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Writing Spaces of Ritual, Resistance, and Renewal: Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York* and Cabrera's *Cuentos negros de Cuba* Intersecting in the Space of Duende

Federico García Lorca spent the last three months of his 1929-1930 sojourn to New York City traveling, writing, and giving more than twenty lectures throughout Cuba. The poet's invitation to the island was issued in February 1930 by the Institución Hispano-Cubana de Cultura, directed at the time by the Cuban anthropologist and scholar of Afro-Cuban culture, Fernando Ortiz, who along with other Cuban and Spanish artists and intellectuals received the young Andalusian poet with open arms.[1] Among those with whom Lorca spent this time that he would later refer to as the best days of his life, were Cuban ethnographer and author Lydia Cabrera, the Cuban poets Juan Marinello, Nicolás Guillén, Enrique, Dulce and Flor Loynaz, and the Spanish musicians María Muñoz and Antonio Quevedo. This expansive circle of friends and artists fueled Lorca's artistic imagination by introducing him to the vibrant Afro-Cuban cultures, sights and sounds of the island, and providing him a much-needed respite from the alienation and despair he experienced and depicted while writing in New York.[2] Lorca's participation in these social gatherings, which included visits to the Black district of Marianao and attendance at a ñáñigo ritual with Cabrera, had a profound and lasting impact. (Birkenmaier 110).[3] He not only reveled in the comradery, but also came to appreciate more deeply his strong cultural ties to the island. As Lorca wrote in a letter to his parents, "Habana es fundamentalmente española, pero de lo más característico y más profundo de nuestra civilización. Yo naturalmente me encuentro en

mi casa…Si me pierdo, que me busquen en Andalucía o en Cuba." ("Havana is fundamentally Spanish, but in the most characteristic and profound aspect of our civilization. Naturally, I feel at home…If no one can find me, let them look for me in Andalusia or in Cuba" (*Espistolario Completo*; my trans.1168).[4] In Cuba, Lorca not only found warmth and hospitality, but also discovered a multiracial cultural imaginary grounded in expressions of sorrow and displacement, joy and perseverance. For him, the presence of displaced African voices and experiences relegated to the margins of Cuban life yet continuing to reveal themselves through artistic expression was similar to what he found in Harlem and embraced as an artist hailing from southern Spain. In this way, Andalusia, Harlem and Cuba are essential touchpoints in Lorca's artistic life for each are spaces crisscrossed with hidden voices, diasporic experiences and forms of expression both ancient and new, deeply Spanish and American at once.

Given this, Lorca's work from this period invites readers to examine more deeply these shared cultural and artistic bonds, and to consider along with him the role of artistry in articulating them. His essays and poetry from this period, specifically *Teoría y juego del duende* ("Play and Theory of the Duende" 1933), and the "Black poems" from *Poeta en Nueva York* (*Poet in New York* 1940) provide a valuable point of intersection for this task given the way they not only connect Lorca's Andalusian roots to his stay in Harlem, but also resonate with the theoretical and artistic conversations taking place in Cuba regarding Cuban national identity and the place of Blackness within it.[5] Among those contributing to these discussions in Cuba was

Lydia Cabrera whose ethnographic fieldwork among descendant African slave populations led to the publication of her groundbreaking work *Cuentos negros de Cuba*, (*Black Stories from Cuba* Paris,1933; Cuba, 1940). Interestingly, and as this study will show, