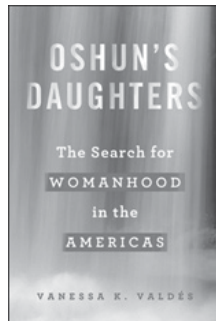
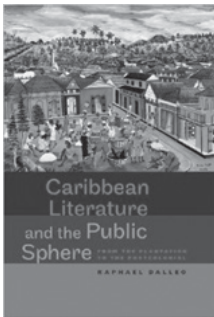


Review Essay

## Sacred Ways of Meaning and Knowing: A Comparative Reading of Caribbean Literature

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CARIBBEAN LITERATURE AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial. By Raphael Dalleo. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press. 2011.

OSHUN'S DAUGHTERS: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas. By Vanessa K. Valdés. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2014.

This essay is a comparative reading of *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial* (2011) by Raphael Dalleo and *Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas* (2014) by Vanessa Valdés. Raphael Dalleo's book is a pan-Caribbean literary history examining the role of the public intellectual from the plantation colony to the emergence of postcolonial regimes. Though also concerned with Caribbean literature, Valdés's woman-centered approach engages Afro-diasporan religion not as an intellectual project but an intimately sacred means of knowing and healing in the lives of black female characters across the Western Hemisphere. Her emphasis on Caribbean,

U.S., and Brazilian women writers, female protagonists, and female-identified African divine entities, situates her scholarship in the vein of renowned critic Miriam DeCosta-Willis and qualifies her book as an interruption of an otherwise androcentric paradigm. By way of juxtapositional analysis, I explore the multiple contributions of Valdés and Dalleo's books in order to compare disparate methodologies and to make critical suggestions for future research. Owing to my interests, my critique is centered on Hispanophone Caribbean authors, the recovery of Afro-Caribbean colonial literature, Spanish-speaking Caribbean writers, and a critical approach to African diasporic religion as epistemological practice. I argue that future literary histories should further integrate black colonial literati into Dalleo's notion of a nineteenth century Caribbean counterpublic, thus expanding an otherwise constricted notion of discursive practice. In that respect, there is much research to be done. Moreover, I believe the silence Dalleo assigns to Afro-diasporic religion inadvertently negates the epistemological significance of such traditions. In this essay, I recommend constructive approaches for the revision of the literary record and my reading of Vanessa Valdés' work submits certain methodological considerations.

Instead of speaking in terms of *zeitgeist*, Dalleo names three periods in Caribbean literary history: plantation slavery, modern colonialism, and post-coloniality. Dalleo reworks Pierre Bourdieu's framework of "literature as a field" in order to examine "the mediating autonomy of cultural producers" (6). Though his primary concern is the writing of a pan-Caribbean literary history, Dalleo engages cultural studies as an instrument for contextualizing literature in terms of social structures and institutional power. The author explores how colonialism persists in the Caribbean not in a static way but as the reemergence of domination to contain resistance movements. Dalleo's critical scope is impressive, embracing the Francophone, Anglophone, and Hispanophone Caribbean from the nineteenth century through the twentieth and into the present. Dalleo says that Caribbean writers were unable to forge a Caribbean public sphere grounded in local practices until the second half of the nineteenth century when it slowly began to take form (15–16, 44).

### **Plantation Societies and the Rise of a Caribbean Counterpublic**

Rafael Dalleo argues that the nineteenth-century Caribbean was not a public sphere as theorized by Jürgen Habermas, but rather constituted a counterpublic where abolitionist literature—largely published in Europe—represented enslaved populations. Habermas envisions a "utopian version of the public sphere" as an emporium of ideas that democratizes discourse by allowing for exchange across class divides (40). But, Dalleo says that newspapers in Caribbean slave societies were the rhetorical vehicle of a small slave-holding elite that feared widespread literacy would give enslaved men and women access to radical abolitionist ideas. The Caribbean press was established in the eighteenth century with two objec-

