65). Many of the del Monte salon's participants produced antislavery works, including "Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía* (written in 1835); Anselmo Suárez y Romero's novel *Francisco* (written in 1839); [and] Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel's short stories *Escenas de la vida privada en la Isla de Cuba* (written in 1838)" (Luis "Antislavery Narratives").<sup>12</sup> Famed author Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, not a group member, left for Spain in 1836 and went on to write the renowned antislavery novel *Sab* (1841) from across the Atlantic. Cirilo Villaverde also participated in the del Monte salon. Except for the final version of *Cecilia Valdés*, he wrote all of his narrative texts in Cuba between 1837 and 1848 (Álvarez García 7). The author published mainly in journals, and his works ranged from short fiction pieces to novels to non-fiction texts and include *La cueva de Taganana* (1837), *La peña blanca* (1837), *El espetón de oro* (1838), *Excursión a Vueltabajo* (1838-1839), *El güajiro* (1839), *Teresa* (1839), *Cecilia Valdés* (1839), and *La joven de la flecha de oro* (1841).

Growing tensions between Spain and Cuba played a key role in the development of what eventually became the expanded version of *Cecilia*. Along with stories and novels, Villaverde also continued to publish articles agitating for independence. Due to his involvement in the 1848 Mina de la Rosa Conspiracy, the author soon found himself in trouble with authorities. Sentenced to prison, he managed to escape, and in 1849 made his way to the United States and exile (Fischer "Introduction" xiv). Over the decades he lived in New Orleans, Philadelphia, and

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<sup>12</sup> The circle consisted of mostly white authors, with the exception of Plácido and Juan Francisco Manzano, and in the study of nineteenth-century Cuban letters white authors have received the most attention. Yet, Mullen highlights the sizeable literary contribution of Afro-Cubans from early on: "As Carlos Telles has noted, between 1815 and 1937 black Cubans published some 402 books, pamphlets, and newspapers" (67).

finally New York City, where he worked as a journalist and an editor, writing in both Spanish and English, and continued his literary pursuits (Handley 48). In New York, as Rodrigo Lazo notes, Villaverde served as right-hand man to the famed *filibustero*, General Narciso López, and had acted as his secretary since the late 1840s (175). Along with López, the author strategized for Cuban annexation by the United States, and published tracts in favor of this strategy. Over time he became a critic of the United States' policies, especially those that involved the annexation of his island home, and a confirmed abolitionist (Lazo 177). It was in these circumstances that Villaverde published *Cecilia Valdés*, greatly altered from its past versions. In the novel the combined results of slavery and Spanish decadence are plainly drawn. New York in the 1880s may have differed greatly from Havana in the 1840s, but it was a context in which slavery and Spanish rule still dominated the United States' southern neighbor, Cuba.

#### CRITICISM, EMOTION, AND *CUBANIDAD*

The 1882 edition of *Cecilia Valdés* was published by the press of the Spanish-language newspaper *El Espejo*, based in New York, and run by the author's son, Narciso Villaverde (Lazo 169). Bookstores in Key West, Florida, Paris, Madrid, and Havana offered it to customers, according to an ad from the period (Lazo 169). In the 1880s, critics took note of Villaverde's opus, with varying results. In an article in the Barcelona journal *La Ilustración Cubana* from 1885, Manuel de la Cruz praises the novel, but laments other critics' indifference to it, which suggests few Spanish journals reviewed it (Álvarez García 30).<sup>13</sup> According to an article written the next year by Diego Vicente Tejera, the renowned Spanish author Benito Pérez Galdós purportedly expressed surprise upon receiving the novel, and stated: ““No creí que un cubano

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<sup>13</sup> The March 27, 1885 article was republished in *Acerca de Cirilo Villaverde*, 30-36.

podiera escribir cosa tan buena” (“I did not think a Cuban could write something so good”) (53).<sup>14</sup> Such a comment from one of Spain’s leading novelists betrays the tendency of Spanish critics to consider literature by Cubans as suspect, and not up to European standards. *Cecilia* was published in Spanish, and received little attention in the English-language press in the United States. Nevertheless, some in the United States also took note of it. Villaverde merited an entry in *Appleton’s Cyclopædia of American Biography* included Villaverde in 1889, with an entry that details his biography and his major publications. With regard to *Cecilia Valdés*, the anonymous author describes it as Villaverde’s “masterpiece, a genuinely Cuban novel, which has been deservedly praised by the most competent critics in Spain and Spanish America” (“Villaverde” 295). (The author fails to explain what qualifies the novel as “genuinely” Cuban). Since *Appleton’s* sought to include “fifteen thousand prominent native and adopted citizens of the United States” and drew upon “friends and relatives of the subjects” for its information, as the preface to the 1888 edition explains, it is likely that one of the many contributors knew Villaverde personally and possibly guaranteed his inclusion in the volume (Preface v).

In the decades following its publication, the novel received some praise, some negative critical attention, and then faded from prominence. Cuban journalist and novelist Martín Morúa Delgado offered his opinion of *Cecilia* in the piece “Las novelas del Señor Villaverde” (1892), admitting to the novel’s importance in the still-developing area of Cuban prose. Despite the “estupendo bombo de las alabanzas” (“fantastic hype of praise”) from Spanish and Cuban critics (71), Morúa Delgado contends that one of the novel’s major problems lies in the tacit approbation of the social, racial, and economic status quo:

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<sup>14</sup> Originally published in the New York journal *La América* in 1886, and republished in *Acerca de Cirilo Villaverde*, 53-60.

En toda la obra se nota el censurable y deliberado empeño de justificar las líneas divisorias trazadas y conservadas por el exclusivismo colonial . . . y tengo para mí que *Cecilia Valdés* debe su desaprobación, demostrada por una tibia popularidad, más que a su imperfección artística, al espíritu retrógrado que la informa. Que cuando todo en nuestros tiempos tiende a reformar, a democratizar las sociedades y a enaltecer el sentimiento popular claro está . . . .

Throughout the work the reprehensible and deliberate effort to justify the dividing lines drawn and preserved by colonial exclusivity can be seen . . . and I believe that *Cecilia Valdés* owes its disapprobation, demonstrated by an unenthusiastic popularity, more than to its artistic imperfection, to the reactionary spirit that informs it. That when everything in our times moves to reform, to democratize societies and ennoble popular sentiment, it is obvious . . . . (79-80)

Williams discusses Morúa Delgado's further critique of *Cecilia* for its "implausible depictions of the slave's situation, its representation of stock characters whose behavior lacked credible motivation" and posits that Morúa Delgado's novel *Sofía*<sup>15</sup> (1891) stands out as an attempt to "correct the ostensible defects" of *Cecilia Valdés* (161).

Such reactions, along with changing political conditions in Cuba, impacted the book's reception and status in coming decades. In the early twentieth century, as Cuba faced a new reality free of Spain, but not free of the United States' influence, some nineteenth-century works—including *Cecilia Valdés*—receded in importance, perhaps as a result of the end of colonialism and the beginning of independence. The novel would not merit critical attention

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<sup>15</sup> *Sofía* also features themes of hidden origins, secrets, and incest, and speaks openly of racial relations.

again until the late 1940s and 1950s (Álvarez García 10).<sup>16</sup> Part of its return to the critics' notice without a doubt derived from its reincarnation in zarzuela form. Quite simply, the zarzuela made *Cecilia* popular; the emotional tale became compulsory reading in schools, but became most "popular literally as a staged revue" (Sommer 358, 126).

Before *Cecilia* and her peers would tread the stage, they lived in the novel's pages. Villaverde's masterpiece details the story of the title character and her tumultuous life and times. It follows the Romantic trend of featuring a long-suffering female protagonist and naming the work for her (Yáñez 133). The daughter of a free bi-racial Cuban woman and her Spanish lover, *Cecilia* is a (presumably) third-generation free woman of color. She receives the surname Valdés so as to hide the identity of her white father, Cándido Gamboa. After a brief, forced separation from her newborn daughter, *Cecilia*'s mother, Charo, goes mad and is interned in a hospital for the insane, and here the author draws on the common nineteenth-century trope of insanity to shape his plot. The parentless *Cecilia* lives with her grandmother, Chepilla. Even as a girl, the protagonist attracts admiration due to her "belleza peregrina," or rare beauty (Villaverde 73). Her suitors include an Afro-Cuban tailor/musician, José Dolores Pimienta, and her white Creole half-brother, Leonardo Gamboa, heir to his father's fortune. Despite the fact that nearly all around her know or suspect the circumstances of her parentage, she seems to discover the truth only at the novel's end in a fleeting reunion with her dying, briefly-lucid mother.

Many emotional scenes point to the author's inclusion of melodramatic elements. More than one critic has commented on the novel's "Soap-operatic narrative" (Lazo 181) that includes

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<sup>16</sup> Álvarez García notes that Villaverde's novel received more attention in post-1959 Cuba: "Y es lógico. Los especialistas—guiados por el impetuoso proceso creador que suscita la construcción del socialismo—se inclinaron al buceo, al análisis del siglo XIX; se entregaron al deslinde sistemático y científico de nuestros genuinos valores formativos" ("And it is logical. The specialists—guided by the impetuous creative process that causes socialism's construction—tended toward research, toward analysis of the nineteenth century; they gave themselves to the systematic and scientific demarcation of our genuine formative values") (10-11).

many elements recognizable from melodrama. As Peter Brooks elucidates, elements of the melodramatic repertoire include “hyperbolic figures, lurid and grandiose events, masked relationships and disguised identities, abductions, slow-acting poisons, secret societies, mysterious parentage” (Brooks 3). These features add to the novel’s sense of the dramatic.

The novel’s melodramatic nature and the time period it covers made it particularly suitable for the Cuban stage since 1920s and 1930s zarzuelas often featured stories of the past century. In many ways the novel is a hybrid of different styles and focuses, and of emotion mixed with descriptions of quotidian life. Sibylle Fischer aptly calls attention to the twisted passion and drama, or “incestuous love and melodrama” that form the novel’s “core” (“Introduction” xxv). A melodramatic plot links the novel and zarzuela, the narrative and the drama. That melodrama whirls around Cecilia in both works. This recourse to intemperate emotion and excess of sentiment made the novel a good candidate for the jump from the narrative genre to the dramatic genre, where it could play out well on stage.

*Cecilia* revolves around masked genealogical origins, incest, and suppressed secrets. These components permeate the novel’s beginning—when a shadowy figure (Cándido Gamboa) steals down a dark alley—the novel’s and the zarzuela’s middle, with the incestuous relationship between unsuspecting siblings—and the zarzuela’s end—when daughter and long-lost mother miraculously reunite in an asylum prison and can atone for past sins. The novel presents silenced witnesses (including María de Regla, Cecilia’s former wet nurse), love triangles (one incestuous), murder, and the cruelties of slavery. Although scholars vary in their opinions over whether *Cecilia* constitutes an abolitionist novel, it shares elements of melodrama with nineteenth-century anti-slavery novels that feature “entangled personal relationships” and scenes in which “people were dramatically exploited . . . designed to move the readers to indignation, shame,

revulsion . . . There was a tendency toward overstatement of characters” (Cobb 466). Many of these tendencies toward over-dramatizing characters and scenes to appeal to readers’ emotions are evident in Villaverde’s text.

As more than one critic has noted, Villaverde constructs Cecilia against a backdrop of detail and realism.<sup>17</sup> The author intersperses emotional plot elements with exhaustive details about Cuban social, economic, political, and racial life, a recourse to the *costumbrismo* style. Hart explains that the “description of the clothes worn, and the use of these clothes as a pointer to social class” are elements of *costumbrismo* (121), and Villaverde depicts everything from carriage parades to Leonardo Gamboa’s classes to clothing styles. A critic writing in 1892 designated Villaverde as the “creator” of the Cuban novel of *costumbres* (Cruz, “Cirilo” 43). Such details as those he includes fill up the literary world he creates. He describes Havana’s neighborhoods, streets, shops, and those who populate them. In fact, “Since the 1890s, critics have claimed the novel as Cuban, in part because it captures conditions in Havana in the early 19<sup>th</sup> c.” (Lazo 170).

The characters’ presence outside the city gives the narrative voice the opportunity to prove the novel “Cuban” by representing its unique environs. While city life features prominently in the novel, country life does as well, with its own detailed depictions. Descriptions of the city’s physical aspects complement those of the country’s topography, flora, and fauna. This emphasis on landscape was a trend of Spanish American Romanticism (Smith 726). The narrator relates, for example, that in the region west of the capital, known as Cuba’s “garden,” heavy dew saturates the mesa’s fertile, iron-rich soil each evening. Tropical plants and bushes fill the lush landscape, and fruit trees (orange, breadfruit, lemon, tamarind, plum, *guanábano*)

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<sup>17</sup> See Lazo and Cruz, for example.



perfume the air. A few timorous birds (*tomeguines*, *bijiritas*, and others) dot the countryside, although the narrator explains that even here agriculture has left its mark, causing animals to seek other havens as habitat disappears (Villaverde 391-92). In the Vuelta Abajo area that Villaverde knew personally, having visited it, the narrator paints a word-rich portrait of yet another landscape:

Asombrosa era la vegetación . . . . Hasta de las ramas verdes y gajos secos . . . pendían las parásitas de todas clases y formas, que viven de la humedad de que está constantemente saturada la atmósfera de los trópicos. El suelo y la floresta, en una palabra, cuajados de flores, ya en ramilletes, ya en festones de variada apariencia y diversidad de matices, formaban un conjunto tan gallardo como pintoresco, . . . bullía materialmente el bosque vecino con todos los insectos y pájaros casi que cría la prolífica tierra cubana. Todos a una zumbaban, silbaban o trinaban entre el sombrío ramaje o la espesa yerba y hacían concierto tal y tan armonioso como no podrán jamás hacerlo los hombres con la voz ni los instrumentos músicos.

The vegetation was astonishing . . . . From even the green limbs and dry, detached branches . . . hung parasites of all classes and forms, which lived off the humidity that constantly saturates the atmosphere of the tropics. The ground and the forest, in a word, filled by flowers, here in bunches, here in garlands of varied appearance and different shades, formed a combination as striking as it was picturesque, . . . the neighboring forest absolutely burbled with nearly all the insects and birds that the prolific Cuban earth produces. All together buzzed, whistled, or trilled between the shadowy branches or the thick plant matter and they made a concert more harmonious than men could make with either voice or musical instruments. (Villaverde 422-23)

This plethora of data on Cuban wildlife and the landscape hearkens to a tradition in Cuban poetry dating from the 1600s and distinguishes *Cecilia Valdés* from nineteenth-century European novels. Villaverde describes sights (green limbs, shadowy branches) and sounds (burbled, buzzed, whistled, trilled) in order to transport his reader to the locale. Like other novels of the period, including Brazilian author José de Alencar's *O guaraní* and *Iracema*, this inclusion of information specific to the local context makes these texts uniquely American. *Guanábanos* and *tomeguines*, among other plants and animals, distinguish the novel from its European counterparts. Such texts create landscapes that come to life, and exercise an influence over the characters in the story.

Plantation culture also plays an important role. These sprawling compounds form microcosms in which enslavers and their enslaved interact with each other and with the natural world. *La Tinaja*, the Gamboas' oppressive sugar plantation stands in opposition to *La Luz*, the Ilincheta coffee plantation. The former is characterized in every way possible as a "bad" plantation, while the latter is "good." The Gamboa estate seems to feed on the sun's scorching heat and on oppression. Isabel Ilincheta, Leonardo Gamboa's future wife, winces at the thought of dwelling there and leaving *La Luz*. Even nature seems to reflect the violence perpetrated by those in control at *La Tinaja*; the cane leaves reflect the sun's burning afternoon rays "cual si fueran bruñidas espadas" ("as if they were polished swords") (Villaverde 436). Punishment, torture, and wretched living conditions afflict those enslaved there and cause many to run away.

The Ilincheta estate, on the other hand, doubles as a "bello jardín, remedio del que perdieron nuestros primeros padres, acariciado por sus más allegados e idolatrada por sus esclavos como no lo fue reina alguna sobre la tierra" ("beautiful garden, poor imitation of what our first parents lost, cherished by those closest to it and idolized by its slaves as was no other

kingdom on the earth”) (Villaverde 424). A second Eden, the utopic vision of the plantation contrasts starkly with the Gamboas’ freehold. Such excursions into description—especially in terms of Villaverde’s meandering style and “bosque de detalles” (“forest of details”) (Cruz, “Cecilia” 34-35)—interrupt the novel’s action but reveal the author’s intent. Idealizing *La Luz* and its mistress, Isabel, demonstrates Villaverde’s attempt to keep the white elements of society on top by showcasing their virtues. It is no surprise that the narrator relates that the enslaved persons on *La Luz*, according to Villaverde’s narrative, weep at their mistress’s imminent departure.

#### NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: CECILIA’S IN-BETWEEN STATUS

To a large extent race determines the narrator’s attitude toward the novel’s female characters. While Isabel is upheld as a model human being—despite her status as an enslaver—Cecilia’s attempts to enter into Isabel’s strata of society are punished. Much has been written about Cecilia’s standing in Cuban society as a biracial woman. The weight of literary convention seems to condemn her to an unhappy end, and the text presents her as the quintessential “tragic mulatta.” Her status—as poor, “nearly white,” “orphaned,” and beautiful—seemingly dooms her to such an outcome. Despite Cecilia’s high hopes for marriage to Leonardo, in Cuba “Socially ambitious light-skinned mulatas, also known as *amarillas*, or high yellows, and prized for their exotic beauty, were fair game for sexual liaisons with white men. The majority of these affairs did not lead to marriage, either in historical reality or in fictional accounts” (Kutzinski 20). Nineteenth-century Latin American writers initially fashioned fetishized heroines shaped by

European ideals—white “Indian maidens” and idyllic damsels;<sup>18</sup> by the mid-nineteenth century this trend began to give way for the *mestiza* (Yáñez 130-31), who was neither white nor ideal. These improbable *mestiza* women characters seemed to spring from their creators’ overactive imaginations. *Mulatas*, in the authors’ treatment, were often associated with a “promiscuous sexuality” and a “deep connection to the earth and nature” (Thomas 206). Cecilia does not possess a profound connection to nature—after all, she never leaves the city. As for promiscuous sexuality, Cecilia is indeed portrayed as licentious since she accedes to Leonardo’s advances. The author “betrays his class’s ambivalence about a true mixing of the races” socially—and sexually (González Mandri 18). A close examination reveals that Cecilia, her mother Charo, and her grandmother Chepilla make up “three generations of mulatas . . . locked in a cycle of sexual exploitation, abandonment, and despair that is maintained by the women’s unwitting complicitousness in perpetuating the conditions of their abuse” (Kutzinski 20). Though she receives promises of security and even marriage, Cecilia finds herself abandoned and ultimately separated from her own daughter, the fourth-generation woman to be affected by an exploitative cycle.

As a free woman of color, Cecilia possesses some agency, but societal mores, authorities, and the laws of the land constrain her socially and physically. These restrictions apply to her doubly, because of her position as an Afro-Cuban woman. Due to her status, she can only inhabit

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<sup>18</sup> In his discussion of the fetishisation of women by Latin American authors of the period, Mario Parajón declares, “Esta mujer-lirio será uno de los ideales de la época. Vestida de muselinas casi transparentes, casi siempre rubia, de cuello de cisne, manos y boca pequeñas, miradas lánguidas, faldas acampanadas y muchos lazos en el cabello, viene a representar la vaga religiosidad del amor a lo invisible e inexistente” (“This woman-lily will be one of the ideals of the epoch. Dressed in nearly transparent muslins, nearly always blond, with a swan-like neck, small mouth and hands, languid glances, bell-shaped skirts and many hair ribbons, she comes to represent the vague religiosity of love for the invisible and the in-existent”) (14-15).

the same space as white women under unusual circumstances.<sup>19</sup> As children, the Gamboa sisters invite the young Cecilia into their home, out of curiosity. They wonder about the peculiar, beautiful twelve-year-old child who roams the streets. Her social betters can ask her to enter their domiciles (also a controlled space for them, but perhaps made less obvious by wealth), while their mother peppers her with questions: “¿Cómo te llamas? . . . ¿Y tu madre? . . . ¿Y tu padre? . . . ¿Con que no tienes padre ni madre? . . . ¿Y cómo vives? ¿Con quién vives? ¿Eres hija de la tierra o del aire?” (“What’s your name? . . . And your mother? . . . And your father? . . . So you have neither father nor mother? . . . How do you live? Who do you live with? Are you a daughter of the land or the air?”) (Villaverde 76). Although she later enters into an amorous relationship with the girls’ brother, Leonardo, Cecilia never again enters the house.<sup>20</sup> Only curiosity about her life gains her admittance as a child.

A few years later, Cecilia suffers at the hands of men in authority who wish to control her fate and her movements. As she walks to her friend Nemesia’s home one night, an acquaintance, Captain Cantalapedra, stops her. Although they had danced together at the *baile de cuna*,<sup>21</sup> he uses his authority to detain her, see her face, find out her destination, and follow her. He doubts her explanation and declares, “Soy el Comisario del barrio y ¿qué se diría de mí si por descuido dejaba que una muchacha tan linda como tú daba mal paso y luego andábamos de tribunales y pleitos?” (“I am the Captain of the district, and what would be said of me if because of carelessness I let a girl as pretty as you do wrong and then we were involved in courts and

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<sup>19</sup> An interesting point of comparison is Casanova-Marengo’s analysis of the marked social/spatial separation between Black and white men in the novel’s *baile de cuna* scene (74-75). See footnote #20.

<sup>20</sup> González Mandri points out that, “When Cecilia crosses over to Leonardo’s privileged spaces, she essentially disappears” (21).

<sup>21</sup> *Bailes de cuna* were balls organized by lower class people of color, often in conjunction with *ferias*. Usually they were small, informal events (Fischer “Notes” 494).

disputes?") (Villaverde 372). Had she been a man—or rather, a white man—the exchange would likely have been limited or would have never occurred. Cantalapiedra follows her to make sure she means to visit a female friend: she is a biracial woman, and he distrusts her word.

At a later point in the novel, the legal system punishes her for her supposed wrongdoings. Again, her race makes her vulnerable because the law views her as a home wrecker, rather than defrauded. Cándido Gamboa uses the law to separate Leonardo and Cecilia by penalizing the latter. He fears that the two will continue their incestuous relationship; rather than reveal the truth he resorts to impugning his son's lover. He denounces Cecilia and secures her arrest, managing to emerge with (somewhat) clean hands by painting her as a scarlet woman setting out to destroy all:

Luego, quisiéramos casarle, su madre y yo, este mismo año, con una señorita muy virtuosa y agraciada, hija de un paisano y antiguo amigo mío [...] Ya vamos para viejos mi mujer y yo, mañana o esotro día morimos los dos, que somos hijos de la muerte. ¿Quién entonces tomará el timón? Él, que es hombre, no ninguna de sus hermanas, débiles mujeres y solteras aún. ¿Comprende ahora V.S. cuál no será nuestro desgracia si nuestro primogénito, el hijo que ha de llevar el nombre de la familia, el título de nobleza, la administración de los bienes, etc., no estudia, no se recibe de Bachiller, no se casa con la señorita con quien está comprometido, e infatuado con la Valdés se le echa de querida? Sin el auxilio de V.S., en estas circunstancias aflictivas, ¿qué serán de la paz y de la felicidad de mi familia?

Then, we wanted him to marry, his mother and I, this same year, with a very virtuous and lovely young lady, daughter of a countryman and old friend of mine [...] My wife and I are getting older, tomorrow or another day both of us will die, we are children of death.

Who then will take the helm? He, who is a man, not any of his sisters, weak women and still single. Does Your Honor understand now what our disgrace will be if our firstborn, the son who is to carry the family name, the title of nobility, the management of the properties, etc., does not study, does not receive the degree, does not marry the woman to whom he is engaged, and infatuated with Valdés he throws out his love? Without Your Honor's help, in these distressing circumstances, what will become of the peace and the happiness of my family? (Villaverde 600)

Don Cándido references many social norms as he makes his impassioned plea. First, he announces Leonardo's impending marriage to an "appropriate" mate, a woman of virtue, and the daughter of a Spaniard; although he never mentions her race, his listener can doubtlessly assume that she is white. Next, he conjures the specter of death, and emphasizes the need for his lineage (i.e. the family name, the family title, and the family business) to continue through the filial line. All of this stability and social cohesion, he claims, stands ready to topple, unless the temptress Cecilia is confined. Of course, he never reveals that Cecilia *is* his family. Without a surname or a white identity, she merits no acknowledgement from her father; a "double standard" exists for his official white family and unofficial non-white family (González Mandri 15). The significance of Cecilia's racial identity only intensifies in the zarzuela, where she verbalizes feelings of uncertainty tied to race, never expressed in the novel.

