

Set in Haiti: The Construction of Race in *Historia de una bala de plata*

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Literary and cultural critics must invent a term that surpasses "marginalized" to describe Haiti's place in literary history. Now that so many are claiming that politically coveted spot on the margin, what are we to do with Haiti, the Western half of an island which in multiple ways really exists on the fringes? Haiti is a small country in a region that, aside from Cuba, is only beginning to receive attention in drama and theatre studies—the Caribbean. Rather than as a producer of literature in general or theatre in particular, it is Haiti's history that has been significant to the Caribbean and the Americas, most particularly, its 18th century slave rebellion. This insurrection's symbolic importance is evident in Cuban Alejo Carpentier's novel *El reino de este mundo* (1949), while Trinidadian C.L.R. James links Haiti to Cuba's 1959 Revolution in his essay "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro." James, in fact, repeatedly returns to Haiti in his writings, for his best-known work, *The Black Jacobins*, lends its title to both a play about L'Ouverture (1936) and a history of Haiti in this period (1938). Another West Indian, Derek Walcott, published a historical drama *Henri Christophe* in 1950 and Aimé Césaire from Martinique continued this focus with his 1963 play, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*. There is an indirect reference to the Haitian backdrop in North American Eugene O'Neill's 1920 play *The Emperor Jones* (set "on an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by white marines") and a direct allusion to it in Colombian Enrique Buenaventura and the Teatro Experimental de Cali's *La tragedia de Henri Christophe* from 1963, continued in his 1979 drama, *Historia de una bala de plata*.

Almost all of the works I have cited in some sense presage the most recent U.S. occupation of Haiti for, while foreign intervention is not the main theme in every case, each, in its concentration on Haitian history, foregrounds the force or risk of radical mass mobilization. This activity can be envisioned as either liberating or menacing; Allan Nairn in an article from the *Nation* (Oct. 3, 1994) calls attention to an American perception of the threat of the Haitian populations'

"taking politics into its own hands" (344). Nairn goes on to enumerate other elements of the present situation in Haiti: a history of puppet governments frequently allied with known criminals (e.g., Duvalier), the necessary alliance of upper-class and business interests in order to establish democracy, the importance of internal security forces in atomizing society. Every one of these factors is present in Buenaventura's 1979 play, *Historia de una bala de plata*. This play is not another rendition of the same old story, however, although many of this story's markers are present. The Teatro Experimental changes its interpretation of Haitian history by using an overtly Brechtian approach and by placing the issue of race at center stage. The revolutionary history of Haiti is decisive and has had great symbolic resonance not just because it represents an uprising on a small Caribbean island but because race was so determinant in that revolt. Analyzing *Historia de una bala de plata* in terms of its intertextual resonances and in relation to Toni Morrison's theories of Africanism will uncover the relations between race and colonialism in the play and demonstrate some possible limitations in the use of Brechtian techniques to provoke a radical response to racism.

Racial issues are also apparent in the plays that form the intertextual backdrop for this one, although they are conceived in very different ways. Eugene O'Neill sets his drama in the West Indies, but the black protagonist speaks in a caricature of African American speech, combining the historical reference to Henri Christophe with black stereotypes more familiar to the dramatist's North American or European audiences.¹ O'Neill keeps historical references in the background and begins his play at what would be the end of Christophe's reign. The drama that follows charts the course of the Emperor's confrontation with his own defeat and he loses his mastery primarily because he is vulnerable to psychological manipulation (continual drumming in the distance reinforces the barbaric powers of his rebelling "subjects"). In his perceptive examination of the play, Robert Hamner notes O'Neill's use of Jungian imagery, his emphasis on problems of the human psyche rather than politics, and argues that the Emperor Brutus Jones is ultimately "a racial turncoat who becomes the victim of his own delusions" (32).