tives: keeping records of the monetary value assigned to human captives and as a means of regulating the movement of enslaved persons (25, 30). Dalleo evokes Ángel Rama's notion of the lettered republic in order to highlight the hierarchical nature of public discourse in Caribbean colonies based on monoculture and captive labor (27). The Uruguayan theorist argued that the Catholic Church and the colonial state were the sole proprietors of literacy, which served to administer urban space in the interest of the Spanish mercantile empire (26). Dalleo explains that slave narratives—one of the earliest forms of Caribbean literature—resembled Rama's lettered republic in that local hierarchies restricted literacy and the avid circulation of texts (23). But Dalleo's use of Rama is tempered by his acknowledgement that unlike the settler colonies of Spanish America, Caribbean societies fell under the aegis of a rural slaveholding class (27). In fact, Dalleo believes that the radical inequality of plantation slavery granted the slaveholding classes an even greater "discursive monopoly" (27).

This does not mean, however, that Caribbeans did not resist the institution of slavery. Dalleo does acknowledge the existence of a Caribbean counterpublic that he believes manifested "entirely in nonliterary forms" (42–43). In this way he unwittingly echoes the work of William Luis who argued in *Literary Bondage* (1990) that the Cuban antislavery narrative was the result of white activism and had no other aesthetic means but "the mechanism available to white or Western culture" (65).

Dalleo says that the abolition of slavery and the subsequent increase in literacy that freedom made possible fomented "a local literary public sphere able to debate and critique the state" (44). In Michel Maxwell Phillip's novel *Emmanuel Appadocca* (1854) Dalleo finds the construction of a rational Trinidadian mulatto subject whose scientific proclivities and ability to examine the motives of men enable him to impose his will on other male subjects (47).<sup>1</sup> I think the Afro-Caribbean Trinidadian protagonist is redolent of Cuban writer Jesús Masdeu's *La raza triste* (The Sad Race) published in 1924, which presents a medical doctor educated in historically black U.S. colleges, who upon return to Cuba is unable to practice medicine. However, though both novels construct a rational male character, Appadocca's dominant masculinity is not subverted by white power structures, as is Masdeu's protagonist. His virility and rationality aside, Appadocca's dream to become the founder of the city where his men might live free is never realized (53).

Unlike José Martí's anti-colonialism, Dalleo demonstrates that the authors of *El laúd del desterrado* (1858)—in New York that published nearly a decade before the Cuban Declaration of Independence—imagined the public sphere "outside of the national space and at sea" (54). The contributors were Miguel Tuerbe Tolón, José Agustín Quintero, Pedro Santacilia, Pedro Ángel Castellón, Juan Clemente Zenea, and Leopoldo Turla (53–54). This group of six white Cuban poets adopted slavery as metaphor, critiqued Spanish rule, and implored their compatriots to "wake up" (54). The collection even published the work of renowned poet José María Heredia to situate the anthology in a longer, albeit

somewhat contradictory and amorphous anticolonial tradition. Immersed in masculinist metaphors, the white male authors of this collection demonstrated a predilection for the pirate, the rebel, and the revolutionary as the appropriate symbols of national struggle. As Dalleo acknowledges, the authors perceived national liberation as an intangible force that could not originate within Cuba, but instead would be gifted to an “oppressed people” (57). Dalleo’s greatest critique of the contributors to *El laúd del desterrado* is their advocacy of annexation and their support for the perpetuation of plantation slavery. More pointedly, the exiled white male literati used freedom as metaphor even while ignoring the subjugation, enslavement, and other forms of violence enacted against African persons on the island. As Susan Buck-Morss has said in “Hegel and Haiti,” liberal philosophers regarded slavery as the antithesis of freedom, but such principles did not apply to Africans whose labor financed the entire Western economic system (821–822).