For characters with African ancestry, all of whom suffer injustice, few opportunities or recourses are available. Cecilia experiences this reality first hand. She and her "twin" half-sister, Adela Gamboa, possess the same physical features, but live worlds apart and belong to different classes. Although Cecilia can be mistaken for "white," her socioeconomic status and the circumstances of her birth prevent her from entering that forbidden social realm, except through

being a mistress. Similar situations existed through the Caribbean, where “color variations of racial hybridity challenged segregation, and the ambiguity of color as a signifier of race lead to an emphasis on the social elements—class, culture, language—that imbricated racial identity” (Bost 91). The protagonist’s lack of resources, family ties, and cultural knowledge present her with circumstances that Adela will never face.

Despite its disdain for Afro-Cuban characters, the novel has often been read as an anti-slavery novel. Critics differ on how to interpret it. Many emphasize its supposed anti-slavery focus, others highlight its anti-colonial tone, and yet others stress its realism. In many editions the title includes the subtitle *novela de costumbres cubanas* (“novel of Cuban customs”) underscoring its descriptions of many popular local practices of the period portrayed. Although the text also details slavery’s evils, the narrative often seems ambivalent about captivity’s effects and comes across in many instances as a racist novel. Though Villaverde illuminates slavery’s ugliness, in his focus and storytelling, the author seems more anti-colonial than anti-slavery (Handley 53). Historic circumstances possibly played a hand in this emphasis on Spain’s evils over slavery’s evils: “By the time Villaverde committed himself to finishing his novel, Cuba had started to move toward abolition . . . slavery in *Cecilia Valdés* is part of a portrait of Cuba but not the main focus of the novel” (Lazo 187). Hart discusses the disparity between the author’s “antislavery stance and the ideology that the events and imagery of *Cecilia Valdés* betoken”; he also suggests that “characters are consistently typified according to their racial origin . . . blacks are routinely described as savages” (122, 121). The narrator portrays the enslaved persons on Ilincheta plantation as childish, credulous, and overly emotional. Isabel Ilincheta’s temporary departure from the estate results in the following reaction:



Las negras especialmente, convencidas de que se marchaba su señorita, rodearon el quitrín y las más expresivas se agolparon al estribo, metían la cabeza por debajo de la cortina o capacete, y, según su costumbre, clamaban a grito herido: ¡Adiós, niña! . . . . Acompañando estas frases, que hemos traducido en gracia del lector, con sus extravagantes demostraciones . . . .

Pobres, sensibles, aunque ignorantes y sencillos esclavos, tenían a su ama por la más hermosa y buena de las mujeres, por un ser delicado y sobrenatural, y se lo demostraba a su manera ruda e idólatra.

The Black women especially, convinced that their mistress was departing, surrounded the trap and the most expressive crowded around the footboard, put their heads beneath the curtain or roof, and, according to their custom, cried out with a wounded yell: Goodbye, miss! . . . . They accompanied these phrases, which we have translated on behalf of the reader, with their extravagant demonstrations . . . .

Poor, sensitive, although ignorant and simple slaves, they held their mistress as the most beautiful and best of women, as a fragile and supernatural being, and their showed it in their crude and idolatrous way. (Villaverde 419-20)

The narrator characterizes the individuals above as infantile, especially the women, and given to emotion. Their reactions are “extravagant,” and out of keeping with the occasion, but the narrator goes on to stereotype them as “ignorant,” “simple,” “crude,” and “idolatrous”; in essence, they cannot control themselves.

These labels, along with the concentration on racial “purity,” represent an effort to validate the discourse of racial difference, as Casanova-Marengo discusses (94). Following this logic, the white individuals would be painted as paragons of virtue. Such is not always the case,

since some of those lauded by the narrator as possessing positive traits (Don Cándido, Doña Rosa, Leonardo) fail to live up to their reputations. Cándido callously engages in the slave trade and hides his past sins; Leonardo shows very little sympathy to those enslaved by his family, and he deceives Cecilia and his fiancée, Isabel; Rosa proves to be a harsh plantation mistress and a steely enemy to Cecilia. The novel seems to blame the evils of Spanish rule and lack of power for the *criollo* class for this dehumanization of those in power. Indeed, “Hardly anyone . . . escapes the charge of racism” (Sommer 127); however, that was not a strong concern of Villaverde’s. Isabel, who is portrayed as a paragon of virtue could not “escape” the charge either. Still, compared to the Afro-Cuban characters, the white characters fare better in the novel because they can find refuge in legal and social codes designed to protect their abundant power.

#### LYRIC THEATER IN THE AMERICAS: TEATRO, OPERA, ZARZUELA

By the time of *Cecilia Valdes*’s publication in 1882 and the zarzuela’s premier in 1932, a centuries-strong tradition of music and drama had been established in Cuba. As in many nations throughout the Americas, musical theater in a variety of forms made its mark in Cuba, ranging from opera to *teatro bufo* to zarzuela. In *La música en Cuba*, Alejo Carpentier suggests that compared to other Latin American countries Cuba produced a surprising amount of operas (259). Opinions vary as to when opera debuted on the island. The first “complete” (presumably fully staged) opera in Havana, according to one critic, was *Dido apasionado* in 1815, and many other operas followed (Molina 270). Another suggests that Metastasio’s *Dido abandonada* (1776) was much earlier (MacCarthy 41). The exact year perhaps matters less than the fact that European masterpieces found a ready home on the Cuban stage, as did homegrown operas. By the mid-

nineteenth century Havana was one of the operatic centers of the Americas (Díaz 4). At the same time, zarzuela, a distinct genre, grew in popularity.

Zarzuela developed in Spain in the mid-1600s and spread throughout the Spanish colonies, from the Americas to the Philippines. Brazil and Venezuela “developed their own zarzuela genres” (MacCarthy 16),<sup>22</sup> as did Mexico, and zarzuela played in Peru as early as 1701 (Webber 287). In many respects it resembles opera, and the genre has been described as “practically an *opéra bouffe*,” with its changing scenes, often all presented in one act (“Zarzuela”). Yet, “Seventeenth century zarzuelas are not totally sung...they consistently involved a rustic or pastoral setting and characters, and were less serious in tone and dramatic content than the strictly mythological court plays” (Stein 261, qtd. in MacCarthy 27-28). Zarzuela in Spain faded in the early 1800s as the nation faced great challenges (Napoleon’s invasion, e.g.). During the 1850s Spanish zarzuelas found ready audiences in the Americas, and new Spanish zarzuelas often came first to Havana before touring in other Latin American cities (Webber 3, 287). It flourished early on in Cuba, and it remained a popular form of musical theater in the nineteenth century. Many zarzuelas were performed in Havana in the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. A decade later, in the 1860s, “zarzuela attracted a large following, and troupes of singers and musicians travelled throughout the former Spanish dominions in South and Central America and Mexico” (“Género chico”). The form’s popularity made it a ready form of entertainment throughout the Americas.

Scholars differ on what constitutes a zarzuela and when the genre began. While some seem to attribute its development to a cumulative process, one which happened gradually (Molina 11), others disagree:

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<sup>22</sup> In Brazil, the government-supported Ópera Lyrica Nacional encouraged the translation of Spanish zarzuela into Portuguese (Magaldi 209).

classification of musical theater composed by Cubans during the nineteenth century has long been an area of debate between musicians, scholars and general audience.

Though some maintain that zarzuela per se does not emerge until the twentieth century (most recently Susan Thomas), others argue that the term zarzuela encompasses all forms of musical theater genres that appear in Cuba during the nineteenth century and beyond (most recently R o Prado). (68)<sup>23</sup>

Such a lack of consensus on terminology may prove confusing, but it is a reality of such enquiries. Thomas points out that Cubans use zarzuela “in the abstract to describe the lyric theater” of c. 1925-1950, and along with the “umbrella term” *la zarzuel stica*, zarzuela can describe reviews, operettas, and *sainetes*<sup>24</sup> or zarzuela itself (21). Despite the lack of clarity, for the purposes of this study it can be noted that scholars seemingly agree on *Cecilia Vald s*’s zarzuela status.

Along with opera and zarzuela, other types of musical theater with roots in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spain found ready audiences in nineteenth-century Cuba. *Teatro vern culo* (comic theater) and the *teatro bufo* (blackface theater)<sup>25</sup> both proved popular. *Teatro vern culo* relied on stock characters: “the *negrito* (comic Black man), *gallego* (Spaniard), *mulata* (mixed-race woman), and *guajiro*”<sup>26</sup> (Thomas 13-14). *Bufo* theater, very popular in the late nineteenth century, always included the *negrito*, *gallego*, and *mulata* and adapted these stock

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<sup>23</sup> Composer Ernesto Lecuona’s *El Cafetal* (“The Coffee Plantation”) (1929), Thomas asserts, was the first “true Cuban zarzuela,” with a “longer, more elaborate plot” and “more complicated musical numbers” than *sainetes* (36).

<sup>24</sup> *Sainetes* are short farces with dialogue and “with or without music, usually with lower-class, urban settings and characters” (Webber 327).

<sup>25</sup> Civantos terms *bufo* theater “A genre of Cuban blackface comedy akin to U.S. minstrel shows” (49). As was common in minstrel shows, in *bufo* a white man wearing black face paint would portray the *negrito* character.

<sup>26</sup> A person from the Cuban countryside.

characters to emphasize the local. The theatrical form particularly “challenged the hegemony of ‘foreign’ genres such as Italian opera and Spanish zarzuela” with its comedy and satire (Thomas 15). The traditions and characters developed in these theatrical offerings would play important roles in later zarzuela, especially with regard to the *mulata*, a figure whose identification with Cuba grew stronger with time.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, questions of cultural formation became particularly important and brought to light contrasting ideas about the impact of foreign influences and what constitutes Cuban identity. In 1940, Fernando Ortiz would articulate his ideas about transculturation and its impact on Cuba. The development of musical theater—and particularly zarzuela—to some extent mirrored these questions and ideas that artists and intellectuals debated. As Diana Taylor emphasizes, “transculturation is not a theatrical phenomenon but a social one. The existence of theatrical hybrids... does not necessarily represent the deeper and more global shifts of transculturation in a society. Transculturation affects the entire culture; it involves the shifting of socio-political, not just aesthetic, borders” (90-91). The meshing of different theatrical conventions, musical styles, instruments, etc., is but one example of the cultural renaissance that was happening in the early twentieth century.

During this period, political realities hurried Cuba’s march toward self-definition. Tension existed in Cuba over the telling of the nation’s foundational story and what influences would receive attention. It was a phenomenon not peculiar to Cuba, but one experienced in many countries. No longer a Spanish colony, Cuba felt the effects of the United States’ involvement in national life, and artists and thinkers responded. “The struggle to construct a unique national identity distinct from that of the United States shaped how Cuban intellectuals narrated their own cultural history” (Guevara, “Narratives” 270). At the same time, a sugar boom dramatically

increased emigration from neighboring islands, Garveyism's presence on the island increased, and anti-Black feelings ran high ("Cuba: Afro-Cubans" 342-43).<sup>27</sup> Some of these changes added to the richness of cultural life, but they also increased the desire of some to control how *cubanidad* would be represented.

This struggle over identity can be seen in the arts, including opera and zarzuela. Near the turn of the century, author and composer Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes wrote what he considered a "national opera," *Yumurí* (1898), a work that reflects this tension because it represents the Cuban population as a white/indigenous mix (Carpentier 254-55).<sup>28</sup> Like Carlos Gomes's Brazilian opus of 1870, *Il Guarany*, Sánchez de Fuentes's opera rewrites Cuba's history as a union between Europeans and indigenous peoples, leaving out all trace of African influence.<sup>29</sup> A reactionary attitude can also be found in zarzuela from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was viewed as "pro-Spanish" (Thomas 15). Yet, a few decades later, zarzuela drew on different influences, including "Afrocuban musical traditions" (MacCarthy 16). This change happened in part due to a growing worldwide interest in African culture.

## 1920S & 1930S CUBA—MOVEMENTS, MANIFESTOS, AND MUSIC

The 1920s and 1930s were decades of tremendous pushing-of-the-envelope artistic change in the Western hemisphere, including Cuba. Innovative movements in the arts—from

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<sup>27</sup> Garveyism, which will be discussed in greater detail in the third chapter, was a movement led by Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey in the early 1900s that found success in various parts of the Americas, and particularly in the United States. Garvey strived to unite persons of African descent in order to gain greater political and economic power.

<sup>28</sup> In *La música en Cuba* Alejo Carpentier notes that the Spanish-language libretto was written with little regard for the demands of sung language, resulting in cumbersome phrasing for the singers (254).

<sup>29</sup> As numerous scholars have noted, the theme of white/indigenous union and its influence in Cuba can be found throughout Eduardo Sánchez de Fuentes's works.

visual art, to literature, to music—flourished, and some focused on exploring African culture. Much of the impetus for experimentation originated in Europe. Latin American avant-garde movements were “distinctly European in origin,” yet “stimulated frenzied cultural activity in Latin America” (Verani “Vanguardia” 114). The currents of modernity sweeping across Cuba can perhaps be most easily seen in the works of *vanguardista* (avant-garde) writers, such as those who formed the Havana-based *Grupo Minorista* in 1923.

The group brought together thinkers and professionals united by intellectual and political affinity. *Grupo Minorista* members included José A. Fernández de Castro, Jorge Mañach, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Alejo Carpentier, Juan Marinello, and Amadeo Roldán. Their “Declaración del Grupo Minorista” listed the goals they wished to advance, including: “la revisión de los valores falsos y gastados . . . la introducción y vulgarización en Cuba de las últimas doctrinas, teóricas y prácticas, artísticas y científicas” (“The revision of false and spent values . . . the introduction and popularization of the latest doctrines, theories, and practices, artistic and scientific”) (“Declaración” 7).

The Cuban avant-garde differed from those of other Latin American countries. In Latin America the avant-garde’s influence was strongest from roughly 1916-1935, as Verani notes; however, “El vanguardismo llega tarde a Cuba y carece de la audacia polémica y experimental de los movimientos de los comienzos de esta década” (“Avant-gardism comes late to Cuba and lacks the experimental and polemic audacity of the movement of the beginning of this decade”) (“Las vanguardias” 22). That is not to say that “audacia polémica y experimental” did not exist in Cuba, but rather that in comparison to the avant-garde movements of Mexico and other countries, it was expressed distinctly and focused on other issues. As *Minorista* Juan Marinello

expressed in an article published in the Havana *Grupo Minorista* journal *Avance*<sup>30</sup> in 1930, and later reprinted in the Madrid journal *Nosotros*,

En lo literario y en lo plástico las corrientes llamadas vagamente *de vanguardia*—bebidas de Francia y de España—han interesado los mejores espíritus. En algún momento estos nuevos nodos han cobijado *esencias criollas*: cuando han sido utilizados como herramientas para captar *lo propio*, no como fórmulas para hacer arte a la moda. Triunfo no pequeño mientras persista *nuestra condición*—hispanoamericana—de provincias europeas, mientras la similitud de inquietudes sea replica y no coincidencia.

In the literary and in the plastic arts the currents vaguely called avant-garde—imbibed from France and Spain—have interested the best spirits. At some moment these new connections have sheltered *creole essences*: when they have been used as tools to capture *our own*, not as formulas to make art a la mode. No small triumph while there persists *our condition*—Spanish American—of [being] European provinces, while the similarity of disquietude is a replica and not a coincidence. (9-10, emphasis added)

Marinello’s mention of “creole essences” shows his own inquietude over copying European art and movements; instead, he comments on the need to use these new connections bridging the Atlantic as tools, not formulaic ways of making art. These desires to capture “our own” found expression in a variety of Cuban cultural forms.

Many Latin American intellectuals also recognized the importance of *mestizaje* and non-European cultural expressions in their own cities and countryside. In Peru, José Carlos

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<sup>30</sup> Veres credits the *Revista de Avance* with initiating the Cuban avant-garde movement in which *Minoristas* took part: “Así la vanguardia en Cuba se considera inaugurada desde 1927 cuando la *Revista de Avance* organiza la exposición “Arte Nuevo” (“Thus the avant-garde in Cuba is considered inaugurated beginning in 1927 when the *Journal of Avance* organized the exposition ‘New Art’”) (par. 16).



Mariátegui wished his journal *Amauta* (1926-1930) to serve as a “voice for the revindication of autochthonous cultures” (Verani “Vanguardia” 129). In Mexico, the *muralistas*, including Diego Rivera and José Orozco, often painted scenes highlighting the lives of the indigenous peoples of Mexico. The Cuban *minoristas* were certainly aware of these movements and of growing interest in (and at times exoticization of) African themes that was sweeping Europe, the United States, and the Caribbean. As Moore points out, “This was the era of the tango, the ‘jazz craze,’ ‘bohemian’ Paris, the Harlem Renaissance, the primitivists, the fauvists, naive *kunst*, and a host of related movements drawing inspiration from non-European traditions” (3). More specifically, movements exploring African cultural elements were taking root in France and in various nations in the Americas, among other places. Different influences—from Blaise Cendrars’s *Anthologie nègre* (1921), to Alain Locke’s anthology *The New Negro* (1925), to a series of manifestos that gave voice to various artistic and political movements—responded to each other and held in common the exploration of Black culture. Along with *Négritude*, the movement that united Francophone intellectuals Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon-Gontran Damas in their desire to throw off the French colonial yoke and celebrate a shared African lineage, Hispanophone movements in the Americas likewise burgeoned.

In Cuba, “Los vanguardistas cubanos habían puesto en marcha una simbiosis entre lo primitivo y lo moderno que encontraba su apoyo en los primeros trabajos etnográficos de Fernando Ortiz y en los cuentos negros y los trabajos folklóricos de Lydia Cabrera” (“The Cuban *vanguardistas* had put in motion a symbiosis between the primitive and the modern that found its support in the first ethnographic works of Fernando Ortiz and the Black stories and the folkloric works of Lydia Cabrera”) (Veres par. 16). In the spirit of this “symbiosis,” some Cuban writers, including *minoristas*, attempted to represent the essence of “lo africano” in their own works.

*Afrocubanista* expressions gained influence in many realms, and as Cuban artists “rediscovered Afro-Cuban culture . . . as the essential source of national characterization” (Béhague “Music” 318), all the arts were affected, from literature to dance to music.

Just as an aptly named renaissance took place in Harlem, the *Afrocriollo* movement of the 1920s-1940s constituted the “Harlem Renaissance of Latin America,” as Richard Jackson calls it (31). *Afrocriollismo* developed into two branches: *negrismo* became associated with white writers who earned a reputation for superficial portrayals and having a “dilettante image, close similarity to European negrophilia”; *negritud* became known for its Black writers and their “authentic” treatment of Black culture (Jackson 20-21). Examples of Negrismo abound. In Puerto Rico, white poet Luis Palés Matos published the poem “Danza negra” (1926), which launched what became the *Afro-Antillano* movement. In certain ways the movement created links between the Antilles islands and their shared African diasporic heritage. Many criticized Palés Matos and other likeminded poets for creating stereotypical Black characters. Indeed, in his work Palés Matos superficialized and exoticized Blacks and their activities, and in this he was not alone. The Puerto Rican poet and his Cuban counterparts, José Z. Tallet and Ramón Guirao, “eran blancos [y] miraban el mundo del negro desde la ventajosa posición del observador ajeno, y su poesía, descriptiva en alto grado, lo representaba como una figura pintoresca que vivía de manera elemental a través de sus sentidos” (“were white [and] saw the world of the black from the advantageous position of the outside observer, and their poetry, descriptive to a high degree, represented him as a picturesque figure that lived in an elementary manner through his feelings”) (Márquez 130). In Cuba, works such as José Z. Tallet’s poem “La Rumba” (1928), and Nicolás Guillén’s collection *Motivos de son* (1930) brought to the forefront the literary use of Black themes and characters (whether “dilettante” or not). These and similar

works helped give rise to *afrocubanismo*, which turned the gaze of many artists, white and Black, not to Africa, but to the rhythms, imagery, and religious practices of “los afrocubanos.”<sup>31</sup>

In terms of music, *afrocubanismo* made its mark as composers and audiences became more open to rhythms and musical styles not previously heard in concert halls or upper-class dance venues. This change represented a major shift in Cuban music and the formation of Cuban identity. After the popularity of European influenced *danzas* and *contradanzas* that “were the rage in the salons of the 1800s,” the second “important moment” of Cuban musical nationalism occurred during 1925-1937, as artists turned to “blacks to find an intrinsically Cuban or national expression characterized by two key concepts, originality and independence” (Rodríguez 100). This moment of nationalism seemingly represents a search for authenticity. Famed composer Amadeo Roldán, a *Minorista* trained in western art music and of mixed African and European heritage (Béhague “Music” 166), offered audiences the groundbreaking *Obertura sobre temas cubanos* (“Overture on Cuban Themes”) (1925). The piece “opened the door that allowed drums, claves, gourds, and rattles onto the concert stage together with violins and clarinets” (Rodríguez 100, 104). He composed works such as the ballet suite *La Rebambaramba*, “one of the finest examples of Afro-Cuban classicism” (Fernández-Kelly 61-62), that employed güiros, maracas, and claves, among other instruments, and made a splash at its 1928 Paris debut (Carpentier, *Obras* 151). Other composers who followed suit felt the music establishment’s displeasure for

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<sup>31</sup> Guillén and others benefitted from the Sunday “Ideales de una Raza” section of the capital’s *Diario de la Marina* newspaper, the brainchild of Gustavo E. Urrutia. Here Guillén published his six groundbreaking *Motivos* poems. The very “reactionary” newspaper *Diario* played a significant role in the city’s political and literary life. Most importantly, the “Ideales” section provided an important forum for the *afrocubano* community. “Ideales” catered to a different group of readers than the rest of the paper, and it “proporcionaba un sustancial aumento semanal de ventas al *Diario* . . . entre la clientela negra y mestiza” (“provided a substantial weekly rise in sales to the *Diario* . . . among the Black and *mestizo* clientele”) (Aguirre 21). *Diario*’s Sunday literary supplement edited by José A. Fernández, also gave voice to change-inducing trends and issues, and with the *Revista de Avance*, constituted the most “characteristic” publications of the Cuban avant-garde as did, to a lesser degree, the journals *Social* (based in Havana) and *Orto* (based in Manzanillo) (Augier “Poesía” xxiv).

integrating “*batá* drums, a *bongó*, *clave*, or even maracas into symphonic works” (Moore 202). Such a combination of instruments had not been previously seen in Havana’s concert halls, although the blend had long been happening in less formal venues.

*Son* music, for instance, mixed musical forms and instruments and became more acceptable as the twentieth century continued. Although it was popular among Cuba’s lower classes, initially many middle- and upper-class Cubans looked down on the disreputable *son*. It gained a reputation as objectionable since the bourgeoisie associated it with prostitution, lewd dancing, and marginalized sectors of society (Aguirre 8). By the late 1920s, though, it came into vogue, and merited official recognition. The Cuban government sent Ignacio Piñero’s Septeto Nacional, a well-known *son* group, to the 1929 World’s Fair in Seville, Spain as its official representative, where it was well received (Ledón Sánchez 84).

Because it was, “created largely by black and mulatto Cubans out of both Euro- and Afro-Cuban elements” *son* can be considered the “quintessential creole Cuban form” (Roberts 103). *Son* musicians used a blend of instruments of European and Cuban origin (guitar, trumpet, double bass, piano, tres, marímbula, maracas, claves, and bongo). The *son*’s origins remain unclear and many *son* variations exist. It was “initially confined to [Cuban’s] rural eastern provinces. Incorporation into the repertoires of urban dance bands in Havana, however, resulted in its dissemination and nationwide popularization in the late 1920s (Alvarez 1994)” (Moore 89).