Hamner conditions this statement by balancing different critiques of racial elements in the play: there is black primitivism but also a reversal of black-white stereotyping in Jones' relation to the white, cockney-accented Smithers; the description and trajectory Jones follows may be atavistic, but his manipulation and command of language is not; the play has been read as signaling both the defeat of white colonialism and as the downfall of an "uppity black man" (33-4).² Although, as Hamner remarks, in 1920 putting a black character at center stage was unusual, race is not explicitly the central issue in *The Emperor Jones*. In

effect, *The Emperor Jones*'s Africanist subtext is a striking example of what Toni Morrison, theorizing white North American writers' encounters with Africanism, has described as a "means of meditation—both safe and risky—on one's own humanity." These encounters permit white authors to "contemplate limitation, suffering, rebellion" and to construct a "history and a context for whites by positing a history-lessness and context-lessness for blacks" (53). O'Neill's play about "an island in the West Indies," then, is more about the boundaries of whiteness than it is about blackness.

Unlike O'Neill, who employs blackness to indirectly define whiteness, Aimé Césaire chooses the Haitian rebellion to exemplify his concept of *négritude*. Rejecting white dominance or the erasure of color, *négritude* affirms African difference and, in the case of Césaire, this affirmation is intrinsically linked to anti-colonialism, to independence. The playwright employs an historical approach with some Brechtian elements in *La Tragedie du roi Christophe*, chronicling the power struggle between Henri Christophe, black king of Northern Haiti, and Pétion, mulatto president of the South. The historical perspective is significantly Haitian, viewing Christophe in terms of his successes and his symbolic importance rather than his limitations (e.g., authoritarianism, rigidity). Christophe ultimately fails in his bid at nation-building but it is an honorable loss, for he refuses to conform to a corrupt system. Seth L. Wolitz names Christophe one among many recurrent "Heros of Negritude" in Césaire's didactic theatre:

Though the Hero of Negritude is defeated at the end of each play by the forces of colonialism or neo-colonialism, the audience leaves the theater aware of reactionary forces but desirous of implementing the progressive political, social, and economic goals of *Négritude*. The theater of Césaire, then, is *théâtre engagé*, the socialist realist epic theater of the Left, the cultural manifestation of *Négritude*. (197)

Through this construction of the hero Césaire unites race and politics and, as Wolitz explains, extends the meaning of tragedy to the social realm (207). But it remains an unresolved tragedy, there is no catharsis, and he thrusts the problem back into the audience's hands.

Césaire's approach works as a catalyst for change because he manipulates his audience's identification with the hero who, while flawed, is an admirable over-reacher. In this view, the goal of achieving an uncompromised black leadership in Haiti is an estimable ideal still to be realized. Buenaventura and the Teatro Experimental put a different spin on Césaire's combination of politics and race—they do not make their ruler a hero of *négritude* in *Historia de una bala de plata*—in fact, there are no heroes at all in the play. Rejecting an historical

version of events (as was their 1963 dramatization of the story), this play calls attention instead to its literary precursors. The title invokes the silver bullet from O'Neill's play while it retains the idea of "history" from the earlier version (and perhaps Césaire's play). The black protagonist is named "Jones" in the Colombian play but "Christophe" becomes "Cristóbal," in a translation to Spanish that also recalls the beginning of American colonialism: Cristóbal Colón. With this dialogic approach, Buenaventura's group inserts its drama in a textual lineage; it is one among other literary interpretations of this particular moment in Caribbean history.

This intertextuality changes the play's relation to history demonstrating that there is not one story of Christophe but many, both historical and literary. Its parodic elements also make us interpret history in a critical, ironic way. The play's intertextuality is, in effect, postmodern, affirming the importance of historical events while questioning the boundaries between history, narrative, theatre, and film (there are references in the Colombian play that seem to allude to the film version of *Emperor Jones*, as we will see). This intertextuality extends the work, for it forces its viewers to examine and cross the boundaries between literary and lived experience.

Bala de plata opens by framing the action that will follow through a prologue:

Pentimetre: [...] La profunda y liviana, dramática y cómica, sublime y ridícula pieza que van a ver y oír, hace parte de una trilogía llamada: "trilogía del Caribe." Ocurren estos asombrosos acontecimientos en una isla imaginaria, surgida en el mar de la fantasía y perdida entre las verdes antillas.

Smith: Los colores tiene en esta pieza, singular significación (se maquilla). En lo alto de la pirámide social estaban los blancos.

Galoffe: Debajo de los blancos y tratando de subir con uñas y dientes estaban los pardos o mulatos.

Abate: Divididos en mestizos, tercerones, cuarterones, tente-en-pie, tente-en-el-aire, de acuerdo a un riguroso porcentaje de sangre negra.