The contributors to *El laúd del desterrado* certainly did not represent the full spectrum of white Cuban politics regarding national independence and slavery. The newspapers *El Mulato* and *El Independiente*, as Dalleo points out, advocated for a transracial vanguard to wrest independence from Spain and to abolish slavery even though, like pro-slavery elements, they too feared that Cuba might become a black republic in the Haitian tradition (58). Cirilo Villaverde—who founded *El Independiente* to contest annexationist politics—soundly rejected the notion of *freedom* imposed upon Cuba that would emerge from U.S. business interest (58).

Raphael Dalleo correctly asserts that literature expressing antislavery sentiment found its reading public in Europe. Furthermore, he states that *The History of Mary Prince* (1831), Manzano’s 1840 slave narrative published in England, and both *Emmanuel Appadocca* and *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole* gained very limited reception in the Caribbean because the plantocracy enjoyed a discursive monopoly on the publication and distribution of work. Dalleo concludes that in the Hispanophone, Francophone, and Anglophone Caribbean, access to the metropolitan public sphere required patronage, approval, and translation at the hands of elite literati (42). Citing Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s essay “Power/Sugar/Literature: Towards a Reinterpretation of Cubanness,” Dalleo asserts that from the 1820s to the 1840s, the Cuban critique of slavery (and pro-independence advocacy) had no influence on public opinion (35).

But the author’s notion of a counterpublic is woefully limited in that it absconds the presence of black literati in Cuba and Puerto Rico. The case of African-descended Cuban poets Juan Francisco Manzano and Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido) is instructive. Notwithstanding their reliance on white patronage, both poets wrote, extemporized, and circulated poetry through a complex series of black literary networks. Dalleo’s rendering underestimates the political significance of Manzano and Plácido in the early 1800s. Plácido and Manzano were the most prominent poets of African descent in early-nineteenth-century Cuba and as Daisy Cué Fernández has demonstrated Plácido was the most prolific poet on the island, publishing even more than José María Heredia (*De antaño* 44). In *Poetas de color* (1879), white abolitionist Francisco Calcagno

boasts that Plácido's antimonarchical poems, "Habana Liberty!" and "The Oath," enjoyed clandestine dissemination in oral and written form throughout the island (22). Furthermore, Calcagno's testimony corroborates the judgment against Plácido, which charged that the poet had covertly funneled political messages through surreptitious black and mulatto networks.<sup>2</sup> Plácido's participation in the Cuban counterpublic often elided the notice of the metropolitan public sphere with its posturing, vain pronouncements and duplicity.

Adriana Lewis Galanes and William Luis's scholarship shed light on Manzano's antislavery poetry, "The Absent Slave Woman," "The Poet's Vision Composed on a Sugar Plantation," and "A Dream: To My Second Brother," the latter which was published in Cuba in 1838. The research of Galanes and Luis re-charted the possibilities for critical analysis so that in addition to the slave narrative, Manzano's poetry might also be read in the context of anticolonial and anti-white supremacist struggle. As I have argued elsewhere, Manzano's autobiographical account constituted a freedom narrative, which unlike his correspondence with white patrons, was informed by the emancipatory promise of Afro-Cuban ritual ("Ritual and Reason" 65). In fact, Plácido's involvement in the ill-fated Ladder Conspiracy bespeaks the political subtext of his poetic expression, the breadth of *his counterpublic* both black and white, and the political consequence of black discursive practice—execution at the hands of the Spanish military. Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido) certainly understood the instrumentality of spoken-word poetry to sow seditious ideas, rouse emotion, and impart a spiritual paradigm for revolutionary exploits. The magnitude of Plácido's influence on the Cuban counterpublic was certainly not lost on the Spanish government which not only forbade the publication of his literature but also the recitation of his poetry and even the mere mention of his name (Paquette 265).