Acceptance of *son* made its way to theatrical venues as well. Zarzuelas, musical revues, and other works brought new sounds to Cuba’s stages. The tango-congo featured in *Cecilia Valdés* is one of several zarzuela songs meant to bring to mind African-inspired rhythms. Trío

Matamoros, a popular *trova* band of the 1920s (and beyond),<sup>32</sup> performed *boleros* and *son*, using guitars, maracas, and claves. The group found great success in “bridging the gap between *trova* and *son*” (Moore 107). In March 1931 they appeared in the musical revue *Guitarras y manzanilla* (“Guitars and chamomile”) at the Havana Teatro Nacional (Molina 297). Such a performance proves significant since *son* music, with its Afro-Cuban influence, would presumably have been heard onstage.

## THE REVIVAL OF ZARZUELA

In the 1920s, along with musical revues, Cuban zarzuelas caught hold of the public’s imagination and became immensely popular on the island. In *150 Años de Zarzuela en Puerto Rico y Cuba*, Molina documents the premiers of many original zarzuelas in Havana theaters in the 1920s and 1930s. This entertainment served a double purpose, since audience members saw the themes and characters particular to Cuban life acted out before them, often adapted from other theatrical traditions, including *teatro bufo*. Cuban zarzuelas of the period often ended unhappily, and resembled tragic opera more than the usually light-hearted zarzuelas of Spain.

In attempting to understand zarzuela’s importance, it is important to recognize that it was “more than entertainment in Cuba; it had genuine cultural and political influence” (Sturman 52). Indeed, analyzing zarzuela’s development and influence serves as a way of understanding Cuba’s “cultural and musical slide into modernity,” one unifying “Old World theatrical and rhetorical traditions with New World themes” (Thomas 1). Many of the “New World Themes” the composers and librettists explored could be found in nineteenth-century literature. For

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<sup>32</sup> *Trova* is “Traditional popular song . . . performed by street musicians (*trovadores*) and other working-class artists that first became nationally popular at the turn of the century . . . . Despite its humble origins, *trova* repertory demonstrates the clear stylistic influence of Italian opera and other classical genres” (Moore 287).

instance, four popular 1920s zarzuelas—*Niña Rita o La Habana en 1830* (1927, music by Eliseo Grenet and Ernesto Lecuona, libretto by Antonio Riancho and Aurelio Castells); *El Cafetal* (1929, music by Ernesto Lecuona, libretto by Gustavo Sánchez Galarraga); *María la O* (1930, music by Ernesto Lecuona, libretto by Gustavo Sánchez Galarraga); and *Cecilia Valdés* (1932, music by Gonzalo Roig, libretto by Agustín Rodríguez and José Sánchez-Arcilla)—all take place during the first half of the nineteenth century. All of the above-mentioned zarzuelas proved popular and their tunes were soon heard in popular venues and were printed as inexpensive sheet music, examples of which can be found at Havana’s Museo Nacional de la Música. Zarzuelas “responded unanimously to the needs of an emerging nationalist movement. The response was articulated by a deliberate exploration of the colonial past, partnered with adaptations of nineteenth-century *novelas antiesclavistas* (antislavery novels)” (MacCarthy 81).

The motivations for this exploration differ; Zoila Salomón, widowed partner of Gonzalo Roig affirms that Maestro Roig had wanted to make a zarzuela out of the novel *Cecilia Valdés* since his youth, and declared, “Esta es la zarzuela que quiero hacer” (“This is the zarzuela that I want to make”) (personal interview). On the other hand, Ernesto Lecuona, as famed arranger and orchestra leader Félix Guerrero explained, “siempre tuvo predilección para los libretos de zarzuela inspirados en el período colonial” (“always had a predilection for the zarzuela librettos inspired by the colonial period”). This predisposition of Lecuona’s in *María la O*, Guerrero clarifies, allows for “un romántico argumento inspirado en La Habana de 1830, donde palpita la vida y costumbres de esa época, con pintorescos detalles de nuestro rico folklore afro” (“a romantic plot inspired the Havana of 1830, where the life and customs of this period pulsate, with picturesque details of our rich African folklore”). Perhaps as the nation faced the 1930s, another decade of political and economic uncertainty, an exploration of fictionalized histories

from a century earlier proved comforting. Given the number of times this period was re-created onstage, it at least proved popular.

Two of those popular zarzuelas set in the early nineteenth century are *María la O* (1930) and *Cecilia Valdés* (1932), both based on Cirilo Villaverde's novel (1882). Well-known composer Ernesto Lecuona and librettist Gustavo Sánchez Galarraga wrote *María la O* and drew its plot elements from the novel. Yet, as the story goes, without official permission from Villaverde's estate, the pair had to rename their zarzuela, swapping Cecilia for María, and change some key elements of the plot. Their adaptation also features a bi-racial Cuban woman and María's songs emphasize her race and gender. Crossed in love by the handsome Fernando, a white man, in the end María stabs her betrayer. The zarzuela with official permission to adapt Villaverde's novel is *Cecilia Valdés: Comedia lírica en un acto* ("Lyrical comedy in one act") by composer Gonzalo Roig and librettists Agustín Rodríguez and José Sánchez-Arcilla. This collaboration was not the first between these talented artists: in 1931 Roig and Rodríguez formed a successful zarzuela company (Molina 297), and Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla also joined forces on another theatrical offering, *El voto de las mujeres* ("The women's vote"), among others.<sup>33</sup>

*Cecilia Valdés* premiered at Havana's Teatro Martí on March 26, 1932. The one-act work told the re-fashioned story through music, dance, and dialogue in a prologue, eight scenes, an epilogue, and an "apotheosis." The transformation from non-musical text to dramatic musical work changed many elements, yet the main characters and the plot of secrecy, incestuous love, and jealousy remained. The prologue opens with an emotional scene, in medias res, in which Don Cándido angrily demands that he immediately be given the newborn child, Cecilia, and that

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<sup>33</sup> Molina (538) and Thomas (32) document other projects on which the men collaborated.

an enslaved woman of his choosing raise her. To the attending doctor he yells, “Soy casado, tengo una familia honorable, y si me descubriera que he tenido una hija con una mestiza, el escándalo sería horrible” (“I am married, I have an honorable family, and if it were discovered that I have had a daughter with a *mestiza*, the scandal would be horrible”) (Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 8). He focuses most on preserving his status and honor as a white man of “good” family. Charito, the new mother, cries in anguish, “¡No! ¡No! ¡Mi hija!” (“No! No! My daughter!”) (Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 8). In her invalid state and as a free woman of color she has no say in the matter. Emotion runs high throughout the novel and the zarzuela, but other elements from the book are absent in the musical work.

In terms of the political statements made in the novel, the zarzuela changes and/or omits many of them. A short introduction to the zarzuela’s first scene establishes the context (Cuba 1830, under the reign of King Fernando VII of Spain, and under the governorship of Francisco Dionisio Vives). The tense political situation between Spanish-born *peninsulares* and Cuban-born *criollos* receives little mention, other than a passing comment from Leonardo. In discussing his father’s desire for an aristocratic (Spanish) title with his friends Menes and Solfa, he contends: “Yo soy criollo, hijo de criolla, y tengo mis ideas respecto a todo lo que viene de allá . . .” (“I am *criollo*, son of a *criollo*, and I have my ideas about all that comes from there . . .”) (Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 11). He identifies with his mother’s Creole heritage, not his father’s Spanish birth or political ideologies that come “from there.”

After this brief statement the atmosphere changes, and music, love, and laughter ensue. Attention shifts to a less strident topic: Cecilia. She appears, and Leonardo lauds her in song, paying special attention to her physical characteristics, as though to dissect then appraise each one in turn. He praises her lovely feet, graceful body, lilting gait, brilliant eyes, and red lips. All



thoughts of politics flee and are replaced by desire for the woman he wishes to seduce, as “nuestra heroína” (“our heroine”) enters the stage to introduce herself through song in her *salida*, or entrance.

Cecilia’s well-known musical piece “Yo soy Cecilia Valdés” illustrates the character’s conflicted nature. She sings, among other phrases,

Hierve la sangre en mis venas	The blood boils in my veins
soy mestiza y no lo soy.	I am mestiza and I am not
Yo no conozco las penas	I don’t know what suffering is
yo siempre cantando voy	I’m always singing as I go
.....	.....
Soy cascabel, soy campana . . .	I am a rattle, I am a bell . . .
¡Yo no sé lo que es sufrir!	I don’t know what it means to suffer!
.....	.....
¡Cecilia Valdés!	¡Cecilia Valdés!
Mi nombre es	My name is
precursor de la alegría.	Precursor to happiness.

(Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 13)

In this passage she gives voice to her uncertainties about her identity singing, something she never does in the novel. This song, despite its very public setting, acts as a kind of soliloquy, revealing her unsettled feelings. A woman of “alma cubana” (“Cuban soul”), Cecilia ties her indecision about her identity to her biracial heritage, which leaves her with feelings of uncertainty, since she is neither mestiza, nor African, nor white. Cecilia seemingly does not know *who* she is, and defines herself using objects that matter most when in motion (a rattle, a

bell). She is in constant flux, which underscores her desire for change and for social mobility. She may not know who she is, but she knows where she wishes to be—in Leonardo’s social ambit. Rather than saying her name *is* happiness, she proclaims it a “precursor” to happiness: that happiness, for her, is yet to come. She equates joy with marriage to a white Cuban man, becoming a social equal of those who consider themselves her “betters.” Not until the zarzuela’s end will she find healing, peace, and the ability to be still.

Much of her unhappiness derives from the socioeconomic difficulties that separate Cecilia from her lighter-skinned peers. Such distinctions are played out on stage through dialogue, stage settings, and music. Before her triumphant arrival, Leonardo describes “Ceci” (Cecilia) as the “mulata más linda de La Habana” (“most beautiful *mulata* of Havana”) (Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 10), emphasizing her race and reinforcing his position of power over her. His interest in her represents an innovation, distinct from *teatro bufo*, in which *mulatas* would gravitate toward a white galán, rather than the “negrito or the gallego” (MacCarthy 82); here they gravitate toward each other. Although she aspires to marry Leonardo, a wealthy white Creole, a wide gulf separates them. While Cecilia generally addresses her beloved in the formal “usted,” Leonardo addresses her in the familiar “tú.” In terms of spatial considerations, as in the novel, they meet on the street or in private Afro-Cuban homes, but never in Leonardo’s family home or on the Gamboa estate. Cecilia would find no welcome in either place because of her biracial background and so-called “lower-class” status.

In terms of music, different musical styles also socially and culturally position the two main characters. These distinctions are highlighted by music. In discussing Cecilia’s *salida*, or the first time she enters the stage and sings, Thomas notes that,

Roig's music explores the boundaries and tensions between Cecilia's white and mulatto characteristics. One of the most overt ways that Roig expresses these tensions is through the interplay of musical styles. Similar to María de la O's *salida*, there is a marked difference between a lyrical, operatic style, which may be read to confer whiteness, and a more rhythmic and "Afrocuban" syllabic setting drawn from popular song. (63)

Although the *salida* forms only part of the larger work (albeit an important part), other songs and lyrics also represent the conferral of "whiteness" or an "Afrocuban" identity on Cecilia, and upon other characters, especially women.

In analyses of race and gender in the zarzuela, Cecilia often receives the lion's share of attention. Thomas contends that "this zarzuela leaves behind the political message of Villaverde's novel and uses its Afrocuban characters to entertain rather than to educate" (62). Although this observation proves partially true since entertainment abounds, the plot and treatment of specific characters still subtly bring the real status of Afro-Cubans to the forefront. Cecilia describes herself as *mestiza* (or perhaps not *mestiza*), as an always-moving, never-still figure, and as a metaphorical bell or rattle. She seems unsure of her identity, which should not seem surprising: Cecilia is a biracial woman living in an era of slavery and female subjugation, and she wants more than society will allow her to have. Many critics note the protagonist's ambiguous sense of identity in the novel and the zarzuela: Nancy Morejón reminds readers, "Cecilia doesn't want to be Cecilia" (qtd. in González Mandri 16); Susan Thomas affirms that "[Cecilia's] identity is always in flux" (64); and Flora González Mandri states that the novel "relegates the figure of the mulatta to a sense of split identity and a place of invisibility" (18). Until the zarzuela's ending, when Cecilia's identity seemingly becomes whole through her communion with the divine, she

exists somewhat frenetically. Yet, she is not the only character who suffers because of her social position.

Another figure, possibly also a *mulata*, suffers greatly in the zarzuela. Her fate sheds light on the consequences of slavery, and on how it is portrayed onstage. Dolores Santa Cruz, an Afro-Cuban woman, stands as a counterpoint to Cecilia, both musically and dramatically. While she has a very minor role in the novel as a madwoman roaming the streets, in the zarzuela she plays a larger part, and sings her woes on stage. In the novel, the narrative voice relates that Dolores, a former slave, bought her freedom, became well-to-do, and then lost all her property in a court battle. In destitution, she wanders the streets in rags, with straw and flowers in her hair, like a Cuban-born Ophelia. Her only line in the book reveals the source of her troubles: “*¡Po! ¡pó! Aquí va Dolores Santa Cruz. Yo no tiene dinero, no come, no duerme. Los ladrones me quitan cuanto tiene. ¡Po! ¡po! ¡Po!*” (“Po! Po! Here goes Dolores Santa Cruz. I has no money, doesn’t eat, doesn’t sleep. Thieves steal from me what I has. Po! Po! Po!”) (Villaverde 321). The narrator relates that since her family cannot afford the fees to keep her in a hospital for the insane, the authorities pick her up and intern her (318).

In the zarzuela, Dolores’s sad story comes to life in the music she sings. On the street and in the asylum she intones her eternal *muletilla*, or tune, “Po po po,” telling of being robbed by the machinations of pitiless lawyers and (presumably white) “gentlemen” (Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 12). In contrast to Cecilia’s soprano part, Dolores sings contralto. Liner notes from a United-States-published Angel Records LP, a repackaging of the 1948 Cuban Montilla

Label recording of selections from *Cecilia Valdés* featuring soprano Marta Pérez,<sup>34</sup> describe Dolores Santa Cruz's singing and pronunciation as follows:

In this quintessentially Afro-Cuban *tango congo* the ex-slave Dolores Santa Cruz, now a crazed wanderer in the streets of Havana, tells how white lawyers robbed her of her money. Her pronunciation of Spanish is strictly Afro-Cuban: for "Here is Dolores Santa Cruz" she sings "Aquí etá Dolore Santa Crú" instead of the correct "Aquí está Dolores Santa Cruz."

For a presumably non-Spanish-speaking audience, the above description underscores the otherness of her musical style. The *tango congo* (described above as not Cuban, but Afro-Cuban), was classified by composer Emilio Grenet as one of the "Genres Bordering on the African" (Guevara 263).

Lyrics and dialogue also separate Dolores racially from the other characters. Dolores's otherness also stands in relation not only to Cecilia, who speaks "standard" Spanish, but also to Isabel de Ilincheta, a mezzo-soprano, who speaks "upper-class" Spanish "in the madrileño style" (Liner notes). Dolores's Spanish, while not labeled "incorrect," is pointedly exemplified as the opposite of correct and as being "Afro-Cuban" in terms of pronunciation. In a later song, "Tanilá," the author describes her lyrics as "rich in Afro-Cuban idioms, def[ying] description" (Liner notes). The speech given to Dolores, Cecilia, and Isabel in dialogue and song defines their characters. As early as the seventeenth century Black characters in Spanish theater spoke distinctly from their white counterparts, marking language as an element that "subalterniza al negro" ("subalternizes the Black person") (Martiatu Terry 279). The custom carried over to

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<sup>34</sup> The record—the first recording of *Cecilia Valdés*—features Ruth Fernández as Dolores Santa Cruz (contralto), Marta Pérez as Cecilia Valdés (soprano), Aida Pujol as Isabel de Ilincheta (mezzo-soprano), and Francisco Naya as Leonardo de Gamboa (tenor).

Cuban theater as well. As Civantos points out, following the nineteenth-century ideas of Andrés Bello and his *Gramática*, “proper” Spanish had long been important in Cuba: “Grammar does not refer merely to syntactical correctness, but rather to the linguistic and cultural authority that legitimates certain speakers and endows them with distinctiveness in the cultural marketplace” (51). Dolores loses her property and her freedom in part because she lacks this “distinctiveness in the cultural marketplace”: she also loses her capacity to speak. Fated to poverty and insanity, she suffers in the zarzuela. And unlike Cecilia, Dolores does not find salvation in her new prison-home, the Paula Hospital, looked after by nuns.

In the zarzuela’s epilogue Dolores remains “incurable”; the nun in charge of her laments, “Es incurable / Lleva lo menos veinte años / con la misma letania” (“She is incurable / It has been at least twenty years / with the same refrain”) (Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 49). Cecilia also comes to the Paula Hospital; there she will serve a year’s sentence as punishment for Leonardo’s death by José Pimienta’s hand. Unlike Dolores, Cecilia is “curable.” In a scene filled with precisely those “Old World theatrical and rhetorical traditions” that Thomas notes in zarzuelas (1), Charito Alarcón, the protagonist’s mother, miraculously recognizes her daughter by the mark on Cecilia’s body, a moment of anagnorisis, and they are then also blessed by an apparition of the female divine. The nun, Madre Soledad, looks on in amazement at the mother-daughter reunion:

Ceci. Vald.:	¿Qué? ¿Quién es usted?	What? Who are you?
Char. Alarc.:	¡Tu madre! ¡Ven a mis brazos!	Your mother! Come to my arms!
Ceci. Vald.:	¡Madre!	Mother!
Char. Alarc.:	¡Hija de mi alma!	Daughter of my soul!
Mad. Soled.:	¡Cosa es ésta de milagro!	This is a miracle!

Char. Alarc.: **(De rodillas.)**

¡Gracias, Caridad del Cobre<sup>35</sup>  
que mi ruego has escuchado,  
y sana me la devuelves...!

**(Kneeling.)**

Thank you, Our Lady of Cobre  
that you have heard my plea,  
and you return her to me whole...!

(Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 42)

The end of this touching scene brings the “apotheosis” that the zarzuela’s title page promises.

The three women see the Virgin on high, bathed in light. This particular virgin, the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, is Cuba’s patron saint in Roman Catholicism and therefore especially meaningful to Cecilia (and to the zarzuela’s audiences). In essence, the two women are recognized, something that had not happened before due to their race and socioeconomic status (and imprisonment). The nun, Madre Soledad urges Cecilia to repent ceaselessly, and the young woman sings her penitence in “Sanctus,” comparing herself to Mary Magdalene:

Ceci. Vald.: ¡Virgen santa, Virgen buena,  
Cecilia Valdés pecó;  
pero Cristo perdonó  
un día a la Magdalena  
por un pecado de amor!

Holy Virgin, good Virgin,  
Cecilia Valdés sinned;  
but Christ forgave  
the Magdalene one day  
for a sin of love!

(Rodríguez and Sánchez-Arcilla 42)

It is interesting to note that another version of the zarzuela, the unsigned, undated 129-page manuscript held by the Museo Nacional de la Música in Havana, omits this scene.<sup>36</sup> Villaverde’s

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<sup>36</sup> This greatly expanded manuscript, according to the museum’s records, measures 210 by 330 millimeters, and this libretto was written not by Agustín Rodríguez and José Sánchez-Arcilla, but by Modesto Centeno and Gilberto Enríquez. Thomas lists Centeno and Enríquez as having adapted the original libretto (223).

novel does not include a heavenly vision, just the reported meeting of Cecilia and Charo before the latter's death. Yet, the scene reconciliatory is critical.

The apotheosis and reunion serve to give this version of the zarzuela a hopeful, optimistic ending (unlike the novel). Rather than remaining stereotyped as dangerous, sexualized *mulatas* that threaten white male power,<sup>37</sup> Cecilia and Charo find salvation and recognition through drawing close to another female archetype: the Virgin.<sup>38</sup> (Before her death, Cecilia's grandmother Chepilla also seems to turn her life over to *La Virgen*). The ending emphasizes Cuba's ties to Catholicism and very possibly Afro-Cuban beliefs, since La Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre is revered in Cuba by practitioners of Regla de Ocha, an Afro-Cuban religion. González Echevarría notes that the Virgen is a *mulata*, and by linking her with Cecilia the zarzuela becomes a "paean to racial mixture and harmony as a desideratum and national ideology" (130). The novel's abrupt conclusion, on the other hand, ties up loose ends but leaves few possibilities for the disgraced Cecilia. In both versions she at last knows her mother and presumably knows (or will know) the mystery of her birth. Ironically, Cecilia's banishment unmask the family secrets. The anxiety of genealogy can be laid to rest, although in the novel its consequences remain, with little recourse for Cecilia.

This "grandiose event" (Brooks 3) that brings *Cecilia Valdés* to a close serves to remind its audience of the zarzuela's emotional highs and lows. The melodrama is palpable: a masked family relationship is laid bare by a reunion and apotheosis. Unity with family, and with heaven, ensues. One could say that union with the national family also occurs, since whiteness is no

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<sup>37</sup> See Kutzinski's excellent discussion of this point in relation to *Cecilia Valdés* and Francisco Muñoz del Monte's poem "La Mulata" (1845) (22-33).

<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that in *María la O* María also pleads with the Virgen del Cobre in the "Gran dúo" she sings with her beloved, Fernando.



longer a prerequisite to belonging to the national patrimony. In this hyperbole-filled scene, set in the depths of prison, grace is bestowed, and all becomes clear. Uncertainty disappears, since Cecilia has, in essence, a new identity that consumes the old one. Since the “desire to express all seems a fundamental characteristic of the melodramatic mode” (Brooks 4), such an ending—in which all is expressed—seems particularly appropriate.

Perhaps that is one reason the story of Cecilia has had such staying power and has been adapted again and again, from a full-length feature film (1982) to a puppet play (2011). Although the 1882 novel’s publication may not have reached as wide a readership as the author would have wished, its adaptation into zarzuela helped bring the story to a much larger audience. That familiarity perhaps derives from a combination of themes. As González Echevarría notes, the artists “learned from the avant-garde and the Afro-Cuban movement the originality and value of Afro-Cuban art, and they put it on stage in the musical form of serious bourgeois and upper-class theater” (130). It was very successful; even the many who had likely never read the book would be familiar with the popular music. Adapting the novel into the dramatic musical work made the experience of seeing or hearing the zarzuela that much more powerful. Presented onstage was Cecilia, an “allegorical symbol of the Cuban nation, celebrating the African and Spanish heritage that permeated collective identities in the Island” (MacCarthy 10). That symbol probably meant a great deal in a decade of uncertainty, as Cuba’s political system teetered. Cecilia has remained important for many decades, and in surprising ways. Still very popular in Miami (Fernández-Kelly 61), the zarzuela was declared a national patrimony of the Cuban Revolutionary government (MacCarthy 98). Whether at home or abroad, on- or offstage, Cecilia has cried, danced, and sung, and along the way become a powerful symbol of Cuban identity.

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This “Romanza” from *María la O* (1930) shows the dissemination of popular zarzuela tunes through the sale of sheet music.

(Courtesy of the Museo Nacional de la Música, Havana)



— Peri é escravo da senhora.  
— Mas Peri é um guerreiro e um chefe.  
— A nação Goitacá tem cem guerreiros fortes como Peri; mil arcos ligeiros como o vôo do gavião.

— Peri is my lady's slave.  
— But Peri is a warrior and a chief.  
— The Goitacá nation has one hundred strong warriors like Peri; one thousand swift bows like a hawk's flight.

*O guarani*, José de Alencar, 105, novel, 1857

## CHAPTER TWO

### *O GUARANI*: LITERATURE, OPERA, AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES

If Cirilo Villaverde tried to create a white family tree for the Cuban nation, then his Brazilian contemporary, José de Alencar (1829-1877), rewrote and “idealized” his own nation’s pedigree. In his famous novel *O guarani* (“The Guarani Indian”) (1857) the renowned author and statesman fashioned a genealogy for Brazil consisting of two branches: indigenous and Portuguese. Like Villaverde’s text, Alencar’s novel reveals anxiety over national origins and racial identity and attempts to establish Brazil as an “authentic” nation that would later develop into the “benevolent” monarchy of the nineteenth century. With *O guarani* the author creates a founding myth for Brazil based on a mestizo identity; this Brazil resolves the anxiety of acknowledging African influence by excluding it and replacing it with an artificial lineage. While Villaverde punishes his characters of African descent (i.e. Cecilia Valdés) Alencar creates a national narrative that ignores African presence all together. In doing so he omits Africans and Afro-Brazilians from the national family and includes only “authentic” indigenous-white Brazilians.