Jones: Y en la base de la pirámide los negros esclavos. La esclavitud ya no era rentable, el trabajo asalariado la desplazaba pero en la isla imaginaria se mantenía como una lacra. (9)

The frame, with its ironic invocation of the imaginary, puts race relations right on the surface creating an exemplary focus on the issues by "estranging the signifying process" (Elam 18). With this opening in mind, then, I was surprised at the results when, teaching the play, I divided my students into groups to make directorial decisions about its staging (in this exercise they have to determine who/where their audience is, how they would alter the play to fit that particular audience, etc.). Each group chose a different audience but, among other modifications, both decided to change the racial setup in the play. One group wanted to put the black characters in "whiteface" and the other to have white characters play the black roles (and vice versa in both cases). When I asked them what they wanted to convey with this change, both groups told me that they thought it would make the themes of the play—power struggles, colonialism, political machinations—more universal, demonstrate that this could happen anywhere, even under different circumstances.

I was stunned. Why would they want to erase this self-conscious attention to race (especially since we'd begun the class talking about O'Neill's more dated version)? Had they considered the difference in meanings between putting on a white "mask" and "blackface," with its traditional racist associations?³ Were they uncomfortable with overt attention to racism, was it their particular situation (predominately white North American readers—two Central Americans)? Using this classroom experience as an example of a pseudo-performance, one group's reaction to a textual version of a theatrical work, demonstrates that perhaps the workings of race relations in the play are not as straight-forward as the opening frame suggests.⁴

This idea of erasing racial markers is expanded in Toni Morrison's recent book, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. In the preface, Morrison differentiates her position as a black reader in the U.S., always conscious of race, from a predominant white or "unraced" reading position that posits the literary imagination as universal and race-free (xii). In this case she is analyzing a North American production of race—obviously different and much more rigidly delimited than that of the Caribbean—but perhaps more illuminating in terms of this specific audience's reactions. Their desire to de-racialize the play represents an urge to return to customary reading practices. In light of these practices, maybe inverting the color continuum really would be a valid adaptation of the play to certain North American audiences. But it also forces us to reconsider what comes after this initial focus of attention on the racial hierarchy in *Historia de una bala de plata*.

The images of blacks that run throughout the play are predominantly stereotypical. None of the characters has any depth nor do we come to understand their psychological processes; the impulse for the play's action is circumstantial

not psychological. The latter traits are in keeping with the epic theatre tradition which, rather than creating identification between spectator and actor, establishes a critical distance; the use of stereotypes, however, is not typically Brechtian. While Brecht called for the actor to put distance between himself and the character he played through a variety of techniques—not impersonating a character but making his social "gestus" or attitude clear, openly shifting in and out of character, putting on make-up and costume on stage, addressing the public—invoking stereotypes was not one of these. Although formulaic depictions of characters may provoke distance, we will see that frequently it does not produce the critical alienation required of epic theatre.

In the first scene of Buenaventura's play, Jones (originally Louis Póitié) is about to be the victim of a Ku Klux Klan lynching in Louisiana. He is rescued from death by Smith, an American opportunist, who renames him and puts him aboard his ship in order to make him the "Napoleón negro del mar caribe" (15).⁵ On board ship racist conventions abound: Jones's strength is challenged by a white sailor, he is seen as uncivilized, bringing bad luck, hyper-sexualized. From the first, however, he "knows his place," understanding that he must be polite, that he is, in fact, a prisoner and Smith's instrument (17).⁶ Once they have landed on the island the clichés multiply. Even the island is described in racialized terms: a kind of slave, it "ha cambiado de dueño muchas veces" (17). Not only a black-white opposition, on the island we see conflicts between mulattoes, blacks, whites, and all the divisions enumerated in the Prologue taking part in a political struggle to form and reform alliances. In this context it is significant that Jones, the principal black figure, is primarily reactive; he is a subject, not an agent, and is not able to define his own role until the very end of the play.