Though it is difficult to gauge the full measure of Manzano and Plácido's rhetorical suasion within communities of African descent, the military government's imprisonment of the former and execution of the latter in 1844 bespeaks the political power of their utterance. And my archival research on the official government narrative of the 1844 Movement demonstrates that the black discursive presence was far more pervasive than critics previously thought. The decree of Queen Isabella II speaks to the symbolic power that Plácido exercised even in death. Three months subsequent to his execution, the Queen of Spain commanded the military government to "cut the root cause of revolution" and "not to spare any means in order to sever the branching out that Plácido The Poet represented."<sup>3</sup>

*Caribbean Literature and The Public Sphere* would benefit from recent scholarship conducted by Roberto Ramos-Perea that unearths essays and theatrical pieces written by fifteen different black Puerto Ricans between 1880 and 1925. The *Antología de la Literatura Puertorriqueña Negra Escrita por Negros: 1880–1925* breaks the discursive silence about what Ramos-Perea has termed the white Catholic hegemony that governs Puerto Rican literary criticism and has condemned black authorship to oblivion (ix). This critical anthology origi-

nally published in 2009 and reissued in 2011 contrasts with literary criticism by numerous authors that explore the representation of the black subject by white authors. Critical of this racialized ventriloquism, Ramos-Perea recovers black Puerto Rican literature so that it may speak for itself. Ramos-Perea is less interested in black authors' access to a *fin-de siècle* public sphere and more concerned with the systematic way that white literary criticism marginalized and excluded their aesthetic contributions to the birth of the Puerto Rican tradition (6–7). The Afro-Puerto Rican literature of Eleuterio Derkes promoted social recognition of interracial marriage in the dramatic piece *Tío Fele* (1883) and lent ideological support to the working classes in the play *Ernesto Lefebre* published one year prior to abolition (13, 15).

### **Reading the Caribbean Public Sphere in the Twentieth Century**

Raphael Dalleo's engagement with twentieth-century Afro-Caribbean writers in a way that contests the invisibility of these subjects in Angel Rama's *La ciudad letrada* (The Lettered Republic) and *Desencuentros de la modernidad* (Divergent Modernities) by Julio Ramos is among the many contributions of his book. Dalleo points out that neither Ramos nor Rama discuss the significance of the abolition of slavery nor do they grapple with the multitude of black literary voices in the post-emancipation era (70). Although Ramos's critical lens is also Latin-Americanist in nature, Dalleo notes that the inclusion of José Martí begins to appropriate and adopt the concept of the lettered republic to the particulars of the Caribbean context. Dalleo is primarily concerned with Martí as an anticolonial figure who takes a nod from Puerto Rican author Eugenio María de Hostos in order to articulate the proper role of the literary intellectual in nationalist struggles for independence from imperial Spain. His reading of Martí's "Nuestra América" (Our America) demonstrates how the author juxtaposed and comingled the "sympathy and sensitivity" of the writer with the *manly* exploits of the Cuban theatre of war (72). (Martí died fighting the Spanish in 1895, on the battlefield in Dos Ríos, Cuba.) Dalleo explores how Martí struggled to resolve the tensions between the notion of literary practice as a feminized space—a sphere of inaction and passivity—with the patriotic violence associated with the masculine ideal (72). Julio Ramos characterizes José Martí's essay "Our America" not as a political treatise but rather as a dynamic prose piece sated with poetic tendencies. Ramos explains that Martí sought to give voice to the native population and to Afro-Latin Americans by promoting the staging of theatrical pieces that might represent subjugated populations (Dalleo 77). But while the author makes useful observations about Martí's anti-imperialist impulse, he says little about his racial project. Martí's emphasis on the "natural man" embodied by the autochthonous *mestizo* who scorns the artificiality and effeminacies of the "the alien pure-blooded Creole" (read white elite male) points to nationalism as a masculinist project that denies the existence of "textbook races" on the one hand even while enshrining cultural and racial admixture as the ideal on the other.