Over the course of several decades Alencar’s narrative has been transformed from a nineteenth-century serialized novel to an Italian-language grand opera and later to a twentieth-

century Portuguese-language opera-ballet endorsed by the regime of Brazilian dictator Getúlio Vargas. Moreover, like *Cecilia Valdés* it has been adapted by other artists in theatre, music, film, and the visual arts. The immensely popular novel *O guarani* provided the basis for the operas *Il Guarany* (1870) and the Brazilian Portuguese version *O guarani* (1935). That the tale has been so often reinterpreted speaks to its ability to bring together disparate people in an imagined collective community, forming a “national genealogy” as Benedict Anderson has emphasized (201). The perception of shared origins that the novel creates highlights the narrative’s power to re-shape how Brazilians see themselves and imagine their nation’s beginnings.

The narrative has become a part of not only the Brazilian collective memory, but also its collective identity. In *O guarani* Alencar celebrates a particular Brazilian identity, a founding myth that strategically remembers/includes specific people and ideals just as it strategically excludes/forgets others. In his rendering, Brazil—a nation founded on violence and conquest—is literally rewritten and given a new genealogy and a new identity as a home for an indigenous Noah and his Portuguese mate, Brazil’s “founders.” The homonymous 1870 grand opera serves a different purpose, and demanded from Europe’s audiences the recognition of Brazil’s status and cultural relevance, bringing glory to the nation and its then-leader, Emperor Pedro II. The subsequent 1935 vernacular translation by C. Paula Barros received backing from the nation’s government under Getúlio Vargas, which repeatedly tried to associate itself with Pedro II and the cultural forms he supported for political gain.

The text presents a fascinating tale of love and intrigue in the Brazilian wilderness, and many consider it to be Brazil’s national novel. It avoids the history of the long, bloody struggles between Europeans over land and resources and the realities of the enslavement of the indigenous population and Africans. Instead, the novel narrates an alternate Brazilian founding

event, one that idealizes and reimagines the origins of Brazilians. A natural disaster that wipes the land clean and the subsequent union of a Guarani warrior and a Portuguese maiden symbolize an “authentic” beginning that leads to the new nation and thus avoids conquest and violence, since all Brazilians are seen as descendants of the two initiators.

The 1935 Brazilian-Portuguese translation of *Il Guarany* reinforces this idea of authenticity. The work—dedicated to the long-dead emperor but sponsored by the president-dictator Vargas—links the two leaders’ regimes. It thus shored up Vargas’s dubious claim to governmental legitimacy, and by drawing on emotions of nostalgia and patriotism, it coerced the national audience to accept the founding legend anew and to look back to the glory days of Pedro II. Vargas’s government appropriated the tale in order to redefine Brazil according to its own ideological needs. José de Alencar’s novel (1857), Carlos Gomes’ Italian-language opera (1870), and C. Paula Barros’s translation into Brazilian Portuguese (1935) each serve different public functions: one celebrates nation-building, another glorifies national status, and the last coerces patriotism. Looking at these versions of the story through the lens of narrative identities, in Paul Ricoeur’s sense, aids in understanding how the various narratives are strategically deployed in different situations. Each expression adds a different layer to the myth of nation-founding and formatively shapes Brazilian collective identity. An exploration of pertinent historical conditions and artistic trends allows for a better understanding of what influences shaped these expressions.

## OF KINGS AND COUNTRY

The nineteenth century brought tremendous political and social change to Brazil, which Portuguese explorers had happened upon three hundred years before. The colony of Brazil—long a source of wealth for the colonizer—became the center of the Portuguese empire in 1808 when

its rulers, the Braganzas, fled to Rio de Janeiro to avoid Napoleon's invading troops. The future King João VI greatly impacted the colony, and especially Rio, since the city's population went from 50,000 to 65,000 with the addition of the royal family, the royal court, and others who came to Brazil (Seara 4). The cultural landscape also underwent change since the king began permitting and sponsoring various innovations: he allowed the operation of the (previously forbidden) printing press, and ordered the construction of the Royal Theater of St. John in Rio in 1813 (L. Silva 27).<sup>39</sup> The monarch also directed Father José Maurício Nunes Garcia, an Afro-Brazilian composer, to write Brazil's first opera, *I Due Gemelli*, which debuted in 1813 in the aforementioned theater (Corrêa de Azevedo 15).

As art and culture thrived in Brazil political and social unrest grew in Portugal. The nation suffered from the effects of war and in the aftermath different political factions fought for power. Eventually João VI was called home in order to restore order to the nation and to save his crown. When the monarch reluctantly left the tropical colony after thirteen years, he entrusted his son, the future Pedro I, to rule over Brazil as part of the Portuguese empire. A series of political maneuverings soon led to Pedro I's declaration of independence for Brazil in 1822. The narratives explored here, *O guarani* and *Il Guarany*, demonstrate the desire of Brazilian artists, like their contemporaries across Latin America, to seek a national identity that would distinguish them from their colonizer and legitimate their nation's collective status. Although this desire for differentiation from the colonizer was not new, with Brazil's independence from Portugal it gained renewed importance and urgency.

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<sup>39</sup> Theater certainly had a presence in Brazil before 1813, and a theater house called the Casa de Ópera had been built in the city in 1767, but burned down two years later (Silva 19). King João's presence in the capital gave new life to the arts.

Led by a constitutional monarch, the empire of Brazil lasted until 1889. During many of those years Emperor Pedro II (1831-1889) ruled. National leaders, led by Pedro II, actively sought to mold and define the idea of “Brazil.” As in other Latin American nations during this time, there was a “renewed interest in national history, along with coordinated efforts by governments and intellectuals to capture and disseminate this history in narrative form” (Newcomb 13). That “national history” could be shaped many ways, according to the ideology of its shaper. Politics and art were closely linked under Pedro II, and artistic currents such as Romanticism were deployed in strategic ways to bring about and legitimate desired ends. Pedro II sought to “consolidate a national culture” and supported certain authors whose politics and artistic vision matched his own, such as Gonçalves de Magalhães (Bosi 109). The monarch considered himself a benevolent patron of the arts who wished to refine the cultural taste of his people. Critic Lafayette Silva, writing in the 1930s, retrospectively goes so far as to call Pedro the “inspirer of all the artistic endeavors” (432) in the kingdom, suggesting that his influence was central to these “endeavors.” While such a statement overemphasizes his involvement, Pedro II did actively promote particular cultural expressions like literature and opera, forms that could employ narrative to present Brazil’s history for ideological purposes.

Brazilian *Romantismo* (c. 1830-1870), like that of other nations, “dinamizou grandes mitos: a nação e o herói” (“energized great myths: the nation and the hero”) (Bosi 103). With its emphasis on artistic expression, independent thought, exploration of the past and nationality, Brazilian Romanticism played a key role in shaping cultural forms. The movement’s influence grew under the sovereignty of Pedro II, the “Second Reign” (1840-1889). Its proponents from various fields participated in the ongoing construction of a “national” identity. Brazil’s Romantic writers drew on European models in their works—Lord Byron was a particular favorite (Smith

726). Still, José de Alencar, Domingos José Gonçalves de Magalhães,<sup>40</sup> and Antônio Gonçalves Dias, among others, re-interpreted European forms in order to present an idealized Brazil, one that fit with their specific cultural and political conceptions (Bethell 180). To this end, Romanticism was “officially introduced” in Brazilian culture circa 1860, although it had made its presence felt long before this point in time (Bosi 110). Brazilian Romantics, like their contemporaries in other countries, consciously sought to fashion the “idea” of their nation, as political scientist Bernardo Ricupero points out (xxii). Their constructed identity differed from that of European Romantics: while the latter group generally distrusted civilization and “protested against capitalism,” the Romantics of Latin America, including those in Brazil largely opposed “barbarism and [were] sympathetic to capitalism” (Ricupero xxviii).

Brazilian and Spanish American Romanticism featured three trends. One “emphasizes landscape and has socio-historical ramifications. The second concentrates on indigenous issues and seeks the perfect Indian. The third is nationalist in tone and is based on the essential characteristics of the movement such as local colour” (Smith 726). The last trend describes *Cecilia Valdés*’s emphasis on local customs, geography, and manners. The focus on finding the “perfect Indian,” evident in *O guarani*, was a main thrust of Brazilian Romanticism, known as *Indianismo*.

This literary movement paid homage to the “índio” and his forest home, and re-interpreted him as a national hero; it also allowed writers to ignore the African presence in their nation (Sá xxii). This focus on indigenous characters by Romantic authors in their various *indianista* works converted the *índios* into “pure” national symbols and invented an ancestry in which Brazilians could presumably take pride. Nineteenth-century Brazilian critic Sílvio Romero

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<sup>40</sup> Magalhães “introduced” Romanticism in Brazil with the publication of *Suspiros poéticos e saúdades* (1836).

pointed out that in their search for “national roots” the Romantic writers of this period “employed indigenous characters as symbols of Brazilian cultural purity” (Vianna 47).<sup>41</sup> Ricupero refers to this “choice of American nature and the Indian as national symbols” as an “ideological operation,” since by then the indigenous population was “practically decimated” and could not prove too vexing to the growing emphasis on modern life (xxviii). Such a focus legitimated this representation of Brazil since the history of the indigenous peoples could be rewritten according to an author’s predilection and written into the national genealogy. Since many considered Brazil’s indigenous population a historic relic that either acceded to or gave way to civilization, it was a convenient group to idealize: this view relegated the *indígenas*’ contribution to Brazilian society to the distant past. Those seeking to promote a specific Brazilian identity could base it on the European-indigenous mix, thus distinguishing it from Europe and omitting Africa. Past miscegenation could be idealized and present miscegenation, especially with Afro-Brazilians, could be conveniently ignored.

Alencar authored *Indianista* works that recalled the “memory” of Brazil’s past. In addition to *O guarani* (1857), the author wrote two other *Indianista* novels, *Iracema* (1865) and *Ubirajara* (1874). *O guarani* was Brazil’s “first frontier novel,” showing similarities to works by James Fennimore Cooper and Chateaubriand that also feature indigenous characters (Andrews 27, 28). For Brazil, Alencar’s characters, language, and elevation of nature have staying power and distinguish the nation not only from Europe, but also from other American nations. Over the years, many generations have recognized the author’s talent at weaving a recognizably “Brazilian” tale. Literary critic Afrânio Coutinho avowed at a conference commemorating the

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<sup>41</sup> Romero himself denied the importance of indigenous groups in Brazil, stating, “The Indian is not a Brazilian” (qtd. in Sá 137).

centenary of the author's death in 1977 that, "Alencar é o patriarca da literatura brasileira" ("Alencar is the literary patriarch of Brazilian literature") (11). Alencar's paternal import derives partially from the perception that his *indianista* novels constitute the myth of origin upon which Brazil's remote beginnings and present identity are founded, or at least the myth of origin that most struck a chord with its Brazilian audience.

### *O GUARANI* AND THE REWRITING OF HISTORY

Set in 1604, the novel tells the tale of the Portuguese nobleman Dom Antônio, who builds his family a fortress—a microcosm of his *patria*—in the new land. One daughter, the young, virginal, blond Cecília (Ceci), seemingly possesses every virtue imaginable along with "ideal" beauty and implied fecundity, an important trait for Brazil's future *materfamilias* (Alencar 297). Her matriarchal role is further emphasized in the novel with the association with Eve; for example, "Cecília era uma menina ingênua e inocente, que nem sequer tinha consciência do seu poder, e do encanto de sua casta beleza; mas era filha de Eva, e não podia se eximir de um quase nada de vaidade" ("Cecilia was a simple and innocent girl, who did not even realize her power, and the enchantment of her chaste beauty; but she was a daughter of Eve, and could not rid herself of a tiny bit of vanity") (Alencar 105). Although she is the future foundress of a nation, the author emphasizes that she is still a daughter (i.e. young and girlish) and given to using her charms when around the attractive Peri. In other words, the narrator implies that she must be taken care of by her future lover, and must be coquettish.

Another daughter, Isabel, the child of an indigenous woman, qualifies as neither wholly Portuguese nor wholly indigenous because of her "illegitimacy," her ill-fated love for a Portuguese adventurer, and her lack of offspring. She is a "mestiza woman" before Brazil can



admit such a population and so rather than found a nation, she must die at the novel's end. Like Cecilia Valdés, another mestiza, she must suffer for her "in-between" status, since she is neither white nor ideal. The Eve role falls to the virginal Ceci rather than to the unacknowledged "Morena" (brunette), *mestiza* Isabel who stands in opposition to her "Loura" (blond), fair half-sister. The novel emphasizes the darkness of her (often tear-filled) eyes more than once. What's more, she feels an antipathy toward Peri, because of his (and her) heritage: "Em Isabel o índio fizera a mesma impressão que lhe causava sempre a presença de um homem daquela côr; lembrara-se de sua mãe infeliz, da raça de que provinha, e da causa do desdém com que era geralmente tratada" ("In Isabel the indian caused the same impression that the presence of a man of that color always caused her; she remembered her unhappy mother, the race from which she came, and the cause of the disdain with which she was generally treated") (Alencar 98). His physical appearance reminds her of her mother, whom she would prefer to forget, and her own uncertain status.

Peri comes across as a hero in every way. Since Alencar relies heavily on allegory, and indeed nineteenth-century historical romances are "more boldly allegorical than the novel" as a genre (Sommer 5),<sup>42</sup> the characters' symbolic purposes must be clearly understandable. Peri is a hero, Ceci is a heroine, and Isabel hardly matters. Life in the wilderness proves dangerous, but Peri comes from a "good" indigenous nation, the Goitacá Guarani, and he saves Ceci from death early in the novel and subsequently devotes himself to fulfilling her every wish. The valiant warrior rescues her from the "savage" Aimorés, a rival indigenous group. He also foils the plot

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<sup>42</sup> Sommer explains that, "By *romance* I mean a cross between our contemporary use of the word as a love story and a nineteenth-century use that distinguished the genre as more boldly allegorical than the novel. The classic examples in Latin America are almost inevitably stories of star-crossed lovers who represent particular regions, races, parties, economic interests, and the like" (5). *O guarani* unites two characters that symbolize different races, regions, and cultures in order to allegorically unify Brazil.

of scheming European adventurers, led by a fallen priest, the wily Italian Loredano. At the novel's end, everyone faces certain death, but Ceci's father knows that Peri can still save his daughter. (His other daughter, Isabel, has already died). The Portuguese noble entrusts Peri with her safety on two conditions: the "heathen" hero must accept Christianity, and he must conduct Ceci to civilization in Rio de Janeiro. Her father trusts only a Christian with the "salvação de minha Cecília" ("salvation of my Cecília") (Alencar 282). In a symbolism-filled passage, the patriarch administers baptism to the willing Peri and bestows upon him the family surname. Only after baptism and the acceptance of a Portuguese identity can a Guarani warrior—even one as "civilized" as Peri—be prepared for such a duty and its aftermath. Peri is essentially "whitened" through this process. Ceci represents the finest that Portugal (i.e. Europe) has to offer, while Peri represents the best of (pre-conquest) Brazil. Together they and their descendants will found a powerful nation.

The two young people successfully flee from the impending slaughter, only to face an epic flood, a cataclysmic founding event. Here Alencar again relies on allegory to drive home his point: the flood serves as an allegorical "baptism" of Brazil, echoing Peri's earlier baptism and conversion. The couple and the land will be taken into the fold, founding a new civilization upon proper foundations. Peri rescues Ceci despite the natural disaster: to do so he turns to the ancient lore of his people. In presenting the flood and the wisdom to withstand it, Alencar gestures not only to biblical tradition but also to Brazil's mythic past. "Era Tamandaré; forte entre os fortes; sabia mais que todos . . . Tamandaré tomou sua mulher nos braços e subiu com ela ao ôlho da palmeira; aí esperou que a água viesse e passasse; a palmeira dava frutos que o alimentavam" ("He was Tamandaré; strong among the strong; he knew more than everyone . . . Tamandaré took his wife in his arms and climbed with her to the top of the palm tree; there he waited until

the water came and went; the palm tree provided fruits that fed them”) (304). Ceci and Peri take shelter in a palm tree and survive the deluge, just as Peri’s mythic ancestors Tamandaré and his wife had done eons before.

Although the novel ends at this point, the implication is clear: the couple will begin anew in an edenic, utopic world, cleansed of previous inhabitants and mores. Just as Ceci is virginal, her adamic counterpart must be a “noble” *índio*, ready to convert to Christianity and adapt to civilization. Brazil’s foundation should begin taint free, removing any question of Brazil’s national or genealogical authenticity and ridding it of the original sin of founding violence. In his final pages, with everyone gone from the wilderness except for Peri and Ceci, Alencar gestures toward a bright future:

[Ceci] embebeu os olhos nos olhos do seu amigo, e lânguida reclinou a loura frente.

O hálito ardente de Peri bafejou-lhe a face.

Fêz-se no semblante da virgem um ninho de castos rubores e límpidos sorrisos: os lábios abriram como as asas purpúreas de um beijo soltando o vôo.

A palmeira arrastrada pela torrente impetuosa fugia. . .

E sumiu-se no horizonte.

[Ceci] immersed her eyes in the eyes of her friend, and slowly reclined her blond forehead.

Peri’s ardent breath caressed her face.

There appeared on the virgin’s face a net of chaste blushes and limpid smiles: her lips opened like the purple wings of a kiss taking flight.

The palm tree, uprooted by the strong storm broke away . . .  
And disappeared on the horizon. (Alencar 306)

This passage emphasizes Ceci's virginity and hints at her implied fertility with references to rosy cheeks and lips. The tree that vanishes in the distance transports them physically and metaphorically. The two heroes will heed the biblical admonition to, "be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth," as they emerge from the flood, and from their union a vigorous, industrious Brazil will be born, a true mestizo nation.<sup>43</sup>

With this multi-faceted ending Alencar draws on the conventions of tragedy, melodrama, and comedy. The tragedy enters in with the death of so many "good" characters—Ceci's family, in particular. Peri saves the innocent heroine, Ceci, from the menacing villain(s), only to then have to save her from a natural disaster. This melodramatic plot differs from that of *Cecilia Valdés*, but both novels use melodramatic elements to captivate readers. As Brooks elucidates, comedy frequently ends with an "erotic union" that brings forth a new society (32). Such a union is definitely hinted at with *O guarani*'s final descriptions of Ceci and Peri.

The pair seems ideally suited to look only to the future: Peri, a king among his own people and now a Christian, "tinha abandonado tudo por [Ceci]; seu passado, seu presente, seu futuro, sua ambição, sua vida, sua religião mesmo; tudo era ela e unicamente ela" ("had abandoned everything for [Ceci]; his past, his present, his future, his ambition, his life, even his religion; everything was she and only she") (Alencar 299). Ceci, the offspring of Portuguese nobility, was a true "americana" who belonged "mais ao deserto do que à cidade; era mais uma virgem brasileira do que uma menina cortesã; seus hábitos e seus gostos prendiam-se mais às pompas singelas da natureza, do que às festas e às galas da arte e da civilização" ("more to the

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<sup>43</sup> Some critics interpret the novel's ending as ambiguous rather than proclaiming a love match (Andrews 29).

desert than to the city; she was more a Brazilian virgin than a courtier; her habits and gestures more attached to the simple splendors of nature, than to the parties and galas of art and civilization”) (Alencar 297, 299). Both are ideal types.<sup>44</sup>

In critic Leila Lehnen’s discussion of Alencar’s play *O Jesuíta* she points out a character’s perception of the “natural deficiency of the Old World, indicating the relationship of dependency between a decadent Europe and a generous, vital Brazil” (par. 16). *O guarani* features the same attitude toward European decadence and Brazilian generosity and vitality. This juxtaposition of corruption and innocence serves a justificatory function in that it reverses the young, unsophisticated Brazilian nation and disparages the older, cultured European nations. Alencar implies that the union of the hero-warrior and the nature-loving maiden will bring about a strong, vibrant society free of the complications of world-weary Europe, a place that produced menacing, greedy villains. Alencar demarcates a space purged by the flood in which industry and posterity will triumph.

*O guarani*’s tale of love articulated the Brazilians national myth of origin and quickly found a loyal audience. The narrative, which Sommer refers to as a “foundational fiction,” was “Brazil’s most influential nineteenth century nationalist work” (McCann 2), one that soon became part of the collective memory. The serialized pieces caused a stir among readers in 1857 and found an audience outside of Rio where it was published (Nogueira Soares 113). The serial’s collection into novel form followed within the same year, and its “popularity was overwhelming” (Coutinho 9). Those very “Brazilian” descriptions struck a chord with a public that over time

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<sup>44</sup> This association of Ceci with nature follows a long-standing tradition of linking women and emotion, as Ahmed points out: “Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as ‘closer’ to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will, and judgment” (3). *Mulatas* have also been linked to nature, as discussed in the first chapter (Thomas 206).

made the novel truly popular and “more read in Brazil than any other book,” as a foe of Alencar’s, Joaquim Nabuco, grudgingly admitted (qtd. in Schwamborn 27). In the prologue to the serialized novel and the subsequent first published edition, Alencar affirms that he “found” and then “deciphered” “um velho manuscrito que encontrei em um armário desta casa, quando a comprei” (“an old manuscript that I found in an armoire in this house, when I bought it”) (2). Alencar’s narrative voice claims to be neither the author nor the creator, but simply a guardian of the aged legend told on the musty manuscript. The oft-used ploy seems cliché, but it serves as a narrative strategy that imbues the legend with authority, removing the author from its creation and asserting the link between the text and Brazil’s prehistory.

That text’s turn to pre-history allows for a willed forgetting of founding violence because it sweeps its audience away with its story of conquest and union. Ricoeur suggests that all historical storytelling is justificatory and therefore ideological, and indeed *O guarani* selectively tells an originary tale toward an ideological end. The novel dissembles the conquest of Brazil by presenting it as noble and necessary; it celebrates the ends (racial harmony) and the resulting Brazilian identity. The narrative neutralizes and even excoriates the sins of the conquerors with the flood: the “barbaric” Aimorés are marked for destruction, while the ideal Peri is saved. Such an idea allows readers to envision themselves as the descendants of Peri and Ceci. This family tree celebrates a particular Brazilian identity, sublating African presence.

In fact, the novel never explicitly mentions historical realities such as the enslavement of Africans and Afro-Brazilians and the mistreatment of indigenous peoples. At the time of its publication, some factions within Brazil argued for the cessation of slavery, or at least its eventual abolition. In *O guarani* the only “slavery” occurs when Peri declares himself Ceci’s slave. Along with African and Afro-Brazilian slavery, the period in which the novel is set saw

*bandeirantes* (slave hunters) enslave Brazil's indigenous peoples for agricultural work, particularly around São Paulo.<sup>45</sup> Alencar's only allusion to the harsh realities of Brazil's colonial caste system comes when Peri contemplates remaining with Ceci in Rio de Janeiro. Speaking in the third person, he foresees an appalling future for himself: "todos serão seus inimigos; todos o tratarão mal; desejará defender-te e não poderá; quererá servir-te e não o deixarão; mas Peri ficará" ("everyone will be his enemies; everyone will treat him badly; he will want to defend you, and will not be able; he will want to serve you and they will not let him; but Peri will stay") (Alencar 297). The author avoids this scenario by keeping his hero firmly away from "civilization" as Peri describes it. Instead, Alencar rewrites history and presumably wipes everyone else out. In his version, civilization and nature will both start anew, with two ideal candidates, the best of their respective nations. The essence of Brazilian identity, then, according to *O guarani*, consists of a legitimate, Christian, white-indigenous mix that pays homage to Portuguese civilization and to the glories of nature. Other alternatives are neither valued nor allowed to survive the flood: Brazil's 1604 re-birth washes away the sins of conquest, and gives the "true" Brazilian progenitors the chance to thrive in their homeland.

#### *BRASILIDADE AT HOME AND ABROAD*

The novel's reimaginings impressed the public as well as playwrights and composers, and provided the material for the opera *Il Guarany*, completed about a dozen years after *O guarani*'s release. Opera thrived in the Americas, and during the nineteenth century Italian opera in particular proved popular in Latin America. Rossini "fever" swept Chile in the 1830s,

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<sup>45</sup> Monteiro's *Negros da Terra: Índios e Bandeirantes nas Origens de São Paulo* offers an excellent study of indigenous enslavement in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Brazil.

followed by a similar passion throughout the Americas for Verdi and his imitators: “by 1870 the most popular of Verdi's operas were being performed in many a far-flung outpost in North, Central and South America” (Brown). In nineteenth-century Brazil opera was, as Cesetti puts it, the “ultimate expression of power and prestige,” but that prestige largely came via European operas and opera companies, singing in Italian and French (107).