Jones' struggle toward self definition is most apparent in scene six, which closes the first of the play's two acts. This scene opens with the entrance of Marta, Jones' wife, who has arrived on the island looking for her husband.⁷ Her dialogue with the *Abate* or priest reveals important background information about her husband and the priest, as well as uncovering her own strength of character. Via Marta we learn that the *Abate* is not what he seems to be, having taught the runaway slaves to read and write—using revolutionary works to do so—a role he appears to want to abjure in present circumstances. This difference between past revolutionary ideas and present capitulation is reinforced by his song at the end of the scene, "La canción de la mitra," which interrupts the action in a Brechtian manner to reveal the opportunism motivating this character. Unlike the priest, Marta is a strong woman who voices the truth—in both personal and social terms. When the *Abate* wonders why she believes her husband, Louis Póitié from Galveston, Louisiana, may be on the island reminding her "El mundo es muy grande hija mía," Marta responds: "No para los negros, señor Abate. Cuando un

negro se mueve de su lugar la gente lo sabe y más si es un fugitivo . . ." (32). Marta is clear about her racial identity and what it means. Louis Poitié has been persecuted by the Ku Klux Klan because of racism and, a Civil War hero, he lives on the small pension earned by a "héroe negro" (32).

Marta's firmly racialized identity conflicts with the vacillating identity of her husband. Jones's entrance interrupts the dialogue between Marta and the priest and he instantly denies he is her husband: "Usted se equivoca. Yo no soy Louis Poitié. Soy el general Cristóbal Jones," yet he affirms his crime: "Si Louis Poitié huye del Ku Klux Klan es porque mató a un blanco que violó a su mujer y tú sabes esa historia tan bien como Louis Poitié" (33). Distancing himself from his past by maintaining the third person, Jones also tacitly confirms his old identity and the valor of his "crime." His identity is not stable; this wavering is not resolved in this scene but extended as Jones/Poitié confronts Smith's former right-hand man Galoffe's threat to assassinate him. Marta urges him to flee: "Louis Poitié, no pierdas esta oportunidad," and her husband responds: "El general Jones tampoco puede perder su oportunidad porque un maldito mulato se le atraviese en el camino. He venido aquí para libertar a los esclavos y lograr la independencia de esta isla" (34). This shift in identities and difference in perspectives is reinforced through the continual use of the character's full name here, augmenting the alienation effect.⁸

The alienation effect is strengthened by identity shifts in all the characters in this scene except Marta, who remains astutely skeptical and, because she "knows too much," is ultimately removed for safe-keeping. Not before she manages to reveal some conflicting information about Smith's background, however, for she lets Jones know that he is in fact a slave trader. Jones argues with her about this but his actions contradict his defense of Smith for, when Galoffe enters searching for Jones, Poitié takes the upper hand and hits him on the head with a statue. In an ironic inversion of O'Neill's play, in this instance it is the mulatto Galoffe who is haunted by racial stereotypes: "¡Despareció! Pueden hacerse invisibles o transformarse en animales. . . . (Un estremecimiento lo sacude y huye despavorido)" (36). Continuing the irony, Poitié takes off his uniform/Jones identity to recover his freedom ("¡Adiós general Jones! . . . ¡Adiós libertador de los esclavos! ¡Adiós malditas ilusiones! ¡Soy libre!"). Unlike the original Emperor Jones, taking off his clothes does not signal a return to an inherent primitivism but a revelation of his true self and the only means to freedom. This concept is reinforced when Smith returns at the end of the scene and, dispensing with Marta, puts Jones back into uniform. Poitié, redressed as Jones, confronts Smith with his own false front:

Jones: ¡Basta de payasadas! ¡Usted, Smith, es uno de los Ku Klux Klan y un traficante de esclavos! No trate de manejarme más ¡Terminemos esta historia de una vez!

Smith: (Al público.) ¡Es un emperador de verdad! ¡No es de pacotilla, ni es una marioneta manejada por mí como ustedes pensaban!

Jones: ¡Hágame linchar, termine conmigo, acabe lo que empezó en Galveston con el Ku Klux Klan! (41)

But Smith, an artful dodger, evades the accusation by revealing the economic motivation behind his maneuvers:

¡Es cierto Jones, he pertenecido al clan, pero para conocer su organización y destruirla! He provisto de esclavos a los propietarios franceses, pero para ganarme su confianza y acabar de una vez por todas con la esclavitud! ¿Y sabes por qué? ¡Por mi propio interés! Ahora, con un hombre como tú, estoy en condiciones de lograr la independencia de esta colonia. Pero impondré la abolición de la esclavitud mediante un decreto. Montaré trapiches a vapor. ¡Un trapiche a vapor no se mueve con esclavos, se mueve con trabajadores libres! (41)