But the absence of black Cuban abolitionist and journalist Juan Gualberto Gómez and military virtuoso Antonio Maceo reproduces the problematic tendency in Hispanophone Caribbean criticism to construct José Martí as what Audre Lorde termed the white father (“Poetry is Not a Luxury” 37–38). In “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” Black feminist, lesbian poet Audre Lorde decenters the “European mode” premised on ideas bereft of imagination without insight and as an alternative promotes a woman-centered poetics that explores the dark spaces within—a well-spring of unexamined creative power (36–37).

Dalleo’s insightful analysis of the Caribbean anticolonial tradition encompasses works written in English, Spanish, and French and explores the significance of fiction and literary journals as discursive repositories for nationalist struggles. For him the Caribbean public sphere come to maturation in the twentieth century with the rise of autochthonous writers who addressed and engaged a local reading public. By briefly commenting on Claude McKay, Suzanne Césaire, and Aimé Césaire as well as the short-lived Dominican journal *La Poesía Sorprendida*, I hope to highlight the notion of the poet as redeemer of a benighted world. Dalleo reads the poem “The Daily Gleaner,” published in 1911, as the inaugural moment in Claude McKay’s journey because here the author perceived the newspaper—founded in 1834, the same year that Great Britain abolished slavery in Jamaica—as a national space for interracial dialogue. In poems like “Quashie to Buccra” and “Passive Resistance,” McKay constructs a collective subject position designed to represent the Jamaican underclass both urban and rural. The pedagogical impulse of his poetry—published between 1910 and 1912—emerges again in the novel *Banana Bottom* (1933) where the female protagonist Bitá Plant seems to distance herself from European customs to draw near to Jamaican culture. Bitá’s journey from her native Jamaica to England to receive an education maps a trajectory that Martinican writer Frantz Fanon would critique thirty years later in his acclaimed *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Some critics say that Bitá’s sojourn to the so-called mother country was designed to make a lady of the Negress but her marriage to Jubban emerges as a definitive act of reinscription into rural culture (Dalleo 99). Dalleo favors the reading submitted by Belinda Edmonson who argues that European culture never loses its status in the novel and that though Bitá Plant rejects upper-class suitors and marries the folk, her mentality remains rather English (100). For Dalleo, *Banana Bottom* does not represent a clash between Jamaica and England as much as it investigates internecine struggles within the Jamaican middle-class while critiquing class privilege and pigmentocracy. For Dalleo, *Banana Bottom* is representative of Caribbean literature of the early twentieth century that posits the literary intellectual as leader in opposition to a staid technocratic elite (107).

With regard to *La Poesía Sorprendida*—published during Rafael Leónidas Trujillo’s regime between 1943 and 1947—Dalleo argues that surrealism’s emphasis on the oneiric and irrational created space for an otherwise apolitical journal to engage the political sphere through indirection and metaphor. In an era rife with racialized nationalism, the journal posited itself as a cosmopolitan

space publishing avant-garde figures such as André Breton and James Joyce and even including the poetry of Haitian writers in the aftermath of Trujillo's 1937 massacre of persons of Haitian descent (111–113). Suzanne and Aimé Césaire's journal *Tropiques* published in Martinique also had a surrealist orientation. Dalleo points out that *Tropiques* was a critical vehicle for the négritude movement, published Aimé Césaire's poetry and essays, and theorized the poet both a spokesman for the people and warrior for a worthy cause. In this way, Césaire situated the poet as a man of action in the tradition of José Martí (114–115). But Dalleo's treatment of Aimé Césaire's seminal work *Discourse on Colonialism* leaves something to be desired because it does not acknowledge the radical anticolonial and anti-white supremacist gesture that the essay represents.