By 1857 a movement to express Brazilian identity through home-produced opera was codified with the opening of the National Imperial Academy of Music and Opera, later renamed the Ópera Lyrica Nacional. It was, unsurprisingly, founded with imperial support. The Academy aimed to privilege the Brazilian language, and to “propagate and develop the love for song in the *língua patria*” (Corrêa de Azevedo 100). After his success with the serialized *O guarani*, José de Alencar wrote the libretto for the opera *A noite de São João* (1859), with music by Elias Álvares Lobo. Carlos Gomes, a Verdi disciple, wrote a Portuguese-language opera in response to this push for vernacular productions. His first opera, *A noite no castelo* (“Night in the Castle”) (1861), was also a product of this emphasis on Brazilian vernacular works, and Pedro II honored its premier with his attendance. Yet, aside from the language choice and the nationality of the composer and librettist, there was nothing uniquely “Brazilian” about *A noite*. Instead, the desire to express *brasilidade* was heavily mediated by European expectations and forms.

Later in the same decade, Gomes sought to create an opera of national import, one that would be known for being from Brazil. He found inspiration in Alencar’s novel, no doubt responding to its popularity, perceived “Brazilianness,” and strong mythic resources. By the time he began his work on *Il Guarany*, Gomes had already found success in the world of operatic composition. After he composed *A noite no castelo*, Pedro II honored him for his artistic achievement; following his second opera, *Joana de Flandres* (“Joan of Flanders”) (1863), the



government granted Gomes funding to study on the continent (Silva 435). He journeyed to Italy not only to learn from opera's masters, but also to demonstrate his expertise and prove that he warranted the state's investment in him by creating the requisite composition of merit.

In Europe Gomes sought to gain recognition and cultural legitimacy for himself and for his nation. He saw in *O guarani* the potential for a national opera. He would include standard opera fare, such as the use of melodrama, stock characters, and situations in which the hero saves the heroine in distress; however, in this case, the action would take place in an exoticized, re-imagined Brazil (Machado Coelho 45). The music of *Il Guarany* demonstrates the influence of Italian opera and French opera, and the trend in the latter school during these decades leaned toward exoticism, particularly in terms of explorations of the so-called Orient. Works including Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1877), Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* (1865), Verdi's *Aida* (1870), Massenet's *Le roi de Lahore* (1877), and Delibes's *Lakmé* demonstrate this trend (Coelho 45), which Gomes followed. For the composer, Brazil and its little-known indigenous peoples as portrayed in *O guarani* offered an out-of-the-ordinary alternative to orientalism and an intriguing theme for his composition.

While residing in Milan, Gomes collaborated with the Italian librettist Antonio Scalvini and theatrical agent Carlo D'Ormeville to adapt *O guarani*, Brazilian novel, into *Il Guarany*, Italian opera (Andrews 30). Although he desired to honor his homeland through his work, Gomes's intention "nunca foi a de criar uma escola brasileira de ópera e, sim, a de triunfar como compositor na Europa, praticando um melodrama fiel às receitas peninsulares" ("was never to create a school of Brazilian opera and, indeed, [was] to triumph as a composer in Europe, carrying out a melodrama faithful to the peninsular formulas") (Machado Coelho 2). His most famous composition follows conventional Italian operatic musical language, which is scarcely

surprising given Gomes's training and ambition, and the prevailing demands of Italian opera tradition. Gomes was rewarded for his allegiance to the status quo, but the Brazilian subject matter set his opera apart from all previous operatic works.

On the evening of March 19, 1870 the audience at Milan's renowned La Scala opera house was treated to a display of exoticism such as it had never before seen. "Brazilians"—ballet dancers decked out in feathers and paint—leaped across the stage accompanied by the strains of Verdi-inspired music, music meant to suggest the rhythms and emotions of some of Brazil's earliest people, destined for onstage defeat. Scenes of death and deceit, longing and love from far-off lands and times had certainly graced La Scala's stage before, but this presentation proved unique because of its topic matter: the legendary origins of Brazil.

*Il Guarany*'s authors made significant changes to Alencar's story. Scalvini and D'Ormeville changed the novel's historical details (Silva 12) and excised some subplots and created others to heighten the sense of drama.<sup>46</sup> For example, in an inventive, rousing scene the warring Aimoré nation kidnaps Ceci, and only Peri's bravery can save her from a fate worse than death: marriage to the Aimoré leader. As musicologist Maria Alice Volpe points out, this plot change substantially alters Alencar's original storyline in which Peri tries to sacrifice himself to the Aimorés in order to save Ceci and her family; in the Gomes production it becomes a "conventional motif of rescue opera in which the female awaits to be saved by the hero." The heightened sense of melodrama of such a scene doubtlessly appeals to audience members as they await the longed-for rescue. And unlike in the novel, where Peri speaks halting Portuguese, in

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<sup>46</sup> Jean Andrews and José Eduardo Rolim de Moura Xavier da Silva, among other critics, detail many of the major differences between the novel and opera, including plot, characters, and the setting.

the opera the hero's language (standard sung Italian), does not differ from that of the European characters (Andrews 34).

In another major subplot alteration, Dom Antônio's unacknowledged daughter Isabel disappears entirely from the opera, which conveniently "evades the issue of miscegenation" altogether (Volpe). This change was likely made to simplify the plot and to avoid the implications of a *mestiza* character existing before Brazil's birth as a *mestizo* nation. With regards to the question of race, Cesetti argues that the "opera avoids much of the racism chronically inherent in Alencar's work by replacing much of his originality with an arsenal of operatic commonplaces" (105). The use of "operatic commonplaces" is indeed apparent in the opera, but on stage, the formulaic plot causes the stereotype of "good" Guaranis versus "bad" Aimorés to come across even more starkly.

For example, the music associated with the Aimorés highlights their "barbarity," at least as a European listening audience might perceive it. The music is filled with "strange rhythmic combinations and melodies, an orchestration that defines daring savagery, unexpectedly, furiously unleashed" (Ruberti 89). In the ballet scenes, Volpe says, the Aimorés are, "dehumanized through their absence of speech, and through the exoticized depiction of mythical savagery and 'pagan bacchanals.'" Rather than using actual indigenous Brazilian music to present the indigenous Brazilian characters, the ballet numbers "show the basic patterns of musical representations of the exotic," employ "traditional formulae of 'Turkish music' in portraying Aimoré ritual dances" (Volpe par. 16) and use "especially crafted 'indigenous' instruments" (Cesetti 108). An edition of the libretto published in Buenos Aires in 1908 and held in the library of the Fundação Casa de Ruy Barbosa clarifies that the (war) instruments used in the premier were made by Mr. Maldura of Milan for the performance (Librería 20).

Turning to so-called Turkish music instead of Amazonian melodies shows Alencar's intent to write for a European audience.<sup>47</sup> Using such "exotic" music to portray otherness was a typical European device of the time, and one critic attributes *Il Guarany*'s instant triumph to its recourse to the "exotic topos" (Cesetti 107). "Orientalist composers relied on previous Orientalist compositions, more than on what was known of the music of the region, as a source of stylistic guidance" (Locke 58). Although Gomes was not an "orientalist" composer, he used variations of many of the stereotypical plot elements.<sup>48</sup> An "oriental" alternative musical form could easily stand in for the Aimoré nation, unknown to most Brazilians and certainly unknown to the Italian audience. While this musical choice demonstrates European fascination with the Orient, it also reveals the "idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (Said 73).

Further, the focus on the exotic serves to express, as Volpe states, the "dichotomy between Pery's<sup>49</sup> affinity with and the Aimoré tribe's antithesis to European civilization" (par. 16). The opera, like the novel, reiterates the tendency of Latin American Romanticism away from "barbarism" and toward "capitalism" (a marker of "civilization") (Ricupero xxviii). Peri thus embodies the model indigenous Brazilian—he willingly rejects even his "patria" for Ceci (Barros 28)—while the cannibalistic Aimorés represent those who cannot belong to "Brazil," and

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<sup>47</sup> Critic Marcus Góes suggests in his book *Carlos Gomes: A Força Indômita* that in *Il Guarany* Gomes also shows influence from popular Brazilian music of the period such as diminished seventh chords and scales, as well as syncopated rhythms (as discussed in Machado Coelho 46).

<sup>48</sup> Locke summarizes the "paradigmatic plot for Orientalist operas as follows: 'young, tolerant, brave, possibly naive, white-European tenor hero intrudes, at risk of disloyalty to his own people and colonialist ethic, into mysterious, dark-skinned, colonized territory represented by alluring dancing girls and deeply affectionate, sensitive lyric soprano, incurring wrath of brutal, intransigent tribal chieftain (bass or bass-baritone) and blindly obedient chorus of male savages'" (52).

<sup>49</sup> The Italian-language libretto spells Peri's name as "Pery." For the sake of consistency the former spelling is used in this study, except in direct quotes.

they are essentially rendered voiceless. Even when they do speak, they speak of presumably “barbaric” topics. “Aspra, crudel, terribile” (“Harsh, cruel, terrible”), the vengeful war song of the Aimorés, clearly informs the audience that they, can never assimilate to European civilization’s mores as Peri does. They sing:

Ma per l’empio Portoghese	But for the impious Portuguese
più speranza omai non v’è:	henceforth there is no hope:
tremi, tremi quel che offese	fear, fear those that offended
la tribù degli Aimorè.	the tribe of the Aimoré.

(Gomes 269-71)

In the opera, as in the novel, no positive indigenous characters exist, except for Peri, who serves as the model. In opposition to the Aimorés, he swears to Dom Antônio that:

Gl’idoli	The gods
dei Guarany rinnego;	of the Guarany I renounce;
alla tua fede iniziami,	initiate me into your faith,
prostrato al suolo te n’prego.	prostrate on the ground I beg you.

(Gomes 423)

Through this act the differences between Peri and Ceci have been lessened, and the “return to a pure, homogenous origin” has taken place (Nunes 2). In contrast, all other indigenous characters are shown to have “uncivilized” tendencies.

For that reason, only under Peri’s munificent guidance can Brazil become a thriving economic center and exporter to the world, the model kingdom of the Braganzas, ready for its European reception. By banishing “undesirable elements” and promoting “desirable” ones, the

spectacle onstage subtly reinforces these ideas, and gives them a coherent history. As a musicalized narration of a national identity, the opera participates in retelling the story of the founding events differently than Alencar told them. Brazilians could read or hear read aloud the serialized tale of *O guarani* in the vernacular, but for the rest of the world, the Brazilian referent was the onstage, musicalized narrative in Italian that told the story through arias, “tribal” bacchanals, and European orchestral instruments.

After its 1870 premier the opera played in Italy and in several major cities, including London and Moscow (Almeida 19). Onstage for all of Europe to see, a Brazilian identity—translated into operatic conventions—had its European debut. Unlike the novel, this Italian-language narrative could be understood by non-Portuguese speaking audiences. Because of Gomes’s achievement, the nation could be recognized as a “cultured” place, with a “cultured” monarch at its head. Just as he had done with his other works, the composer dedicated *Il Guarany* to Emperor Pedro II. While this opera glorified Brazil, it also brought (self-reflexive) praise to the emperor, the patron (in the broad sense of the term) who sponsored it. The acclaimed masterpiece proved Brazil’s cultural and political legitimacy: Brazil had arrived in Europe.

Of course, Brazil’s “arrival” meant that it received recognition from Europe’s cultural powers. To truly succeed on anything but a Brazilian stage Alencar’s work had to leave his country and be judged in the European arena, and composed in the “official” language of opera. To attain international renown even a “Brazilian” opera had to come “by way of Paris or Milan, in order to arrive [in Brazil] as a foreign article, proven and consecrated by the European public” (Corrêa de Azevedo 14). This reality differs greatly from *Cecilia Valdes*’s success in Havana decades later—the Cuban zarzuela, written in the vernacular, did not need foreign consecration

to be well-received at home. In Rio an Italian-language opera was a sign of culture, and a Brazilian Portuguese opera would never do for La Scala. The empire's willingness to sponsor Gomes's stay on the continent acknowledged and played into this reality of European hegemony over which cultural forms would be considered legitimate. If Brazil wanted to be recognized as a cultural power, it would have to establish an international cultural presence, and *Il Guarany* provided the opportunity. Although it honored Brazil and its sovereign, *Il Guarany* was not written for the Brazilian public at large.

Its debut in the capital city, Rio de Janeiro, on Dec. 2, 1870 attracted the city's elite and even the emperor, Dom Pedro II, graced the event with his presence. The piece's European reception impacted its Brazilian reception; it won over audiences both abroad and at home. The opera quickly garnered attention, as a Dec. 1870 journal held by the Academia Brasileira de Letras, *A Comedia Social*, shows: "Carlos Gomes, tu fallas uma lingua universal; onde está a tua patria? ... tua patria é o mundo e tua gloria é a nossa!" ("Carlos Gomes, you speak the universal language; where is your native land? ... your native land is the world and your glory is ours!") (*O Que Vai* 3).<sup>50</sup> Despite this success, José de Alencar complained, according to Alfredo D'Escragnolle Taunay's *Reminiscências*, that "'O Gomes fez do meu Guarany uma embrulhada sem nome, cheia de disparates, obrigando a pobresinha de Cecy a cantar duettos com o cacique dos Aymorés que lhe offrece o Throno da sua tribu e fazendo Pery jactar-se de ser o leão das nossas mattas'" ("Gomes made of my Guarany an indescribable confusion, full of nonsense, requiring poor Cecy to sing duets with the chief of the Aymorés who offered her the throne of his tribe and making Pery boast about being the lion of our jungles") (qtd. in Schwamborn 25).

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<sup>50</sup> An examination of several other periodicals circa 1870 (including *A Vida Fluminense*, *Jornal do Commercio*, and the *Semana Ilustrada*) housed in Rio's Biblioteca Nacional and the Casa Fundação de Ruy Barbosa demonstrate the importance of *Il Guarany*'s Brazilian premier, especially given its European reception.

Pedro II, on the other hand, wholeheartedly approved of Gomes's work, and recognized the latter's accomplishment (Itiberê da Cunha 140).<sup>51</sup>

Considering the Second Empire's official ideology regarding whom to include and whom to exclude in Brazil's history, this action is not surprising. While Corrêa de Azevedo notes that *Il Guarany* was the "most popular and beloved opera of the Brazilian public" (38), such a declaration begs the question of whom "the public" consisted. Those knowledgeable about opera constituted a kind of inner circle, since it "exige uma iniciação, uma tradição cultural, que entre nós permanece um privilégio" ("requires an initiation, a cultural tradition, that among us [the Brazilian people] remains a kind of privilege") (Freitag 141-42). The Italian language barrier could be breached through privilege, which few Brazilians enjoyed. Over the next few decades the "novel and opera were considered obligatory markers of Brazilian high culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (2). Yet, independent of the Italian lyrics, the memorable tunes were quickly transformed into popular dances, piano music, and even Carnival marches, which meant that a large number of Brazilians became familiar with Gomes's music (Cesetti 108). The transformation from popular newspaper serial to one of the "obligatory markers" of high culture to material for Carnival can be attributed to the opera's success on the European stage.

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<sup>51</sup> Alencar seemed to soften toward Gomes's opera and its artistic license, since he later stated: "daqui a tempos, talvez por causa das suas espontâneas e inspiradas melodias, não poucos hão de ler esse livro, senão relê-lo—e maior favor não pode merecer um autor" ("henceforth, maybe because of his spontaneous and inspired melodies, not just a few will read this book, if not re-read it—and an author cannot deserve a greater service") (qtd. in Machado Coelho 10).



## PERI, DOM PEDRO, AND GETÚLIO VARGAS

Despite its importance as a cultural form, over time *O guarani* would likely have faded in importance in Brazil, were it not for its political usefulness. Only one year after the 1888 abolition of slavery the Braganza royal family in Brazil was exiled to France, and a new age of Brazilian republicanism began. Despite high hopes for a positivist, progressive Brazil, clashes inevitably arose as competing interests grappled for government power. Conflicts and coups led to the eventual ascension of Getúlio Vargas, a populist who served as civilian chief of Brazil's provisional government from 1930-1934, president from 1934-1937, and President-dictator until 1945 (Williams 9). One of his main focuses was “managing culture,” as historian Daryle Williams puts it, and in implementing a systematic way of producing acceptable *Brazilian* culture that would educate and regularize Brazil's disparate population. Although Vargas had relatively little to do with actual cultural policy, he “never disavowed the perception that he was a savior, protector, and patron of Brazilian culture” (Williams 14) as well as a “protetor da classe teatral” [protector of the theatrical class] (Adler Pereira 29). Despite the power of his office, Vargas needed all the political authority he could get. The perceived champion of culture and the arts could increase his political capital and his legitimacy by patronizing and associating with Brazilian radio and theatrical performers and artists.

This desire to be a patron of arts coincides with Vargas's attempts to identify himself with the then recently rehabilitated figure of Emperor Pedro II. The president “quickly caught on to the image of the deceased philosopher-king, seeing in Pedro II the opportunity to make the empire and post-1930 republic part of the same historical continuum” (Williams 156). The exiled and excoriated Braganzas had come back into nostalgic vogue in Brazil, and the 1922 centennial celebration of Brazil's 1822 independence “helped accelerate a process in which the 1889 ban

[on the Braganzas] was rescinded and the remains of Pedro and his wife Tereza Cristina could be repatriated to Brazilian soil” (Williams 150). One of Vargas’s approaches to the problem of legitimating himself was to endorse the cultural forms that Pedro II had endorsed, especially those “national traditions” that built the “national identity” (Ricupero xxiii). Vargas’s “Ministério da Educação e Saúde” [Ministry of Education and Health], established in 1930, implemented policies in support of such cultural forms. Under Gustavo Capanema’s leadership (1934-1945), it supported specially chosen cultural projects through official channels. As Capanema wrote regarding the Ministry’s duties: “the mission of the Ministry of Education, and the government as a whole, can be summed up in one word: culture. Or perhaps better stated, national culture” (qtd. in Williams 62). Whose vision of culture was promoted, and to what end? The answer lies in the choice of projects the ministry endorsed.

During this time the agency promoted and published texts that chronicled Brazilian culture, focusing especially on Pedro II’s sovereignty, the Second Reign years (1840-1889). To that end it published histories of Brazilian theater by Lafayette Silva (1938), Brazilian opera by Luiz Heitor Corrêa de Azevedo (1938), Carlos Gomes by Renato Almeida (1937),<sup>52</sup> and a Brazilian Portuguese rendition of *Il Guarany* by C. Paula Barros, a Brazilian poet from the state of Paraná (1937).<sup>53</sup> These measures no doubt represent attempts to link the Vargas regime to the nostalgically popular reign of Pedro II and to those associated with it.<sup>54</sup> Other cultural explorations, such as theatrical performances also occurred under the government’s watchful

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<sup>52</sup> The book was written, as Almeida notes, by order of Minister Gustavo Capanema (36).

<sup>53</sup> Non-governmental publications also followed the trend. For example, Hermes Vieira’s *O romance de Carlos Gomes* (São Paulo: L.G. Miranda, 1936) lauds Gomes’s most famous work, asking, “Qual é o brasileiro que ouvindo o Guarany, não sente em si uma exaltação do sentimento popular?” (“What Brazilian upon hearing *O Guarany* does not feel in himself an exaltation of the common sentiment?”) (101).

<sup>54</sup> 1936 marked the centenary of Carlos Gomes’s birth, and celebrations were held throughout Brazil (Almeida 4).

eye. Adler Pereira relates, “O apoio às atividades cênicas foi estabelecido pela primeira vez no país de modo sistemático no primeiro governo Getúlio Vargas, com a criação do Serviço Nacional de Teatro (SNT) em dezembro de 1937, alguns dias depois da decretação do Estado Novo” [The support for the scenic arts was systematically established for the first time in the country in the first government of Getúlio Vargas, with the creation of the National Theater Service in December of 1937, a few days after the decree of the Estado Novo] (6).<sup>55</sup> The establishment of an official organization to support theater shows how much Vargas’s government used culture in promoting its mandates. Naturally, Vargas stood in need of political legitimacy as he climbed the ladder of executive power. Not everyone in the nation saw the revolution as legitimate, and Vargas sought to consolidate his influence and change his opponents’ perceptions. In Pedro II and the Braganza-endorsed cultural forms he encouraged Vargas saw an opportunity to further his own political ambitions and power. It is hardly surprising that the “pace of rehabilitation [of Pedro II] accelerated after the Revolution of 1930” that swept Vargas into power (Williams 151).

Vargas’s act of linking himself to Pedro II proved politically canny. With the passage of time many Brazilians remembered Pedro II as a “legitimate” leader of Brazil; Vargas made the same claim for himself. He still needed the people’s “belief in that authority” that Ricoeur discusses in terms of the exercise of memory (“Memory” 83). Vargas understood that modes of legitimation sustain relations of domination, and that domination’s continuance requires its acceptance. In *Ideology and Utopia*, Ricoeur writes that ideology fills the gap between a leader’s claim to authority and the followers’ belief in that authority. Vargas declared himself President-

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<sup>55</sup> Although Williams reports that the SNT, under Abadie Faria Rosa, “functioned on a provisional basis prior to official creation on 13 January 1937” (65).

dictator and inaugurated the *Estado Novo* in 1937 (Williams 9); because of his actions he stood in need of such legitimation. His move to dictator and his re-ordering of the government with the “New State” made the question of authority and the need for ideology even more imperative.

## THE OLD GUARD AND THE AVANT-GARDE: BIFURCATING VIEWS OF BRAZILIAN CULTURE

Prior to the establishment of the *Estado Novo* a seismic cultural shift was taking place in Brazil in the 1920s, one that mirrored the avant-garde’s inquiries into culture in other nations, including Cuba with *afrocubanismo* and *minorismo*, and the United States’ Harlem Renaissance. The advent of *modernismo* in Brazil forced this issue with its examination of European influence on Brazilian culture. Modernist Oswald de Andrade developed the potent metaphor of *antropofagismo*, or cannibalism, to explain how home-grown art could digest “foreign” models in order to use what was useful and discard the rest. Since colonial Europeans often attributed the practice of cannibalism to indigenous Brazilians, the volte-face in some ways indicates how far Brazilian art had moved from its colonial and imperial roots. This act of recycling, as modern parlance might term it, allowed the nation’s artists to accept Europe’s influences on their own terms and find their own voices.

For all that, the same “issues of race and national identity which had preoccupied the intellectuals and statesmen since the nineteenth century also preoccupied the modernists” (Nunes 45). They disparaged some individuals previously upheld as cultural paragons because of the latter group’s interpretations of race and/or national identity. For instance, in the midst of the famed 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna* (“Modern Art Week”), a defining moment for Brazil’s Modernist movement, Carlos Gomes was lambasted because his works were “not Brazilian

enough” (Cesetti 102). Despite his honors earned at home and abroad, the composer’s musical allegiance to “peninsular formulas” (Machado Coelho 2) made him, in the modernists’ opinion, part of the to-be-rejected status quo.

In contrast, it must be remembered that 1922 (Brazil’s centennial independent year) also saw the elevation of “status quo” figures from the past. That year Pedro II and his family were once again officially esteemed (Williams 150). A commemorative centenary edition of the *Rio Jornal do Commercio* from Sept. 7, 1922 (Brazilian Independence Day) remembers D. Pedro II fondly, and compliments his role as commander-in-chief and his leadership over the Brazilian parliament (3). The same edition of the *Jornal* also recalls the opening of the National Academy of Opera in 1857 (257) and the triumph of Gomes’s opera *A noite do castelo* in 1861 (355). This return to the past marked the embrace of other artists and topics from the Second Reign years. Although critics had ignored Carlos Gomes and *O guarani*, and the avant-garde had rejected him, the situation changed. By the 1930s Alencar’s extensive body of work underwent a “resurrection . . . from the point of view of critical reevaluation” (Coutinho 10). In the meantime, bureaucrats were looking to Second Reign artistic productions that acceptably told the tale of national founding. In spite of the modernists’ rejection of the opera *Il Guarany*, for many Brazilians Gomes’s reputation outweighed his reliance on European forms, and a canny Getúlio Vargas respected such opinions.