Smith is not after an ideologically motivated freedom but a self-interested investment opportunity. The goal here is capitalist. Yet he only has to add the political lip service to higher motivations—"¡Pero la isla también obtendrá beneficios! ¡Y la humanidad!" (41)—to convince Jones to resume his pose as emperor. Like Jones' donning and removing of his uniform (offering the potential for great visual theatre), Smith changes his discursive costume right before our eyes.⁹

The main character alternates between poles representing his acceptance of Smith's capitalist values and betrayal of his race in the guise of Jones and his affirmation of his black identity and struggle against oppression in his identity as Poitié. Racial identity is shown to be a variable component in the colonial project; it can be manipulated, as Jones is, but blackness also works metaphorically here. It is linked to slavery which is both a real and a figural condition, as in the example of the island, or of Susana, who sings about changing masters as often as three times a night, adding that "los primeros conquistadores se llevaron mi virginidad" (28).¹⁰ Morrison analyzes the metaphorical application of race in a U.S. context as a way of "referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and

expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than race ever was" (63). The primary examples of "threats" she provides are class conflict and the way the enforced dependency of black people has been used to highlight individualism, the freedom of whites. Changing the referent to the Colombian play, in the Caribbean/Colombian contexts locating slavery and racial hierarchies at center of the play and in Haiti becomes an indirect call for solidarity against the individualism promoted by capitalism. This unity is summoned against a long Haitian history that links race to class struggles.¹¹ While striving to portray the complexity of the situation, Buenaventura and the Teatro Experimental call for an accord that goes beyond racial factors to include national and regional ones.

The Colombian collective theatre group is actually making a plea for Caribbean and Latin American autonomy via Haitian history. Their strategy becomes quite clear at the end of the play which extends beyond Haiti to one of its Spanish-speaking neighbors. The conclusion to *Historia de una bala de plata* is similar to those of both O'Neill and Césaire in that the defeated king-figure dies, but his death is distinct in each case. In the American version the emperor's own fears, self-doubt, his personal and his racialized past delude him and he is killed by the "savage" natives, proving that he is not better than the others. In Césaire's version the betrayed Christophe commits suicide; he cannot conform to a corrupt system and in this way retains part of his noble idealism. In the final scene of *Bala de plata* (II,4), just after assuming power and acting as a true emperor for the first time rather than Smith's puppet, Jones renounces his throne to join the rebelling slaves (taking off the uniform again and appearing as Poitié). But his actions prove foolhardy for he is killed by the *cimarrones'* King Yoffré who does not trust him (especially since he is unwittingly leading the marines to Yoffré's enclave)—it is too late for unity. Jones' mistake appears to have been not rebelling soon enough, vacillating in his identity, having been partially seduced by the appearance of power. Or it may be that the system is so corrupt, so undermined by infighting, that there is no place for his valiance; having been brought in as a figurehead, he cannot change his role and will always be an outsider. The Colombian group creates hope, possibilities beyond the play's ending, however, by returning to the choral framing device and making reference to the future:

Pentimetre: ¡En la próxima verán ustedes a las dictaduras que, como herencia de los marines, quedaron en el Caribe!

Yoffré: ¡Y verán también como la lucha de los pueblos no se detiene!
(70)

History is not static but mutable and the mention of the Caribbean framework also invokes what the audience will recognize as the next symbolically important triumph of the people's struggle—Cuba.

This play uses racism and slavery as metaphors to comment on associated problems of national or regional identity and autonomy. As we have seen, race can be an effective figure for portraying postcolonial questions, but at a cost; the metaphoric use of racism in this instance obscures some real racist elements by using these to enunciate another problem. It is worth considering, for example, why the Teatro Experimental de Cali chose to examine questions of colonialism and race in Haiti, in effect, dislocating these problems to another place and period when both of these are important issues in Colombia.¹² Although there is a substantial black population in Colombia it has been "unseen;" as in much of Latin America, the term "ethnic minorities" has customarily been used to refer to Indians (a more "frictional" differentiation, according to Peter Wade, that signals the Indian population's cultural and linguistic differences and at once unifies and excludes indigenous people as a category in Colombian national identity, 336). Via the Caribbean the play makes indirect reference to Colombian racism, not nearly as well-considered as that of Haiti, while the connection between Haiti and Colombia (and Martinique and the USA through the intertextual references) provides evidence of a black diaspora that transcends national boundaries.¹³