Robin Kelley's recent introduction to *Discourse on Colonialism* characterizes the text as a "declaration of war," a quasi-manifesto asserting that European colonialism had not enriched Europe but instead decivilized it (7–9). Kelley correctly asserts that Césaire's 1950 publication prefigured postcolonial studies by describing Europe's reinvention of the colonized and the deliberate destruction of their history as a process of what Césaire termed, "thingification" (9) and is today regarded as objectification. Furthermore, Kelley criticizes the silence that postcolonial scholarship has constructed around *Discourse*, which is often catalogued as a precursor to contemporary theory but is seldom explored for its contribution. Moreover, Robin Kelley makes three significant points: Césaire located the origins of fascism in the history of Western colonialism, he revised Marxist thought, and he employed surrealism as an aesthetic instrument to survey the depths of the reader's unconscious and touch his very being (9–10). Future literary histories would benefit enormously from a critical examination of Césaire's seminal work.

### **Expanding the Notion of Caribbean Intellectual Tradition**

In *Oshun's Daughters*, Vanessa Valdés analyzes the representation of Afro-diasporic religion as a transgressive instrument in hemispheric narrative that prominently features female protagonists. The Brazilian, Cuban, and U.S. poetry and prose that Valdés examines portrays Yoruban religiosity as a holistic epistemological system that negates the problematic binaries of European rationalism (1–2). Valdés draws heavily on the work of Tracy Hucks's *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (2012) to conceive of Yoruban traditions as religions formed in the crucible of Diaspora that were transformed and articulated through the dual pressures of migration and anti-black persecution. In an effort to avoid the reductionist tendency of anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits's *Myth of the Negro Past*, Valdés rejects the notion of African-derived, African-inspired, and African-based.<sup>4</sup> And that way she acknowledges the fluidity and innovation of Afro-descendant religious traditions in South America, the Caribbean, and North America (3). For Valdés the "allegiance to a diaspora" interrupts the metanarrative of nation and creates space for complex, multi-tiered



constructions of female identities that are neither derivative of, nor subordinate to, Christian notions of masculinity (6). *Oshun's Daughters* builds on the critical anthologies *Daughters of the Diaspora Afro-Hispanic Writers* (2003) and *Women Warriors of the Afro-Latina Diaspora* (2012), the former published by Miriam DeCosta Willis and the latter by Marta Moreno Vega, Yvette Modestin, and Marinieves Alba. However, Valdés's significant contribution to the literature of the Americas would benefit from some methodological modifications. Afro-diasporan religions were not "transported to the Western Hemisphere" (1) as she claims but rather as sociologist Jualynne Dodson proposes in *Sacred Spaces: Religious Traditions of Oriente Cuba* (2008) a broad epistemological framework embodied in behavioral fragments, conscious and subconscious understandings, and some phenomenological principles accompanied African captives to the New World (39–40, 45). Also the book might benefit if the "Yoruba" were not read as a discrete ethnic designation but rather differentiated ethnic groups that coalesced in the nineteenth century under a pan-regional identity. Andrew Apter's book *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (1992) and Toyin Falola and Matt Childs's edited volume *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* (2005) treat these highly contested matters.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding, such methodological considerations do not diminish the critical intervention of Vanessa Valdés's work, which privileges the representation of African sacrality in an intellectual tradition that divorces mind/body, thus rendering alternative interpretations of spirit meaningless.

Vanessa Valdés provides insight into the presence of African cosmologies in Audre Lorde's poetry as lyrical work guided by an ancestral presence in the poems, "Winds of the Orishas" and "125<sup>th</sup> Street and Abomey" among others. Valdés describes the way in which Lorde distinguishes between the intellectual decorum of logic/reason and the "untamed longings for something different" that lie within the modern female subject (32). Through the exploration of Yemanjá and Seboulisa—Yoruban and Fon-based divine entities respectively—Valdés says that Audre Lorde constructs the dark mother as intuitive understanding in opposition to knowledge, an "un-ladylike" sensibility that rejects the patriarchal project to silence, control, and domesticate women. The exploration of African religiosity allows Lorde to explore and emulate unconventional models of femininity (35).