In 1937 Vargas’s Ministry of Education and Health published the Portuguese translation of the *Il Guarany* Italian libretto, completed by poet C. Paula Barros in 1935. She dedicated the text to the memory of Emperor Pedro II. Given the ties between Vargas and Pedro, such a dedication could hardly be apolitical. The Brazilian Portuguese adaptation played at the Teatro Municipal in Rio de Janeiro in May, 1937, and Vargas was invited, although whether he

attended is not known: “Sob os auspícios do Presidente Getúlio Vargas, a Comissão de Teatro Nacional, presidida pelo Exmo. Sr. Ministro Gustavo Capanema” (“Under the auspices of President Getúlio Vargas, the National Theater Commission, presided over by the Most Excellent Mr. Minister Gustavo Capanema”) (Barros).<sup>56</sup> The poet wished to honor Carlos Gomes with her adaptation; as she wrote in an introductory page, she considered her work to be a “colaboração para o canto em idioma pátrio e um modesto trabalho a serviço da glória de Carlos Gomes” (“collaboration for the music in the lingua patria and a modest service to the glory of Carlos Gomes”). The dedication creates a chain linking the participants: Gomes dedicated his work to Pedro II; Barros honored Gomes and dedicated her work to Pedro II; and Vargas, Pedro’s political “heir,” paid homage to Pedro II and tried to associate himself with the dead ruler in order to gain political capital and strengthen his claim to authority.

Some of that political capital was gained through the media’s notice and discussion of the *Il Guarany* translation. An unsigned notice from the Rio de Janeiro *Diário de Notícias* on 20 May, 1937 eulogizes the translation, the translator, and the Ministry of Education:

Constitue, pois, esse espectáculo official, uma nota de verdadeira sensação, quer sobre o ponto de vista literario, quer musical. Da versão de C. Paula Barros, a critica tem se occupado largamente, tecendo os mais merecidos louvores á obra de patriotismo e verdadeiro devotamento de poeta pátrio; basta assignalar que essa versão, a par do seu reconhecido merito literario, custou ao seu autor dois annos e meio de trabalho, durante os quaes burilou a sua obra, applicando os conhecimentos musicaes que adquiriu especialmente para realiza-la. Tal devotamento a uma empreitada de tão elevado sentido

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<sup>56</sup> This 1937 event marked the piece’s first fully staged performance, given governmental approval and patronage.

patriotico, bem merece o apoio que lhe deu o Ministerio da Educaçãõ, encarregando-se da montagem da opera.

This official spectacle constitutes, then, a note of true sensation, either from the literary or the musical point of view. The critic has occupied [him/her]self at length with the version of C. Paula Barros, spinning the most merited praises for the work of patriotism and true devotion of the compatriot poet; it is enough to emphasize that this version, aside from its recognized literary merit, cost its author two-and-a-half years of work, during which she chiseled away at her work, applying the musical knowledge that she especially acquired to complete it. Such devotion to a task of such patriotic feeling well deserves the support that the Ministry of Education gave her, seeing to the staging of the opera.

(“Os Programas de Hoje” 11)

Another mention from a few days after the premier cites the piece’s “profundamente cultural e democratico” (“profoundly cultural and democratic”) character, and also praises the Ministry of Education (D’Or 10). The removal of the language barrier no doubt made the opera more accessible to the Brazilian people. Yet, altruism alone did not lead to the Ministry’s sponsorship of the opera.

Turning to the language of the *pátria* and the ideals of empire was particularly important at this time of increased immigration and perceived instability.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the changes in government with the advent of the *Estado Novo*, world events also impacted Brazil, with “Jewish refugees fleeing persecution in Europe and fears of Nazi infiltration among German immigrant communities in the Brazilian South” (Williams 7). Brazil’s national identity could be threatened by the influx, and could be, according to the Vargasites, in need of strengthening. A return to

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<sup>57</sup> Immigration helped boost Brazil’s population from 14 million in 1890 to 30 million in 1920 (Cunha 422).

important nineteenth-century nationalist works such as *O guarani* and *Il Guarany* could be (a part of) the overarching strategy to find solid moorings and solidify national identity. Such an ideologically motivated decision certainly aimed to “legitimize...the authority of order or power” (Ricoeur, “Memory” 83). Language represented one way to accomplish this goal, and built upon Alencar’s reputation for being one of the architects of Brazilian Portuguese (Marques 88).<sup>58</sup> Emphasizing the beauty and nobility of Brazilian Portuguese in a work like Gomes’s reinforces the notion that “foreign” expressions are unnecessary and even threatening, since they are in the end alien to Brazil’s founding myths. Allowing Peri and Ceci to speak (sing) Portuguese takes them off the Milanese stage and places them squarely by the shores of Brazil’s Paquequer River, surrounded by the flora and fauna of the Brazilian jungle, ready to found a nation. Rather than seeking approval on the stages of Europe, Brazil’s leaders sought approval at home.

Barros outlines her motives for translating the masterpiece, and one of them is to “Observar, e em alguns pontos, restabelecer a verdade histórica, dando a dramaticidade e a emoção necessarias” (“Observe, and in some points, reestablish the historical veracity, giving the necessary drama and emotion”) (n.p.). Her assertion that she reestablishes “historical veracity” in the narrative proves interesting given its clearly fictional nature. Barros supports the already-established dominant national narrative by translating it back into the vernacular and making subtle changes to make it more “Brazilian.” A comparison of the original Italian-language opera and the Portuguese-language translation reveals some minor changes to the libretto. For instance, a translation choice emphasizes the villain Gonzalez’s disdain for Peri: he calls the hero a

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<sup>58</sup> Although Marques argues against Alencar’s influence, he acknowledges the widespread acknowledgement of the author’s patriarchal role.



“selvagem,” or savage, rather than an “índio” (Barros 15). While this choice may be one that has more to do with rhythm than with any other consideration, in such a charged work, small changes matter. In a footnote to Act III, Scene V she explains that indigenous Brazilians usually did not prostrate themselves during their religious ceremonies (as the opera directs); instead, they looked to the sun (Barros 69). By mentioning such a piece of information Barros seems to emphasize her claim to have restored historical “veracity” to the opera; the unspoken implication is that, written by an Italian, the libretto and stage directions strayed from Brazilian authenticity, which has now been restored.

A matter of pride for Barros (and for the ministry) seems to be restoring Gomes’s opera to the vernacular. Perhaps the return to Portuguese ensures the “historical veracity” that Paula Barros claims. True progenitors of Brazil must speak in the (adopted, adapted) mother tongue, and bring the nation into being as the collective imagination demands. They could hardly found Brazil speaking Italian, although the Gomes version eighty years prior had allowed it in the interest of gaining Europe’s notice. In the 1930s, Barros sought to: “Criar um clima proprio e adequado que dêse à opera mais popular do Brasil—a brasilidade que não póde ter em idioma estranho” (“Create an appropriate and adequate atmosphere that gives to this most popular opera of Brazil—a Brazilianness that cannot be had in a foreign language”). Her desire to endow the work with a stronger “brasilidade,” while still remaining true to the work’s rhythms, coincided with the Vargas government’s political aims to gain credibility; the government must have seen Gomes’s work as an ally in its efforts later in 1937 to found the *Estado Novo*. The translation emphasized it being not a Portuguese, but a *Brazilian* version and adaptation.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Carlos Gomes’s daughter, Ítala Gomes Vaz de Carvalho, protested against the translation since she thought it took away from her father’s work (Machado Coelho 14). Yet, she did not claim that Barros had substantially changed the opera.

The nationalistic nature of *Il Guarany* influenced expressions in other cultural spheres including theater, film, and radio and provided a means for the government to strengthen its claims to legitimacy. In the case of radio, listening to the opera on radio became a government-invented tradition, one that sought to bring into being a connection between Gomes's masterpiece, Brazilianness, the government, and radio. September 7, 1922, marked the Brazilian debut of the new technology, radio, when President Epitácio Pessoa delivered an "independence-day address," followed by arias from the opera (McCann 22). This combination of a patriotic speech and *Il Guarany* music was the first of many occasions when the overture played on government-sponsored radio broadcasts. Beginning in 1934, Vargas's Department of Press and Propaganda (DIP) produced *A Hora do Brasil* ("The Hour of Brazil"), a national nightly show that played on every radio station. The unpopular program frequently featured Vargas's speeches, as well as news, patriotic trivia, and musical selections; its theme music came from the *Il Guarany* overture (McCann 28). In 1934, just as in 1922, the act of framing the program with *Il Guarany*'s music represented an "invented practice" that was "unspecific[ly] and vague[ly]" meant to instill values such as "patriotism', 'loyalty', 'duty', 'playing the game' and the like" into the listening audience (Hobsbawm 10).

Over time the official use gave the piece of music a "tipo muito peculiar de 'brasilidade'" ("very peculiar type of Brazilianness") (Machado Coelho 11). The song served as a metonym of the opera, with all of its historical, cultural, and patriotic associations. Renato Almeida's 1937 book published by the Ministério da Educação e Saúde proclaimed that the piece of music was a "partitura nacional, a que demos um sentido cívico . . . pode incorporar, como Hino, aos símbolos do país" ("national score, to which we give a civic feeling . . . it could be incorporated, as a Hymn, into the symbols of our country") (Almeida 3). This invented practice of playing the

song, initially drawn from a national narrative, trickled down to the individual through this powerful medium, thus impacting individual identities. Anyone listening to the reportedly tedious program would be reminded at the outset that Gomes had long ago set Peri and Ceci's story to music. The fact would be nearly inescapable. At the same time, the song served to remind listeners that Vargas had appropriated the music and put it to his own political uses.

These efforts on the part of the government, though more overtly propaganda, were not so different from the other strategic deployments of *O guarani*. Alencar's original motive may have been to celebrate the founding of Brazil, but his founding was a peculiar one that included only the acceptable elements that would serve to narrate an ideal Brazilian society. In a similar fashion, Gomes sought approval for his nation, but he searched for it abroad. In the interest of creating "legitimate" art he chose to employ the language of opera rather than the language of his empire. He also translated and simplified the "Brazilian" story in such a way that even its "savages" had to be adapted for European audiences. The return of the story to its native tongue proved valuable for the dictator who did not seek approval abroad, but at home. By associating himself with Pedro II, Carlos Gomes, and José de Alencar, Vargas pieced together a multi-faceted approach that proved acceptable to at least a portion of his citizens, and allowed him to span, in part, the credibility gap that he faced. Each version constitutes a revision of history that not only disassembles the conquest of Brazil, but also the years of the empire and the Vargas regime. Ceci and Peri's love gave birth to an idealized Brazil, allowed it to be recognized by other powers, and helped it to shore up the toppling foundation of a presidency.

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OPERA ITALIANA.

- Por ora não, o preço está ainda muito alto.
- Vamos embora, João, aquella mulher é capaz de fascinar-nos.
- Esta?!!!

This comic from *Semana Illustrada* (published in Rio, August 6, 1871) provides a humorous commentary on Brazilians' attitude toward Italian opera:

--Por ora não, o preço está ainda muito alto.

--Vamos embora, João, aquella mulher é capaz de fascinar-nos.

--Esta?!!!

(Courtesy of the Biblioteca Rodolfo Garcia at the Academia Brasileira de Letras)

Haiti, land that should be so happy, grown instead so sad!  
Land of golden moonlight and silver rain, bright birds, and  
brighter sun, perfumed breezes and a sea so green, hills of  
great woods and valleys of sweet earth. Why can't it be a  
happy land? So many years of struggle, and still vile intrigue  
binds our wings like spider webs. Oh, most unhappy Haiti!  
When the drums beat in the hills at night, mournful and heart-  
breaking, I can feel your sorrow. No wonder the Empress  
hates your drums! Where is their power now to make the gods  
smile upon this troubled island?

*Emperor of Haiti*, Langston Hughes, 311, drama, 1936

### CHAPTER THREE

#### HOME TO HAITI: *TROUBLED ISLAND* AND BEYOND

Although Black characters were excluded from José de Alencar's Brazil and punished in Cirilo Villaverde's Cuba, in Langston Hughes's Haiti they were remembered. This act of (selectively) remembering and re-envisioning Haitian history in a dramatized musical work took place in 1949 with the debut of *Troubled Island* (1939) on a renowned New York City stage. Set in Haiti, the opera was based on Langston Hughes's play *Emperor of Haiti* (1936),<sup>60</sup> which explored the rise and fall of the "tiger," Haitian revolutionary leader Jean Jacques Dessalines. The masterpiece was written by composer William Grant Still and librettist Langston Hughes, with libretto additions by Verna Arvey. Described at the time by a radio interviewer as a "work of Negro background,"<sup>61</sup> the possibility of such an opera premiering onstage was hardly to be thought of years before, but this opus did make it to the stage, albeit only briefly. The play and the opera are only two of the many texts by Harlem Renaissance artists from the 1920s and 1930s that consider Haiti. Another opera, *Ouanga* (1931), by Clarence Cameron White and John

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<sup>60</sup> The play is known alternately by the title *Drums of Haiti*.

<sup>61</sup> The undated, unattributed *Voice of America* radio piece featured an interview with William Grant Still and excerpts from the *Troubled Island* dress rehearsal in 1949, the year of the opera's New York City debut.

Frederick Matheus, also tells the story of Dessalines. Many of these artists regarded Haiti as a source of inspiration, and looked to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) for an alternative national narrative, one that celebrates the hard-won freedom of the Haitian people, many of whom were enslaved and fought for liberty. These particular dramatic works by Hughes and Still represent a utopian choice and are a projection of an alternate history. They serve to narrate Haiti and view the land as a place of hope, rather than as a “problem,” which was a dominant interpretation in the 1930s in the United States, and indeed had been for many decades.

Harlem Renaissance artists took a great interest in Haiti because of its unique history, culture, and relationship to the United States. After many years of revolution, in 1804 Haiti became the first independent Black republic, free of European rule. The nation was home to many African groups that helped shape cultural and religious practices. The Yoruba, for example, “wherever they constituted a ‘critical mass’ were deeply influential in the formation of slave and post-independence cultures” (Roberts 179). In the mid-nineteenth century thousands of Blacks from the United States immigrated to Haiti since it was viewed as offering greater opportunities and freedoms to persons of African descent than the United States and being more feasible than movements advocating immigration to Africa (Dixon 88).<sup>62</sup> Yet by 1915, Haiti was under U.S. occupation, which lasted until 1934. In light of these circumstances, something utopic can be seen in the works of Still, Hughes, and others who portray the people of Haiti. They call for a freedom that celebrates Africa and the Black experience in the Americas.

As both the play and the opera illustrate, the freedom fighter Dessalines cannot build the nation which he envisaged, and he falls prey to the pitfalls of absolute power. Yet, he dreams of

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<sup>62</sup> Immigration to Canada was also proposed to many as an attractive alternative (Dixon 66). For a detailed discussion of these immigration movements see Chris Dixon’s *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century*.

building his land into a place of peace where, “as the island peasants still plant their seeds and the fisherman still put out to sea, [the] dream of freedom miraculously persists” (“Interview”). Haiti, then, could be understood as a metonym for the situation of Blacks in the United States, and allowed the artists to explore national origin and racial identity in a context removed from the United States, but also close to home. This exploration occurred at a particularly important historical moment when “African Americans . . . according to [Alain] Locke, [were] in the process of overcoming the burden of white stereotypization” (Schmeisser 275). Through music and dance, costumes and scenery, the artists told the story of Dessalines and, by extension, the story of Haiti, creating a powerfully didactic tale about the joys of remaining true to the values of Africa and the perils of turning to those of Europe.

Haiti’s association with Africa made it particularly interesting to Harlem Renaissance artists. Writers, composers, dramatists, and others, including Still and Hughes, sought to explore Black identity in the Americas with particular attention to African roots. This focus often meant turning their gaze to “Ethiopianism,” a “cultural project of black vindicationist nationalism” that valued African influences in Black culture (Schmeisser 275). This interest in Haiti can be understood as being related to, yet distinct from, Ethiopianism since Haiti was perceived as an “African” nation in the Americas. Although they could have chosen any country in which to set their tales of enslaved peoples fighting for freedom—the United States, Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, and Martinique, all witnessed notable efforts to combat slavery—they often chose Haiti. An exploration of Haiti’s past, its political situation in the 1930s—which saw the United States’ withdrawal from the country after 19 years—its portrayal in mainstream culture, and its portrayal in the Harlem Renaissance can elucidate Haiti’s symbolic and political importance to the artists.

## AN APTLY NAMED RENAISSANCE

Much has been written about the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, its authors and artists, performers and players. As distinct avant-garde movements explored themes and found expression around the globe, new ideas percolated in Harlem, reacting to the currents of art, politics, and social issues both stateside and abroad. The exploration of race became increasingly important, and Harlem became a “race capital,” in which “For the first time, large segments of the African American population lived in close proximity” (Krasner 9). The post-World War I United States was a nation divided by racial tensions, as race riots in several cities during the “Bloody Summers” of 1918 and 1919 demonstrate (Plummer 131).<sup>63</sup> In Harlem and elsewhere, considerations of identity became a theme of literature, music, drama, and visual arts created by Black Americans. Howard University professor Alain Locke encouraged Black writers and artists and promoted their work, becoming an important figure for decades to come in this effort. His groundbreaking anthology *The New Negro* (1925) featured poetry, visual art, and articles that explored the emerging artistic trends.

Harlem Renaissance writers and artists held different views on how identity should be expressed, which led to lively debates. In “The Negro-Art Hokum,” published in *Nation* in 1926, author George Schuyler declared that spirituals and other kinds of music were “no more expressive or characteristic of the Negro race than the music and dancing of the Appalachian highlanders or the Dalmatian peasantry are expressive or characteristic of the Caucasian race” (51). Langston Hughes, in reply, took an opposite view, and spoke of the “very high mountain,” a “racial” mountain, which Black artists had to climb, suggesting that they should explore and

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<sup>63</sup> Race riots and lynchings occurred across the United States. As McWhirter notes, the files of the NAACP show that in the summer of 1919 fifty-two Black people were lynched, hundreds were killed, thousands were injured, and businesses lost millions of dollars as a result of looting and damage (13).

celebrate themes pertinent to Black audiences (“Artist” 57). These opinions, along with those of other writers and artists, were expressed in publications of the time. In fact, debates over the appropriately named “renaissance” happened not just in the United States, but worldwide. In Latin America, where another renaissance was occurring, as discussed in the previous chapter, reactions varied. Famed Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges, writing about Hughes in the late 1920s, took a negative view of the poetry from the new artistic current (57). On the other hand, in 1930 Cuban critic Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring took care to remind *Social* readers of the Havana magazine’s previous publication of Hughes’s “I, too Sing America,” while describing the poet’s recent visit to Havana. The critic also promised to include more of Hughes’s poems in an upcoming issue, translated from “el dialecto de Harlem—la ciudad negra newyorquiña” (the dialect of Harlem—the Black New Yorkian city) (105).

Over time, Langston Hughes has become the most widely recognized author associated with the Harlem Renaissance. His oeuvre includes poetry, novels, books, stories, plays, libretti, and articles. Hughes’s early poetry collections *The Weary Blues* (1926) and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) made waves because of their use of musical forms (Blues and Jazz). Through his poetry he became an internationally known writer, although interpretations of him and translations of his work varied greatly, according to the different ideologies of those presenting him in print (Kernan 326). Journals in several countries published his work, presenting it as “Black poetry” from the US. For example, the Mexican avant-garde journal *Contemporáneos*, titled “2º no de poesía” (1931), features selected poetry by Vicente Huidobro, Jorge Luís Borges,

and Langston Hughes. Many other examples of Hughes's poetry—in translation and at times in English—abound in Latin American publications.<sup>64</sup>

Hughes also wrote works for the stage, including plays and operas, which often examined aspects of Black life in the United States and the Americas. His first trip to Cuba in 1930, where he met leading Black and white artists and avant-gardists, including Nicolás Guillén and José Antonio Fernández de Castro, came about because his patron, Charlotte Mason, encouraged him to find a Black Cuban composer with whom to collaborate on an opera (Muller 119). As Sanders notes, “The extent of Hughes's engagement in opera may seem surprising, yet as early as 1926 he and Zora Neale Hurston planned a Negro opera, hoping to collaborate with the well-known African American composer Clarence Cameron White” and in 1928 Hughes began planning a “play on Haiti” (6),<sup>65</sup> a topic that he would continue to explore in his writing and traveling, with a trip to Haiti in 1931.

A variety of artists and thinkers associated with the Harlem Renaissance—including John Matheus, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Dubois, Langston Hughes, Clarence Cameron White, and William Grant Still—fashioned texts that featured Haiti, its heroes, and culture. This fascination with Haiti seemingly had its roots in a desire to explore an alternate history, that of a nation that created a free Black republic, one in which the categorization of race and the imposition of slavery had been officially and openly opposed for more than one hundred years. It is akin to the “positive image” of Brazil that many African

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<sup>64</sup> For example, in “Nota sobre la poesía de los negros en los Estados Unidos” in the same issue of *Contemporáneos*, Salvador Novas describes Hughes as one of the “más interesantes poetas negros del momento” (“most interesting Black poets of the moment”) (197). Many other examples of Hughes's poetic dissemination can be found, as Kernan has documented.

<sup>65</sup> Hughes would continue writing opera libretti for works ranging from *The Organizer* (1940), about the struggle to form a union, to *Esther* (1956), a biblically-themed opera. The latter work was put on by the Hunter College Opera Association in 1961 (Parmentor). The poet also wrote musicals and “song-plays” with varying themes.

American leaders cultivated from approximately 1900-1940; the nation was encouraged as an immigration destination for Black Americans (Stam 52). Many Blacks in the United States viewed Haiti and Brazil, two nations with comparatively high populations of persons of African descent, as better living options than their own nation. As Largey notes, “African-American artists and writers became interested in Haiti as a symbol of black distinctiveness in the Americas. Literary critic J. Michael Dash . . . noted that the assignment of Haiti as a repository for African cultural traits made it the focus of a new, negrophilic form of cultural representation” (37). This “cultural representation” defied previous characterizations of perceived African influences as “backward” or somehow lacking. Haiti’s interpretation as a treasure house of African cultural forms drew eager artists to explore and celebrate it in film, literature, drama, opera, music, and other genres.

Critic Elzbieta Sklodowska has theorized what Haiti represents in the Cuban imaginary, stating that “Haiti is a synecdoche for the other.” Prior to and during the 1930s, what did Haiti represent in the United States’ imaginary? Such an enquiry recognizes Haiti as a bifurcated notion, which some viewed negatively, as a “problem” because of its links to Africa, and others viewed positively, as a space that celebrated African identity in its national narrative. The nineteenth-century image that Cubans had of Haiti as a dangerous, “infected” place was still shared by many in the United States (and Cuba) in the twentieth century.

For example, in the 1910s, “lurid accounts of voodoo . . . frequently appeared in the popular press” (Plummer 126), influencing the perceptions of Haiti for many in the United States. Jackson notes that in their edition of Arna Bontemps’s 1939 classic *Drums at Dusk*, “Michael P. Bibler and Jessica Adams argue [that] . . . Bontemps was ““responding to the mainstream portrayals of Haiti—many of them rather lurid—that had been circulating during the



1920s and 1930s, when the United States Military occupied the island nation” (144). The military occupation likely increased interest in Haiti during this time, although many portrayals of it left a great deal to be desired. Examples of contemporary “lurid” depictions abound: “works such as John Houston Craige's *Black Baghdad* (1933) and *Cannibal Cousins* (1934) continued the earlier trend by giving lurid second-hand accounts of religious practices that included human sacrifice and cannibalism” (Largey 39). These types of portrayals were not limited to the United States. For example, in the early 1930s various volumes of the Havana magazine *Carteles*, held by the Biblioteca Histórica Cubana y Americana “Francisco González del Valle,” feature articles and stories that exoticize Haiti by focusing on topics such as incantations, jungles, and “zombies,” rather than anything of worth.