The temporal and spatial distancing generated by exploring the issue in Haiti may allow Colombian audiences to indirectly reflect on their own situation. The play can be read in allegorical terms and these aspects could certainly be heightened in its production. The factiousness so apparent throughout the play, in fact, eerily echoes Peter Wade's description of the infighting resulting from the "nature" of Colombia's racial order, which is "constituted and reproduced through its twin processes of *mestizaje* and discrimination" (43). Colombian culture evidences both prejudice and tolerance in the "contradictory but interdependent coexistence of blackness, indianess, mixedness, and whiteness" (5). According to Wade the resulting competition for prestige ultimately forecloses on any possible solidarity; this situation makes us read the drama's call for unity in different, more realistic light.

But the differences between Haiti and Colombia also provoke questions about the effectiveness of Brechtian distancing in the case of a subject already distanced or alienated from its potential audience (not all audiences, of course; the play would have very different receptions in many Caribbean countries, in coastal vs. the interior of Colombia). Brecht defines his "Verfremdungseffekt" as consisting "in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately

accessible into something peculiar, striking and unexpected" (Brecht 143). Blackness, in all its varieties and as a fully developed social position, is for many audiences not something "ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible." White, criollo, *mestizo*, even mulatto audiences are already distanced from a black subject position. Taking this into account, the stereotypes, lack of agency or intellectual development, and the continual enactment of racism in *Historia de una bala de plata*, rather than provoke critical distance, may also reinforce existing detachment.

Buenaventura's highlighting of race does not, in fact, make racism the main subject of the play. *Historia de una bala de plata* prominently features race, suggesting, perhaps, that this is its theme, while it is really using the slave situation to offer a critique of a shared regional past. By means of this metaphorization, it oddly enough in some way participates in the displacement of race. Some other contemporary plays and films that portray race or slavery and more successfully manage to implicate the audience in these issues provide an interesting point of contrast to the play. Jean Genet's 1959 play *The Blacks (Les Nègres)*, combines Brechtian and absurdist techniques to generate a critique of black and white relations, implicating the audience from the outset. Genet introduces the text of the play with this note:

This play, written, I repeat, by a white man, is intended for a white audience, but if, which is unlikely, it is ever performed before a black audience, then a white person, male or female shall be invited every evening. The organizer of the show should welcome him formally, dress him in ceremonial costume and lead him to his seat, preferably in the front row of the orchestra. The actors will play for him. A spotlight should be focused on this symbolic white throughout the performance.

But what if no white person accepted? Then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theatre. And if the blacks refuse the masks, then let a dummy be used. (4)

Race is clearly the issue and one of the play's central goals, explicitly stated by a member of the all-black cast, is to "corrode and dissolve the idea [that whites] would like us to have of them" (112). Through costume, dialogue, performers shifting in and out of character, audience participation and reflection through a "white" court on stage, Genet dramatizes a self-conscious perspective of race relations ("it was easy for you to transform us into an allegory," says the white-masked queen to her spectators, 123). Distance, in this case, is manipulated to provoke a white audience's self-criticism.

Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1978 film, *La última cena*, which depicts an 18th century Cuban slave rebellion, treats race in yet another way, casting the "white" or criollo characters as representatives of certain ideological positions while avoiding stereotyping the slaves. Although none of the characters is fully developed here, the slaves' self-expression is the focal point of the longest section of the movie (the dinner scene) and they evidence a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and reactions to their shared situation. We are led to identify with the slaves through the multiplicity of positions and qualities they exhibit. When the audience may be already alienated from the subject, Alea demonstrates that more radical possibilities lie in identification rather than distancing.