In the work of Audre Lorde, Vanessa Valdés has observed a dynamic and inclusive process of subject formation informed by Yoruban cosmological thought. Lorde engages in a process of becoming informed by the dark mother whose selfhood is not defined by patriarchal structures but rather grounded in erotic practice (35–36). Valdés brings Audre Lorde into dialogue with Puerto Rican literature written in New York. Similar to the work of Suzanne Césaire in the Martinican journal *Tropiques*, Miguel Algarín theorized *boricua* poetry as an act of naming that situated the poet as a troubadour unifying the Puerto Rican community in moments of collective grief, outrage, and delight (38). Valdés's engagement with Nuyorican poetry emerging within the disenchantment of the late 1960s and the 1970s highlights the work of Sandra María Esteves. Esteves's

lyricism engages all of the elements that Algarín identified in Nuyorican culture: salsa music, transculturated black religion, and the palpable presence of oral tradition (39). Esteves's *Yerba Buena* (1980) is the first of her six collections of poetry to openly engage African diasporan religion. In poems like "Oración" (Prayer), the poet condemns Christianity not as a religion but as a system of ideology enacted to institute coercive labor practices among indigenous and African-descended populations in Latin America. Valdés draws needed attention to Esteves's rejection of the Virgin Mary as a disingenuous maternal figure who failed to protect the "brown children" of Mother Earth (42–43). By naming the seven orishas known as the seven African powers—Eleguá, Ogún, Changó, Yemayá, Obatalá, Ochún, and Orula (Oyá replaces Orula in the poem)—Valdés argues that the most significant divine spirits of the Yoruban pantheon supplant ecclesiastical authority in Esteves's work (43).<sup>6</sup> Valdés's incisive reading concludes that the initiation of the lyrical subject into the priesthood in "Oración" constitutes emancipatory practice for Puerto Ricans and that her poetry as a whole posits a diasporic subjectivity in opposition to an otherwise Hispano-Catholic Puerto Rican identity (37–38, 46).

As part of a lengthy examination of the tension between literary activity and political commitment, Dalleo analyzes George Lamming's essays in *The Pleasures of Exile* as a text positioned between the political commitment of the literary intellectual and the growing U.S. domination in the Caribbean region (174). Writing in the tradition of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, George Lamming's essay, "Caliban Orders History" centers Toussaint Louverture as the key black revolutionary figure whose insurgent activity dictated the course of history. Reading Toussaint through the lens of C.L.R James's *Black Jacobins*, Lamming perceives the Haitian Revolution as what Dalleo called a "speech act" that transformed the language of the enslaved from labor to revolution (159).

Dalleo draws attention to Martin Carter's poem "Listening to the Land" as an evocation of the voice of "some buried slave" who seeks to assert discursive presence from the grave, a presence denied by a white supremacist structure that deemed him property during his lifetime. The critic rightfully named the relationship between Carter's twentieth-century poem, Lamming's invocation of ancestral presence in *The Pleasures of Exile*, and José Martí's canonical essay "Our America" (167–168). And he is right to read Carter's poem as a reconceptualization of the relationship between the poet and the silenced captive since Carter does not speak for the enslaved but rather creates space to listen (167). I think Dalleo's reading would benefit from recent scholarship on Afro-Cuban colonial literature, particularly the ongoing recovery of black colonial poets like José del Carmen Díaz. In a recent article published in *The Zora Neale Hurston Forum* I perform a literary excavation of José del Carmen Díaz's poem "The Cemetery on The Sugar Plantation" as an example of what critic Jenny Sharpe calls "counter memory" ("Black Femininity and The Silence" 21). Appended to Francisco Calcagno's book *Poetas de color* (1879), the poem relates the narratives interred of seven enslaved persons in nine pithy epitaphs in which

the stories of three female characters are found. Del Carmen Díaz represented the tenor and texture of voices held captive—whose bodies largely buried in unmarked graves—were unable to vocalize their experiences. I think that while the subjectivity of the characters is very much in question, the poet's physical presence in the plantation cemetery transforms him into a conduit for voices to proffer critique from the otherworld. The reader cannot know if what del Carmen Díaz wrote about the three black female characters reflects what the deceased might have articulated themselves. But, there is no doubt that critics ought to do further analysis of *Cantos del esclavo* not only to popularize a black Cuban poet who has been effaced from the literary record but also to expand our notion of counterpublic by unearthing Caribbean voices uttered in a discursive void.