While such depictions of Haiti were common in popular media, on the other hand, narratives from the same period, such as *Troubled Island*, allow Haiti to be viewed differently, and to be commemorated onstage as a distinct, positive kind of place and space. The opera in particular “turned not only toward ‘African roots,’ via Haiti, but also ‘challenged the master narrative’ of the history of the Americas, placing Haiti in its rightful place as the second republic in the hemisphere” (Krasner 94). Instead of parroting the “master narrative,” the opera projected an alternative narrative. Still and Hughes accomplished this feat by ennobling oft-ignored historical figures, particularly Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and by re-examining his story in detail in order to turn it into a dramatic musical work. Several of these figures from Haitian history, including François Mackandal and Dutty Boukman, are invoked in Harlem Renaissance works, including Langston Hughes’s play *Emperor of Haiti*, as a way to remember past struggles and future promises. In this fashion, the stage becomes another home for Haiti, and the onstage Haiti can serve as a ““repository of African cultural traits”” (Largey 37). Through opera performance

these cultural traits come to life by means of story, song, and spectacle. Yet, telling such stories proved challenging in a nation that viewed Haiti from a distance, and distanced itself from Haiti.

#### HAITI IN TIMES GONE BY

Surrounded by the Caribbean Sea, Haiti forms part of the Greater Antilles archipelago and was home to the Taíno people until European settlement began, which nearly annihilated the indigenous population. French interest in the island of Hispaniola—to which Spain initially laid claim—began with settlements in the mid-seventeenth century, followed by the establishment of the colony of Saint-Domingue, after Spain surrendered Hispaniola to France in 1697 (Marzagalli 237). The fertile island, like many others in the Caribbean, proved ideal for growing tobacco and indigo, and for labor-intensive sugar production. Of all the colonies in the region tainted by the slave trade, on the eve of the Haitian Revolution, Saint-Domingue was the “hemisphere’s most productive and profitable slave economy” (Scott 25). Because of its profitability, France attempted to hang on to this jewel in its colonial crown, even as its own government underwent drastic changes beginning in 1789.

Developments abroad and desire for reform at home also brought drastic changes to Saint-Domingue. Rich planters, merchants, and others, reacting to news of events in France, established three “regional assemblies,” one of which “declared itself sovereign” from the homeland in 1790 (Geggus, “Haitian Revolution” 535). A sizeable population of free persons of color, *gens de couleur*, sought reforms that would ensure greater racial equality. And, many of those held in slavery—numbering half a million—also wanted change. By circa 1790, “enslaved Africans made up roughly two-thirds of the total labor force of the colony” (Casimir xiii). A 1791 uprising of enslaved persons in the northern Cap Français region marked the beginning of

developments that would, thirteen years later, result in a land free of European powers, no longer called Saint-Domingue, but renamed Haiti, an indigenous name meaning “mountainous land” in Taíno, a retitling that served as a “symbolic erasure of the colonial past” (Geggus, “Haitian Revolution” 544).

This revolution was one of a series of struggles by Haitians, some free, others enslaved, who sought independence from French rule. From 1751-1757 famed fighter François Mackandal, who had escaped slavery and lived as a maroon in the countryside, headed an uprising. His efforts at liberation proved unsuccessful; he was eventually captured, and then burned at the stake in 1758. By 1791 Dutty Boukman, who also lived in a maroon community, led the beginnings of revolution in Cap Français, which sparked a colony-wide revolt. Both Mackandal and Boukman were practitioners of voodoo, and mixed their call for freedom with their spiritual beliefs and invocations of metaphysical aid. Alliances between different groups created unusual coalitions, depending on each group’s goals and allies. Boukman, along with revolutionary leaders Toussaint L’Ouverture, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe and many others, played distinct, vital roles in the Haitian Revolution, which eventually culminated in a cessation of hostilities with France.

Despite its new-won freedom, Haiti struggled after independence. Led initially by Jean Jacques Dessalines, the government implemented sweeping social, political, and economic changes, but the new nation was turned upside down by war. Many challenges ensued, and various hands governed Haiti after Emperor Dessalines’s death. Internal challenges and external threats remained: as late as 1814 Bourbon France had plans to reconquer Saint-Domingue, although the re-conquest did not take place (Geggus, “Memory” 240). In spite of the difficulties that Haiti faced, its symbolic position as the “guarantor of black progress” (Drescher 13) around

the world put it in a unique position, one which would impact the people of many other nations in their own struggles for freedom.

Separated by only a few hundred miles, the relationship between Haiti and the United States is long and complex. News of the Haitian revolt made its way to the United States early on, eliciting different reactions. Many feared the results of this new revolution, seeing it as a precursor to uprisings by enslaved persons in the United States (Newman 80). In terms of trade, virtually all markets were closed to Haitian exports after the revolution, and its Latin American neighbors shunned it. These roadblocks to commerce had a devastating impact on the fledgling nation. At the end of the eighteenth century the United States government sent a consul general to “establish relations” with Toussaint L’Ouverture, since trade with Haiti mattered greatly (Newman 79). While the United States refused to recognize Haiti’s independence until after the Civil War, in the nineteenth century, its repute as an “independent Black nation was still powerfully important to America’s free Black population” (Alexander 58). In later decades Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois would praise Toussaint L’Ouverture as an inspiration (Jackson 141-42).

The United States’ Haitian policy unfortunately did not reflect the admiration some of its citizens felt for the Caribbean nation. By the twentieth century, its role in Haiti had grown enormously, culminating with the occupation by the United States from 1915-1934. The justification for this invasion, according to the United States government, came from perceived “widespread violence, actual anarchy, and imminent danger to foreigners’ lives and property” (Plummer 125). Also, during this period the United States presented itself as a white, civilized nation juxtaposed with the Caribbean, which it depicted as a place of “new, extranational,

‘barbaric’ miscegenation” (Handley 6). Groups within the United States took note of the intervention, and made their disapproval known. Largey relates that,

African-American organizations were becoming more vociferous in their condemnation of what they considered to be an unjust and inhumane military campaign against Haiti.

Groups like the NAACP were also using Haiti as an analogue to their own situation in the United States, likening the disenfranchisement of poor Haitian voters to the fate of poor black people in the southern United States. (40)

By 1930, New York’s Haitian population numbered 500, and these immigrants engaged in many activities to make their voices heard, from protest to putting on “theatricals to make the Afro-American community more aware of Haitian culture and Haiti’s current problems” (Plummer 138). Despite these and other efforts, the occupation would last nearly twenty years.

In Haiti, the majority of citizens viewed the occupation negatively, and anti-U.S. feeling abounded. Indeed, Haitians protested taxes, restrictions on immigration, new segregational policies, forced labor gangs, and aggressive, intrusive policies, and violence ensued (Plummer 140, 129). In terms of other responses,

Haitians were united in the name of nation and race in the face of the white neocolonial presence of the United States Marines. Literary activity now acquired a new urgency... It was also felt that Haiti’s intellectual and cultural isolation should come to an end. A conscious effort was therefore made to introduce Haitian writers to the literature of South American writers and of the Harlem Renaissance. (Dash 99)

These literary efforts represented a desire to Haitians to represent themselves in the literary world, or at least allow their voice to be heard as they would wish. Haitian writers and artists joined art with politics as they made their disapproval of unjust laws known. Appreciation grew

for previously dismissed and/or persecuted aspects of Haitian culture. In 1928 Jean Price-Mars published *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (“So spoke the uncle”), a book of essays that “called upon Haitian elites to value the African side of their cultural patrimony, especially vodou. Until the publication of Price-Mars's book, Haitian elites generally saw vodou as a malevolent force that threatened the social status quo” (Largey 37). Largey also draws attention to the fact that Price-Mars’s work contributed to making “vodou a cultural commodity and turned the music of the vodou ceremony into a product suitable for Haitian middle-class consumption” (37). Such expressions in literature and music strengthened national identity and a desire for a return to autonomy.

#### HAITI ON SCREEN AND ON STAGE

Military intervention in Haiti could be comfortably justified in the 1920s and 1930s in part because of the way Haiti was often presented on screen and on stage, as a land blighted by “voodoo” and “backwardness.” This misrepresentation has to do with the storytellers and the stories they told. For example, those who exoticized the Haitian religion, vodou, frequently found it easy to present an entire people via shorthand: Haiti was a land of jungles and black magic, drumming and dance. This reinterpretation of Haiti impacted artists who portrayed Haiti and the Caribbean, whether or not they sought to exoticize the areas. As Kirk relates, “Darwin T. Turner has observed that black dramatists of the 1920s and 1930s often found it necessary to work with characters and themes dramatized by white dramatists. Often these dramatists turned to themes of voodooism” (195). Exotic representations of Haiti and other centers of “voodooism” sold well, which was a paramount commercial consideration. Jungles and related spaces could similarly evoke the “exotic,” as could the Caribbean in general. Many works from the time

illustrate this point, and some were more exoticized than others, especially when Hollywood became involved.

Tinseltown's renditions of life in Haiti and in the extended Caribbean often mixed histrionics with "exotic" elements. The number of films set in these areas in the 1930s demonstrates their popularity. For instance *White Zombie* (1932), set in Haiti, treats the theme of zombies created through the use of "voodoo." Showcasing Bela Lugosi of *Dracula* fame (1931), the film links together these disparate narratives of the "undead" with its choice of star. The movie poster proclaims that the piece features "Bela *Dracula* Lugosi" ("Zombie"), cashing in on his previous success. *Dracula*, now presented as a sugar mill overseer and white "witch doctor," can still suck the life from nubile young women through his mastery of incantation.

Made just two years later and set in Louisiana, *Chloe, Love is Calling You* (1934) features a Black "voodoo" priestess who leaves the swamp (another version of the jungle) in order to exact revenge on those who have wronged her. *Chloe* later formed part of a "Voodoo Double Feature" along with *The Devil's Daughter* (1939). A "race film," meant specifically to be shown in U.S. theaters with Black audiences, *The Devil's Daughter* stars Nina Mae McKinney and Ida James as half-sisters in an "all-star colored cast," as the movie poster announces ("Daughter"). The story revolves around Sylvia Walton (Ida James) and her return from Harlem to the family plantation in Jamaica, where jealousy impels her half-sibling to use black magic against her. The film poster for the double feature of *The Devil's Daughter* and *Chloe* promises viewers they will, "Hear Hypnotic Voodoo Drums! See the terrifying blood dance! See rituals of virgin sacrifice!" ("Chloe"). Hollywood again portrayed Haiti in *Ouanga* (1936), in which a Black woman uses a "voodoo spell" to wreak havoc on a neighboring plantation ("Ouanga"). This film differs greatly from Clarence Cameron White and John Frederick Matheus's 1931

opera of the same name. Although exoticism can certainly be found in dramatic works of the period, Hollywood's propensity to emphasize the "danger" of the Caribbean can hardly be overstated.

These representations of Haiti and of the Caribbean reveal a great deal about stereotypes of the time. In each case the trope of "voodoo" demarcates an otherness that separates the Caribbean from the United States in marked ways. Haiti, Louisiana, Jamaica, and other parts of the Caribbean become spaces of otherness, places in which reason can be lost or taken and people can be forced to succumb to the desires of puppet masters. The term "voodoo," as presented in these movies, can easily be read as a sign of otherness in terms of religion (non-Christian) and race (non-white). In considering how these stories are told, it seems that they are narrated not only to exoticize the other, but also to warn against the perils of mixing spaces, races, and customs. Taking into account the actual historical events occurring during this time, with the United States' occupation of Haiti, these narratives divulge a great deal of anxiety about what could be lying in wait in the swamp/jungle, ready to emerge and "contaminate" the ways of life familiar to movie-going audiences.

Broadway audiences also viewed representations of the extended Caribbean. Just as in the movies, portrayals of these spaces and their inhabitants often left a great deal to be desired. "As late as 1937, poet and literary historian Sterling Brown recognized that in drama large areas of black experience 'remain unexplored.' Broadway, he lamented, 'is still entranced with the stereotype of the exotic primitive, the comic stooge and the tragic mulatto'" (Krasner 8). Such stereotypes also appeared in non-Broadway fare; as Rampersad relates, in the 1920s Langston Hughes attended a "terrible' . . . black musical in Philadelphia" with "a listless chorus in blue overalls, the obligatory cotton field scenery, stale jokes about blacks stealing" ("Hughes" 160).



Some works bordered on exoticism; for example, Eugene O'Neill's popular Broadway play *Emperor Jones* (1920) features a quick-witted African-American protagonist who flees prison and escapes to an unspecified Caribbean island, where he reigns as emperor.<sup>66</sup> The play and subsequent adaptations<sup>67</sup> present the island and its inhabitants in distinct ways, but no zombies tread the boards. The language of a *New York Evening Post* review of a 1926 *Emperor Jones* revival demonstrates the preoccupation with imagery/themes related to the Caribbean: "Neither the play nor Gilpin has lost any of the dark magic which bewitched and captured a city away back in the dim days of 1920" (qtd. in Krasner 192). The emphasis on "dark magic" bewitching and capturing the city evokes images of "voodoo" incantations. Although the themes explored in the play contribute to the reviewer's choice of language, it is hard to say where exoticism begins or ends in this evaluation.

Another drama that featured themes of kingship and betrayal in the Caribbean was the very famous "Voodoo *Macbeth*" production, which debuted in 1935. Performed by the Federal Theater Project's Negro Theater (part of the Works Progress Administration), the Shakespearean classic takes place in the court of Haitian emperor Henri Christophe. Directed by a very young Orson Welles, the tragedy replaced witches and Scottish highlands with drummers and Haitian backdrops. The Harlem community initially viewed the play's premier with trepidation. Yet, on opening night, thousands lined the streets to be near the sold-out Lafayette Theater and what was a cause of concern became a source of pride; it also gave Black actors "usually restricted to dancing and singing for white audiences, a chance to prove they were capable of tackling the

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<sup>66</sup> Charles Gilpin, who played the role of the emperor, was the "first black actor to achieve Broadway stardom in a non-musical drama" (Krasner 190).

<sup>67</sup> A homonymous film adaptation starring Paul Robeson as Jones followed (1933), as did an opera by composer Louis Gruenberg (1933), and a ballet by Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (1956).

classics” (W. Smith 38, 39). Eventually the play made its way to Broadway, also proving popular there. In both cases, although Black actors portrayed Jones and Henri Christophe—an improvement over the days when such roles would automatically have been played by white actors in blackface—artistic decisions were not in the hands of Black cast members. As Wendy Smith points out, “There were serious plays in the 1920s with African-American protagonists, but *The Emperor Jones*, *In Abraham’s Bosom* and *Porgy* all had white authors. ‘The Negro theatre has not really progressed,’ commented the Baltimore *Afro-American* in 1933. ‘It has merely been absorbed’” (40). The advent of *Troubled Island* and *Ouanga* proved that some progress was occurring, since the creators of the operas, members of the Black community, portrayed their subjects with dignity, not exoticism.

#### DRAMA AND MUSIC IN HARLEM AND BEYOND

Along with theater, opera, operetta, and musical revues have a long history in and around Harlem, as does the record industry. The presence of successful Black opera companies in New York City and farther to the south, in Washington D.C., demonstrates that opera was not just entertainment for white upper class audiences, as a common stereotype might suggest.<sup>68</sup> Instead, Black opera companies presented a variety of grand operas to appreciative audiences. New York became an opera hub: the Theodore Drury Opera Company, which performed *Aida*, *Faust*, and *Carmen*, was founded there in 1889. A generally positive *New York Times* review of the premiere of *Aida*, published May 29, 1906, states that “A good part of the audience was colored,

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<sup>68</sup> Groups outside of the metropolitan centers of Washington D.C. and New York City also staged operas. Harry Lawrence Freeman founded the Freeman Grand Opera Company in Denver, Colorado in 1891; decades later, the Harry Thacker Burleigh Music Association, founded in 1933 in South Bend, Indiana, provided, as Ksander notes, “blacks professional opportunities in the world of opera—options that extended from black singers and instrumentalists to black composers, who were otherwise encountering serious roadblocks.”

too, and the boxes were filled by the leaders of New York's colored society" while the "supers all showed up well" ("Colored Opera"). The metropolis also served as home to the Lexington Opera House, active from 1910-1915, and in 1920 Carlotta and Harry Lawrence Freeman founded the Negro Grand Opera Company (Coelho 166-67). In Washington D.C., the Colored Opera Company began in 1872. The capital also served as the home to *The Negro Music Journal*, published from 1902-1903, which featured articles on a variety of musical topics, including "Biographical sketches of important and successful Negro musicians," including soprano Rachel Walker, the "Creole Nightingale," and Englishman Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, author of *Hiawatha* ("Music Journal"). The burgeoning record industry in the United States sought to appeal to Black consumers' desire for music with classical, jazz, and blues recordings. Harry Pace founded the Pace Phonographic Company in 1921 (also known as Black Swan Records) and, as Nancarrow relates, he "fundamentally agreed with many leaders of the Harlem Renaissance that the true future of African American music lay not in the 'lower' folk idioms of blues and jazz but in classical genres" (139). Yet the entrepreneur found that classical music recordings and the opera series he began in 1922 sold less well than blues and jazz, and there was "no substantial market among its African American customers" for such music (Nancarrow 140).

Several Black composers from the United States wrote operas or operettas in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries including John Thomas Douglass, Louisa Mars, Edmund Dede and Lucien Lambert, Scott Joplin, and Harry Lawrence Freeman (Kirk 186). The gifted composer Scott Joplin found the operatic world to be harsh. His first opera, *Guest of Honor* (1903), was performed only a handful of times, and *Treemonisha* (1915) was only partially staged during his lifetime. Yet, one of the foremost composers from this time period, Harry

Lawrence Freeman, composed twenty-three operas beginning in 1893, several of which came to the stage in their entirety. His most famous piece, the three-act grand opera *Voodoo* (1928), was the first such opus “composed by a black artist to join the Broadway circuit” (Kirk 184). *Voodoo*, set in Louisiana, featured “jazz, blues, spirituals, and voodoo chants. The ‘Ballets’ in the opera are cakewalks, tangos, and clog dances” (Kirk 188). It played at New York’s 52nd Street Theater, with a live radio broadcast on WGBS (“Biographical Note”). Also appearing on Broadway was Hall Johnson’s *Run Little Chillun* (1933), often described as a “folk opera” or a “music drama.” Over a decade earlier the “all-black musical” *Shuffle Along* (1921) proved popular with white audiences, and began the “heyday” of Black revues in the 1920s (Murchison 46) as “Jazz age musicals [were] saturating Broadway” (Krasner 139). Over time, although musicals and “dignified” Black operas played on some New York’s stages, these musical pieces “deteriorated into the strut-and-leer that marred many of the Broadway revues” and to which Langston Hughes, among others, objected (Rampersad, “Hughes” 134).

Such revues, along with vaudeville shows, provided work for Black actors and singers, which was not readily available in other venues. Black vaudeville, which grew in popularity in the early 1900s, and gradually spread from the South to the Northeast and the Midwest, also provided opportunities. It was a difficult road, since “white critics discouraged ambition in black vaudeville shows and frequently gave good revues only to shows that satisfied their own preconceptions and stereotypes” (George-Graves 5). Those seeking to work in opera faced even greater difficulties. Many operas were not willing to have integrated casts. Composer Louis Gruenberg’s opera *Emperor Jones* played at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1933-1934, and although the original drama (1920) featured integrated casts (Charles Gilpin as the emperor; later Paul Robeson) as did the film version (1933), the opera did not. Instead, baritone Lawrence

Tibbett played the title role in blackface—New York opera was not yet ready for a Black performer to play a lead role.<sup>69</sup>

## HAITIAN HISTORY AS OPERA

Within the studies of the Harlem Renaissance, if drama has received little attention, as Krasner points out (96), then it is safe to say that opera has suffered the same fate. Yet, the place of opera within the Harlem Renaissance should be acknowledged and studied. It occupies an important position within the full cultural panorama, distinct from, and yet related to other cultural forms of the time. The fact that two operas from the 1930s explored the Haitian Revolution shows the importance of the revolution in the minds of the authors, who saw in it a theme worthy of operatic treatment, one that would inspire and entertain audiences without reverting to the exoticization of Haiti that often predominated.<sup>70</sup>

*Ouanga* (1931) and *Troubled Island* (1939) both fashion a founding myth for Haiti, the myth of a Black American utopia. It is a nation born out of conquest, enslavement, and a desire for liberty. The operas omit a great deal of historical detail in order to focus on specific events, to fashion key characters, and to construct particular narratives. The protagonist, Dessalines, portrayed as deeply flawed, is a hero, albeit a tragic one. The forces of destiny pound against him

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<sup>69</sup> As Cheatham relates, in 1945 the New York City Opera became the “first major opera company in the United States to give an African-American male singer, Todd Duncan, an opportunity to perform a major role. [It] had been, in 1946 and 1948 respectively, the first major opera company in the United States, to give long term contracts to an African-American female singer, Camilla Williams, and an African-American male singer, Lawrence Winters” (“Still” 31). The New York City Opera also later put on *Troubled Island*.

<sup>70</sup> The operatic theme of enslaved persons rebelling was growing in importance during the decade. For example, a 1939 opera by composer Paul Bowles told the story of Denmark Vesey, an enslaved person from the Caribbean who planned an unsuccessful slave revolt in South Carolina in 1822. The opera was named after the leader of the rebellion.

until he breaks. The musical works are as important as literature in shaping a specific vision of Haiti—a place of struggle, but also of hope.

Both operas construct a past for Haiti through their exploration of the rise and fall of Haitian leader Jean Jacques Dessalines from his efforts in the Haitian Revolution to his death in 1806. Considering the political situation of the day in the United States, it is safe to say that the choice of subject matter was far from incidental. “Haiti was also considered at the time to have the most African cultural retentions of any country in the Americas . . . [it] also had a long history which was known to many African Americans” (Largey 38). In the case of the two operas, the “nation” being performed onstage was a utopian projection of an alternate history, one that formed part of the African Diaspora in the Americas.

The two works share similar plots, since both tell of Dessalines, his struggle against tyranny, his own turn toward tyranny, and his difficulties in choosing between “traditional” and “modern” ways. *Ouanga* tells of his choices in love and politics. Dessalines prepares to take the throne and to mandate Christianity among his people. His love, Defilee, affirms her belief in voodoo. She rejects the role of queen and warns of the disaster that will result if he spurns his beliefs. In a poignant scene Defilee reminds him to, “Listen to the drum beats. Can you destroy the wind, or stop the rain and the sea, Dessalines? . . . We are the children of the forest. You cannot kill the jungle in us!” He dismisses her warnings and chooses a consort who encourages him in his “modernization” efforts. The newly crowned king also errs gravely when he orders the death of Mougali, a voodoo priestess, declaring to his people, “Hear me, your bodies I have freed, ye are no longer slaves. I have killed once more, to free your souls! Trust me once again!”. Although he later tries to repent of her death, it is too late and a spell cast upon him ensures his demise.

*Troubled Island* begins with Dessalines, his back raw with the whip lashes of a cruel master, ready to lead the fight for freedom from slavery and France. His beloved, Azelia, who is also entrapped by slavery, assists him. In the next act, Emperor Dessalines forges a new nation and surrounds himself with the pomp of royalty. Despite his efforts, and the wisdom of his mentor, Martel, Haiti falters, and economic, social, and political problems arise. Dessalines also leaves Azelia for Claire, a light-skinned woman infatuated with Europe. She and Vuval, who is her lover and Dessalines's secretary, scheme against the ruler, and their intrigue contributes to his defeat and ignominious death. Rather than dying as a result of a religious curse, as in *Ouanga*, in *Troubled Island* Dessalines dies because he has essentially lost the faith of his people. Both operas seem to suggest that abandoning traditional ways in favor of European conducts brings doom and despair rather than prosperity.

In writing the libretto for *Troubled Island*, Langston Hughes drew heavily on his play, *Emperor of Haiti*, begun in 1928, performed in 1935, and reworked until 1936. Both works are set in Haiti in 1791, as revolution spreads through the countryside. The writer originally envisaged the work as a “singing play,” filled with music from the Caribbean (Rampersad, “Hughes” 165). Hughes spent several months in Haiti in 1931 and later wrote a children's book with Arna Bontemps entitled *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932) (Rampersad, “Chronology” xiv). His collaboration with Still a few years later came about very naturally, as Still related:

I'd set many versions of Langston Hughes to music, for he writes very singable poetry. It was in the 1930s that I asked if he would try a libretto for me. He gave me *Drums of Haiti* to read. And we decided it was a fine basis for an opera. It was exciting and colorful

as drama. It had an impressive underlying philosophy. It was pertinent to the general theme of the Negro in American art, to which we were both dedicated. (“Interview”)

One such setting of a Hughes poem is the song “Love is Like Dew,” which appeared in English in the Cuban avant-garde journal *Social* in October 1930 (Poema 56). The “exciting” and “colorful” play, was, of course, written to be a dramatic piece brought to life on stage. Like *Troubled Island*, *Emperor of Haiti* also tells the foundational story of Haiti, and the two follow the same plot, with only minor changes. Yet, this adaptation comes not from the literary, but the dramatic genre, which presents different challenges and advantages. Although the play and opera have very similar plots, the much longer play includes more historical details and practices representative of Haitian life.