Historia de una bala de plata subordinates the question of race in order to present an international perspective on a postcolonial economic situation by means of the slavery metaphor. Through this figure, rather than merely eliding racial elements, the play makes us reconsider the role of race in history, problematize it, and perhaps brings this factor closer to the surface in Colombia. At the same time we have seen how the play's reception changes with different audiences; the desired critical outcome from Brechtian distancing requires some prior degree of identification which may or may not be present in an audience. Perhaps if they had highlighted race in a non-stereotypical way Buenaventura and the Teatro Colectivo de Cali might have used the underlying unity in conjunction with the specific differences of African-American experiences (in the broadest sense) to really get beyond nationalism. This would mean that the culmination of the series could not be the Cuban experience but would extend beyond it; it would not present us with a concrete radical alternative but a future possibility based on an alternative, diasporic view of history. In this it might offer its audiences a nation-less, race-conscious and more truly postcolonial vision of other possible unities.

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Notes

1. Robert Hamner demonstrates that O'Neill's play also combines distinct historical moments in its creation of the Emperor Jones; while Cristophe is a clear reference, the myth of the silver bullet has been associated with Guillaume Sam, a Haitian ruler assassinated in 1915 (31).

2. While Ann E. Larabee makes a forceful argument for Jones' authoritative command of language in her essay, "'Meeting the Outside Face to Face,'" the reception of the play's racial images has always been mixed. Paul Robeson, who played the role of Jones in 1924 after Charles Gilpin's initial version, changes his reactions to O'Neill's play; he first describes the importance of Jones's

tragic role (*Paul Robeson Speaks* 70) then—a more mature, established actor—he refused to participate in a 1939 revival of *The Emperor Jones* unless all "epithets derogatory to the Negro" were eliminated (128). Black audiences at the Lafayette Theatre had still another response to an early production of the play: razzing the actor "to get out of the jungle, because he was in Harlem" (*The Harlem Renaissance* 115).

3. This idea ironically calls to mind the title of Frantz Fanon's famous book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, in which he discusses internal colonization produced by racist practices.

4. My self-conscious inclusion of the reactions of my students here is in keeping with Buenaventura and the TEC's desire to establish a polemical relation with their public, engaging their audiences in post-production discussions, including their unpredictable interventions as part of the theatre experience (Buenaventura discusses these issues in "Ensayo de dramaturgia colectiva").

5. Jones' "rescue" is a significant variant on O'Neill's play in which Jones is an escaped convict who arrived on and "conquered" the island of his own volition. Many of the resonances between Buenaventura's and O'Neill's works suggest that the intertext is more likely to have been the 1933 film of *The Emperor Jones* than the play itself; Smith makes references to Jones's time on a chain gang, working in a Pullman car, and includes a scene in which he strikes a white man (later edited out of the film), all incidents that do not occur in the play.

6. Even the characters' names—Jones and Smith—reinforce their generality.

7. The inclusion of Marta as a character is one of the striking changes from the first Buenaventura play—*La tragedia del rey Christophe*—to *Historia de una bala de plata*. There are no important female characters in the earlier version and Christophe's wife does little more than cry.

8. Brecht reminds actors that to achieve this effect "the actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into the character he is portraying . . . the actor speaks his part not as if he were improvising it himself but like a quotation." (137-8)

9. Buenaventura has remarked on the importance of the "theatre within the theatre" created in *Bala de plata* and adds that in productions the group planned to emphasize these different levels through the scenery: creating some flats that would make reference to the "reality" or the referent for the action and others that would evoke the theatrical quality of Poitié playing the role of Jones (*Conjunto* 24).

10. Paul Gilroy has called plantation slavery "capitalism with its clothes off" (15); this clear reference to the economic system imposed by colonialism is also apparent in *Historia de una bala de plata*.

11. David Nicholls insists that, although there is a general color hierarchy in Haiti, it is not rigid and class struggles cannot be "reduced to purely ethnic factors" (6). While this is undoubtedly true, racialized categories are also continually reinforced; the three dominant castes he names are "white," "free-colored," and "slaves" (23) and he signals the intimate association between politics and race when he informs us that the 1805 constitution in Haiti proclaimed that "all Haitians, whatever their shade, shall be called black" (24).

12. Amir Smith Córdoba (in a book published, coincidentally, in 1980) chronicles the presence of racism in Colombia—a country that has the third highest Black population in the Americas (after United States and Brazil, 21)—and Nina S. de Friedemann offers a brief history of black "invisibility and presence" in an article with this title.

13. Paul Gilroy's recent book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* provocatively employs a transnational and intercultural approach to what he terms "Black Atlantic culture," demonstrating some of the limitations of strict national and racial categories.

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