If read in juxtaposition with Dalleo, Valdés's research demonstrates the epistemological contribution of Afro-diasporic religion to Caribbean literature. Her reading of *Casa de juegos* by Daína Chaviano, the poetry of renowned writer Nancy Morejón, and the widely popular novel *Dreaming in Cuban* by Cristina García disclose the silences embedded in *Caribbean Literature in the Public Sphere*. Valdés acknowledges ancestral presence and the aura of the orishas in the lyrical work of Morejón who portrayed sacred entities by alluding to nature. In Morejón's poem "Los ojos de Elegguá" (The Eyes of Elegguá) from *Richard trajo su flauta y otros argumentos* (1967), Valdés muses that Elegguá may have lost mastery over the crossroads he commands, that ritual powers might have been rendered inefficacious, and that humanity might be in crisis (90, 92–93). Valdés analyzes *Casa de juegos* as Chaviano's intervention into a broader conversation about the erotic as a spiritual encounter with sexuality that may be aptly articulated through the idiom of Afro-Cuban religiosity. For Valdés, the author does not use African divine spirits as metaphors but instead invokes their power as a heuristic tool for her audience (101). For Chaviano's female protagonist the erotic is a liberatory act that she learns to decouple from indignity and misuse in order to survive amid a suffocating Cuban social environment (101).

*Caribbean Literature in The Public Sphere* represents a major contribution to pan-Caribbean literary history exploring the plantation era, the emergence of the anticolonial intellectual, and the late-twentieth-century emphasis on testimonial literature and popular culture. Raphael Dalleo's scholarly contributions would be enhanced, however, if forthcoming research unearthed, weighed, and carefully considered the nineteenth century in search of poets, essayists, politicians, and playwrights of African descent whose collective work represents a far more robust counterpublic than previously imagined. But, such an inquiry cannot properly be conducted without a much-needed reassessment of the epistemological and ethical contributions of African-diasporic religion.

## Notes

1. Maxwell Phillip's novel *Emmanuel Appadocca* (1854) is contemporaneous to *Clotel* (1853) published in the United States by formerly enslaved author, William Wells Brown.

2. The official title of the seven and half page Spanish government document is, *Sentencia pronunciada por la Seccion de la Comision militar establecida en la ciudad de Matanzas para con-*

ocer de la causa de conspiracion de la gente de color [sic]. MS Span 52 (717) Folder 2 Houghton Library, Harvard University.

3. Real orden: legajo 134, expediente 259. Cuban National Archive.

4. In *Myth of the Negro Past* (1941), Melville J. Herskovits negated the racist myth that African-Americans were without a historical past. The ahistorical fiction that Herskovits contested was based upon a series of other myths: the Afro-American had an infantile personality readily adaptable to harsh living circumstances; that the least capable Africans were enslaved; that there were no cultural continuities between Africa and the Diaspora; that African cultures disintegrated once coming in contact with European cultural systems (Sidney Mintz, "Introduction", *Myth of the Negro Past*, xvii-xviii).

5. In his essay, "The Diaspora a Yoruba Speakers, 1650-1865: Dimensions and Implications", historian David Etlis discusses the dispersal of Yoruba-speaking Africans from distinct political units that fell captive to European enslavers and were shipped to the New World (17-19, 23).

6. In *Santería Enthroned: Art Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*, anthropologist David Brown describes Orula (also known as Orúnmila) as the diviner-oricha of the Ifá oracle and tutelary head of ritual priests known as babalawos (371).

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