As with the adaptation of any work into another, many differences separate Langston Hughes’s play and the opera that Still and Hughes developed. The relative brevity of both works (the drama and the opera libretto) allows for comparative close readings to highlight these distinctions. One of the most evident is the language variation in the different works. In *Emperor*, speech patterns and accents indicate social and educational disparities, particularly those between enslaved characters and those born into freedom, which are often of European and African heritage. The speech of those coming from slavery could be characterized as colloquial, with slang and idioms from U.S. English. For example, the exchange below between three women vendors—formerly enslaved, now free—shows the characters’ use of non-standard English.

COCOANUT VENDOR: My master made all his slaves join the Catholic Church. He said if we didn't, he'd beat the stuffings out of us. I been going to mass mighty near as long as I been colored.



YAM VENDOR:                   That's been a long time!

THREAD VENDOR:               Then how come I seed you at the last voodoo dance, just a-calling  
  on Legba?

COCOANUT VENDOR:         Oh, I believes in voodoo, too. Who says I didn't? Might as well  
  believe in all kinds of gods, then if one fails you, you got another  
  one to kinder help out. (Hughes, *Emperor* 314)

The women's subtle humor emerges as they discuss strategies to negotiate between distinct religious practices. The vendors' language differs from that of the educated bi-racial character Vuval, who presumably uses his language as a kind of social marker to distinguish himself from those around him. It also differs from Dessalines's language: as a hero, he speaks heroically, with "proper" grammar. Yet in the opera, all the characters—from the servants to the king—sing in standard English and the speech patterns that distinguish one character from another largely disappear. In the opera, a market vendor rejects a fisherman's advances, and sings, "No good man do I need ---- / one more mouth for me to feed! (Hughes, *Island* 30). Instead, plot and costuming, among other components, indicate social differences.

Another element that changes from play to opera is the consideration of Haitian history. One scene features the invocation of the names of dead and living heroes of revolutionary movements against the French. On the night of uprising, Dessalines and the wise man Martel remember the great Mackandal and show their solidarity with the other leaders.

DESSALINES:                 We have no choice but to kill . . . wipe out the whites in all this island . . .  
  for if the French are left alive to force us back to slavery, we'll never get a  
  chance to rise again. And for us, you and me—Boukman, Christophe,

Toussaint, and all our leaders—there'd be only the rack, the wheel, or  
burning at the stake like Mackandal. Mackandal!

*(Turning and appealing to the night)*

Great Mackandal! Dead leader of rebellious slaves, fight with us now.

MARTEL: Mackandal is with us, son. His spirit walks the Haitian hills crying the  
name of freedom. (Hughes, *Emperor* 285)

By invoking Mackandal's name, Dessalines makes himself the leader's heir, the inheritor of the cause of freedom. Dessalines comes across as a more revolutionary character in the play, one linked with Mackandal and Boukman, Christophe and Toussaint, names with which at least some of those reading or seeing the play would have been very familiar. As Martel explains to another man, "Jean Jacques is a mighty soldier, Popo, and a brave man. He's not a statesman" (Hughes, *Emperor* 311).

Despite Hughes's desire, his drama never became the "singing" play he envisioned until its adaptation into *Troubled Island*. By the time he and William Grant Still completed *Troubled Island*, the very talented Still had established himself as a composer of great merit, whose work was known throughout Europe (Kernodle 501). An accomplished musician, he had played in many bands in Harlem the 1920s, and had orchestrated and composed music for musicals, including the famous *Shuffle Along* (1921) (Murchison 47). In 1921 he served as the "chief arranger" for the Pace (Black Swan) Phonograph Company. Modernism influenced his earlier 1920s art music pieces, which did not sit well with at least one New York critic who expected more exotic-sounding music from Still (C. Smith 382). Along with Hughes, Still was a Harlem Renaissance artist, one whose vision of the possibilities of art and artistic achievement matched those of many of his contemporaries and colleagues, including Alain Locke, as Murchison

argues (53-55). In later works, along with his operatic compositions and ballets, the composer explored a variety of musical styles, including jazz, blues, and spirituals, and created many signature pieces. As Still wrote in an early version of “An Afro-American Composer’s Point of View” from 1932, “I feel that it is best for me to confine myself to composition of a racial nature. The music of my people is the music I understand best . . . the time has arrived when the Negro composer must turn from the recording of Spirituals to the development of the contributions of his race, and to the work of elevating them to higher artistic planes” (Murchison 59). He had also previously composed settings for some of Hughes’s poems when the two joined forces for *Troubled Island*.

The three-act opera presents a more stream-lined version of Dessalines’s story than Hughes’s play. The opera shows Dessalines’s archetypical rise to power and fall from grace—he is the peasant who rises to be king, and is in turn dethroned. The plot moves from romance, to struggle, to discord, to death, sustained by the music that similarly echoes the varying moods. Despite his hubris, the opus portrays the ruler as a sympathetic, tragic figure, bearing burdens “too heavy” for any one person.

The first act begins with haunting, somewhat discordant melodies that seem to foreshadow trouble to come, punctuated by drum beats, meant to be coming from the hills. Fighters gather to prepare for the revolt, and eventually Jean Jacques and Azelia speak of their love. In a phrase that portends the trouble to come, Azelia confesses to Dessalines that she is “Afraid that freedom / Will rob me of you” (Hughes 5). Yet, they will pursue their dream, joined by many others. As the wise man Martel speaks of Africa to the crowd, the chorus of enslaved persons sings, and the singing takes on a call-and-response form, while echoing the mournful sounds of a southern spiritual. Later, the music grows more intense and the percussion grows

stronger, as all prepare for a vodou ritual, and the stage fills with dancers. The sacrificial rooster, held high over Dessalines's head, spills its blood on his whiplashed back, emblematic of the history of suffering and the blood that will be shed in the cause of freedom.

In the second act, Dessalines, now emperor, must handle the affairs of state in the new nation of Haiti. His secretary, Vuval, scoffs at the people's requests for teachers and learning, laughingly declaring, "The peasants want a teacher!" (Hughes 14). Dessalines, on the other hand, tells Martel of his dreams of progress, but laments, that,

The fields are all untilled,  
The taxes are unpaid,  
The cane uncut,  
The roads unmade. (Hughes, *Island* 14)

Martel, a bass whose notes reach low, in turn shares his vision for the new nation:

A world I dream where black or white,  
Whatever race you be,  
Will share the bounties of the earth,  
And every man is free. (Hughes, *Island* 15)

Given the reality Black Americans faced in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s, Martel's words must have had a strong impact on those reading or hearing them. Yet, despite Martel's counsel, Dessalines reveals his plans to rule by force: "The blacks will know this sword, too, / Unless my work they do!" (Hughes, *Island* 16). He has moved symbolically from a liberator to an oppressor, like those he fought. His clothing and accommodations reinforce this reality: wearing a crown and living in a palace, he has created a European-like court. And

Dessalines is no benevolent ruler: his words suggest that he now sees the Haitian people as vassals who will achieve his vision.

His choice of consort reinforces his transformation. As Claire, the “*pale and lovely quadroon mistress of the emperor*” (Hughes, *Island* 16), enters, Martel can only utter a quick warning, “Beware!” to his leader. The significance of his counsel subsequently becomes clear when Claire, left alone on stage, sings an aria. In it she declares her hatred of Haiti, with its “black king” and “savage drums” (Hughes, *Island* 18). She and Vuval, her devious lover, represent forces within Haiti that will keep it from attaining the goals of racial harmony, progress, and independence. At the opera premiere, their love duet at the end of Act II, Scene I received some criticism, and a *New York Post Home News* reviewer described it as “rather sugary,” also noting that Still planned the music accordingly, since both characters “were phonies and pretenders, they should be so characterized in the music” (Kernodle 499).

The next scene contrasts Claire with Azelia, and symbolically juxtaposes the new with the old. As the palace servants prepare for a banquet, Azelia, poor and ragged, tries to enter the palace to warn “her” Jean Jacques of revolt on the coast, only to be turned away. At the banquet, the herald announces the nobles, with their pompous, ludicrous titles, bestowed by their king: “Lord and Lady Toutemonde! / [...] Duke of Marmelade and La Countess Louise! / [...] Madame the Duchess of Limonade!” (Hughes, *Island* 24). They wear “gorgeously grotesque copies of various European court styles” (Hughes, *Island* 24) and are essentially performing for their king and queen. Upon arriving Dessalines proclaims “I have covered my scars with diamonds / [...] Greatest Emperor in the world am I / King and ruler divine!” (Hughes, *Island* 25). Here his pride nears its zenith and his downfall looms; as Azelia breaks into the banquet

room Claire keeps Dessalines from seeing his old love and from hearing her vital warnings of trouble brewing in the countryside.

Another episode shows how far Jean Jacques has come from his roots. In the hall “*Mulatto dance girls*” perform a stately ballet, choreographed by George Balanchine for the New York premiere, only to be replaced by “*dark dancers*” performing a “*voodoo dance*” that becomes “*fierce, provocative, and terrible*” (Hughes, *Island* 26). This juxtaposition of “dance girls” with “dark dancers” demonstrates the larger conflict between European and African ways in Haiti. Their racial makeup, clothing, movements, and the music that accompanies them demonstrate this divide. The emperor, egged on by Claire, forbids the latter dance, asserting that “My empress does not like drums”; he then declares that he wishes to build a “civilization here,” one free of “voodoo” (Hughes, *Island* 27). Here the contrast between European- and African-influenced customs and practices perhaps shows most clearly. By choosing Claire and ballet, and rejecting Azelia and vodou, Dessalines aligns himself with colonial forces and cultural forms. Yet his scars—once coated by rooster’s blood, and now covered by diamonds—remain, and cannot be ignored, just as his people’s demands cannot be disregarded in favor of European ways. Growing in power and anger, the emperor threatens the nobles around him, declaring he will again be a “tiger”; his hubris reaches its apex, just as the news of a revolt reaches him, brought by an agitated messenger. “The tiger” leaps to action, determined to regain his nation—but doomed to fail.

The short third and final act portrays Dessalines’s ultimate betrayal and downfall. In a village marketplace the vendors sell their wares, and Azelia once again appears, old, tired, and alone. She is an Ophelia-like figure, crazed by love, pain, and poverty. Soldiers, led by Vuval, descend on the market, and Vuval convinces them of their duty to kill the king: “You who once

were slaves / About to made slaves again / By your king!” (Hughes, *Island* 35). Yet, when Dessalines arrives, the soldiers dare not touch him, and Vuval shoots Dessalines in his scarred back. Azelia finds her dead lover’s body on the ground, and declares, in the final words sung in the opera, “I live...to kiss...your scars!” (Hughes, *Island* 38). She covers his scars with her own body, marking the third and final time that the disfigured back—the emblem of enslavement and the fight against slavery—will be symbolically and literally covered. The dramatic ending, with its emotional appeal, brings Dessalines’s life full circle, and heralds a new path for Haiti. His rise to power, the opera seems to say, brings only tragedy because he turns his back on what made Haiti great.

Much has been written about *Troubled Island*’s March 31, 1949 New York début and subsequent close after three contracted performances. From the beginning, the press associated *Troubled Island* with race. In 1949 a radio program host described Still and Hughes as “both Negroes. Both men are well and widely known in their respective fields of music and letters” (“Interview”). The opera was not just an “American” opera—and operas by composers from the United States were not often performed—but it was also, more particularly, an opera by a famous Black composer, and would be judged as such. Still recognized this, and one of his stipulations for the performance at New York City Center was that the cast be “interracial...because he recognized that if [the conductor] Halász attempted to use an all-African American cast, he would run into the opera’s being typecast, much like *Porgy and Bess*”<sup>71</sup> had been (Kernodle 490-91). And so, some cast members (including premiere-night

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<sup>71</sup> *Porgy and Bess*, an opera set in South Carolina, premiered in 1935 with music by George Gershwin and lyrics by Ira Gershwin and DuBose Heyward.

principals Marie Powers and Robert Weede) painted their faces, an unfortunate convention of the time.

*Troubled Island* made history on that March evening by breaking with customary portrayals of Black characters. It received mixed reviews, which likely contributed to its close.<sup>72</sup> The same year also marked the fully staged performance in a South Bend, Indiana high school auditorium of Clarence Cameron White's opera *Ouanga*. It played in much humbler circumstances than *Troubled Island*, and it also distanced itself from past racist portrayals of Black characters. It is likely that the operas could not have been performed earlier, since each defied the expectations established by the musicals and the revues of the 1920s and 1930s that featured Black actors. Neither was a comedy nor a jazz-inspired musical, although such suggestions has been proffered in the case of *Ouanga*: "White recounted that several producers urged him and Matheus to make the opera a comedy, thus making it conform to white audiences' expectations of black musical theater of the day" (Largey 51). Instead of conforming to such expectations, *Ouanga* and *Troubled Island* broke with them. The latter's portrayal of Dessalines as a tragic hero trying to make a utopian dream possible marked this change. The leader was neither comic, nor demonic, with zombified followers. He could change the course of history through his own agency, until that agency became more attuned to European ideals than to those he had always treasured. The message of the importance of keeping faith with one's roots triumphed, reinforced by the humane and sympathetic depictions of Dessalines and others.

*Troubled Island* holds an important place in American opera not simply because it was composed by William Grant Still and written by Langston Hughes, but also because its treatment

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<sup>72</sup> Still asserted that a friendly critic revealed that other New York theater critics had banned together in their decision to pan the opera, feeling that the composer, as a Black man, had "gone far enough" (Smith 389).



of Haiti marks its importance. During a decade when Haiti had just become free from US rule, Still and Hughes's choice for the opera could hardly have been more apropos. In telling the foundational story of Haiti, it projected an American national narrative, one that showed the successful establishment of the Black republic, flawed though it was. The impact of *Troubled Island* cannot be measured; unlike the many canonical works that have been adapted into opera or operetta in the Americas, neither the play nor the opera have (yet) been featured prominently in contemporary culture, or received the attention that most certainly is their due. While *Porgy and Bess* has become world famous with its stirring melodies and identifiable story, *Troubled Island* has never entered into the operatic circuit. Perhaps its early problems quenched the enthusiasm that could have grown for it, or perhaps it is yet to be discovered by the opera-going public at large. Yet, by celebrating Haiti's African roots, and thus by extension the African roots of the United States, it holds an important place in the annals of opera worldwide.

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# PAUL ROBESON, NEGRO

por Mary M. Spaulding

**•Dedicado afectuosamente a la raza de color de mi país**

PAUL Robeson, Negro" es el título del libro que describe, capítulo a capítulo, en lenguaje sencillo, elocuente, vigoroso, la vida de este gran hombre que debería ser inspiración y orgullo para todos los hermanos de su raza.

El libro se debe a la pluma sugestiva y valerosa de su propia esposa y compañera de aventuras, la escritora Esianda Goode Robeson.

En el título, pues, no hay desprecio, sino más bien un orgullo noble de proclamar que Paul Robeson, ídolo de dos continentes, extraordinaria cultura y con un brillante porvenir ante sus ojos, pertenece a una raza que ha llevado consigo, como lastre para su desenvolvimiento y su progreso, los prejuicios y las crueldades del hombre blanco.

"Paul Robeson, Negro" es la historia de un ser humano que, a despecho del color obscuro de su piel, a despecho de los obstáculos que su ascendencia africana ha levantado en su camino, ha llegado por sus propios esfuerzos y gracias a la inteligencia excepcional con que le dotara la madre Naturaleza, a colocarse a la altura moral e intelectual de cualquier gran artista blanco.

Ajenos a prejuicios raciales, nos encaminamos al "set" donde se filmaban las escenas de su primera película: "El Emperador Jones". Es una obra donde palpita el espíritu del africano. Paul Robeson, actor de excepcionales condiciones histrónicas y famoso cantante de ópera, juega en ella el papel principal. Hay dos hombres blancos en la trama de la obra, pero la personalidad vigorosa de Paul Robeson los eclipsa.

Justicias de que han sido víctimas... Y durante nuestra larga contemplación hicimos a pesar nuestro comparaciones con otras vitas a otros "sets"... entre el carácter del artista negro y el de muchos de sus colegas blancos.

Confesamos sinceramente que en muchos casos la comparación dejaba mal parados a los últimos. Estamos acostumbrados a la vanidad de las figuras triunfantes de la pantalla contemplado en muchas ocasiones las "autodivulgaciones" que padecen y hemos sentido también, con sonrisas lastimosas, la brutal verdad de que, cerca, los ídolos blancos resultan ridículos y pequeños.

De manera que cuando se habla de Paul Robeson, se habla de grandeza para llegar a la grandeza ha tenido que vencer con todos los obstáculos que se mueve en un ambiente que se muestra sencillo, modesto, capaz de un gesto que no es trivial y noble, nos rodeamos con las debilidades de los otros y no tenemos empacho en afirmar que el actor negro, como el ébano, nos impresionó más que las "superprodigiosas" de los blancos.

Paul Robeson se entregó al arte con una generosidad que lucha. Quietamente cumplió los órdenes de los directores, notamos también que cada vez que salía a escena con él, fuera sobre asuntos de teatro, fotográfica o meramente dramática. La visión artística de Paul Robeson la conocen y admiran los que trabajan con él y, sin embargo, el artista parece como si se diera cuenta de esta importancia que derrama sobre sus compañeros de labor.

En uno de los momentos Paul Robeson se acerca de nosotros trayendo de la mano a una mujer pálida y nerviosa, de ojos color café, labios finos y nos delicados; es Esianda, su esposa. Como él, de raza negra, pero de piel casi tan blanca y tan bellos labios como cualquier mujer de la raza nórdica.

Paul Robeson es modesto, pero si logramos que nos dé cinco minutos de él, por el día, en cambio, siente por nosotros una admiración que se revela de ocultas, y es así la que prodiga, repasando una a una las cuentas del rosario de los triunfos de su famoso marido.

Después nos entrega el libro de su ternera composición, una obra más hermosa de las alabadas, que, no por eso, deja de ser una biografía justa y sin exageraciones de la vida y obras del extraordinario Paul Robeson.

Nuestros resumidos en pocas palabras esta biografía. Paul Robeson nació en Princeton, Estado de New Jersey, a las once y media de New York, el día nueve de abril de 1898.

(Continúa en la página siguiente)



Paul ROBESON, el gran actor negro, en su carácter de "El Emperador Jones", filmada por John Krinsky.



John Krinsky, que con tanto éxito trajo a los Estados Unidos la obra "Macchen in uniform", produce ahora con todo lujo la ópera "El Emperador Jones" con Paul ROBESON, el famoso actor negro, como intérprete principal.

De derecha a izquierda: Dudley MURPHY, director; Mary M. SPAULDING, Paul ROBESON y H. DIKENS. Nótese la enorme musculatura del actor negro.





PAUL ROBESON, famoso en toda Europa por su actuación en la obra "Macchen in uniform", que dirigió John Krinsky y Cochrane, en la película "El Emperador Jones", que distribuyen los Artistas Unidos.

colocándolos en plano secundario, lo que hace resaltar, por el efecto de la labor del actor negro.

Y como éste, noble, fuerte, espiritual tan intensa que, sin embargo, ejerce rara influencia sobre los que trabajan con él, condensa en fuente de inspiración para todos.

excelentes proporciones físicas y poseyendo todas las características del africano, Paul Robeson se hace notar más por la seriedad de su intelecto y

TELEI

This article about Paul Robeson, famed star of *Emperor Jones*, appeared in *Carteles* (Havana, June 9, 1935). This example demonstrates the interest of non-U.S. readers in the successes of

Black actors on Broadway and in Hollywood.

(Courtesy of the Biblioteca Histórica Cubana y Americana "Francisco González del Valle")



## CONCLUSION

Why, after so many years have passed, do the narratives considered in this study continue to have cultural staying power, long after their heydays? Why and how are they still adapted, performed, and referenced in popular culture? What keeps them alive?

The themes of these print texts and dramatic musical works have a great deal to do with the stories that they tell. Each story presents a constructed version of the national narrative, and an alternative utopic national narrative in the case of Haiti, that has resonated with readers and listeners. Each example presents anxieties about race and nation that are still relevant today, and the texts and musical works attempt to resolve those anxieties.

Although Cecilia Valdés likely discovers the truth of her heritage in Villaverde's novel, she is still excluded from the national family and provided no entrée into it; however, in the zarzuela, written decades later, when Cuba was beginning to recognize Afro-Cuban cultural contributions, she finds recognition, redemption, and peace at last with her biracial identity. *O guarani*, on the other hand, dissembles the conquest and excludes the Black body from Brazilian shores, creating a family tree into which only white and "good" indigenous persons can be grafted. With their idealization of this specific identity and their recourse to the mytho-poetic core, the works fit an ideological mold that would prove to serve the Brazilian government well. *Emperor of Haiti* and *Troubled Island* provide a different model, in that they celebrate Black presence in the Americas and the Haitian Revolution not for ideological purposes, but rather as a utopian choice, to project a history far different from that of their own nation.

Each of these works has left its cultural mark. While the lesser known operas *Ouanga* and *Troubled Island* perhaps do not share the popularity of *Il Guarany* and *Cecilia Valdés*, the former works are receiving more and more critical attention and are performed and/or listened to more

than ever. In 2009 a commemorative concert at the New York City Schomburg Center marked the sixtieth anniversary of *Troubled Island*'s 1949 premier and generated a great deal of interest in the neglected opera. While *Ouanga* has not been recently performed by a major company, interest in opera of the Harlem Renaissance is growing, as scholarly articles, public events, and social media postings demonstrate.

The same can be said for the Brazilian opera and the Cuban zarzuela. The renown of *Il Guarany* and its modern-day status as “national opera” can perhaps be attributed in part to its “symbiotic relationship” to the novel, the “notoriety of both works feeding on each other and helping them become true national symbols” (Cesetti 103). (This observation likewise applies to *Cecilia Valdés*). *Il Guarany*'s music, especially from the Overture and the ballet, is often played at pop concerts outside of Brazil (Ewen). Inside Brazil the “Voz do Brasil” (“Voice of Brazil”) radio program still plays the *Il Guarany* overture, as it has for decades. Today, however, it plays more modern versions, some infused with samba or other genres. The music, when recognized, still has the power to evoke an image of Brazil that hearkens back to its earliest (imagined) days or to recall the tradition of beginning each day's government-sponsored radio program with the music.

It is with *Cecilia Valdés* that the bonds of community that performance can forge can be most clearly seen—both within Cuba and without. Inside Cuba, the novel and zarzuela still hold canonical status and together they have become a symbol of national pride in the post-revolutionary government; outside the nation, particularly in the United States, they have nostalgic power and have become powerful symbols of Cubanness. In fact, the zarzuela remains a popular Spanish-language work that has been presented in the United States by a variety of companies, from New York's Carnegie Hall in 1962 to the Metropolitan Opera in 1965 to Los

Angeles's Bilingual Foundation of the Arts in 2010, not to mention several performances in the Miami area. The Los Angeles show, performed in both Spanish and English, presents an intriguing portrayal of the character Cecilia and comes to exemplify the types of discourses surrounding the bicultural and biracial identity of Hispanic-Americans living in California at the turn of the century, taking on a significance distinct from the meaning it has in Havana.

Of course, many other operas and zarzuelas, some adapted from literary texts, have played important roles in their respective nations. Although they do not fall within the scope of this study, they present interesting avenues for further inquiry. Considering how many “guides” to opera do not mention *Il Guarany*, or *Ouanga*, a great deal of work remains to be done on these and other works. (*Troubled Island* fares a bit better perhaps because of Langston Hughes's fame, but still has only been performed a handful of times.)

The nation shapes and can be shaped by these cultural expressions. Whether through official channels—as with Roig's *Cecilia Valdés* being “declared a National Patrimony” in Cuba (MacCarthy 98)—or through unofficial channels, as with the renewed interest in Harlem Renaissance operas, these masterpieces still impact the societies in which they were written and often impact the world beyond. In a sense, music's transportability creates its own diaspora, as it travels on radio and television stations, and to internet sites, expanding the notions of performance and rewriting the texts from which it was adapted.

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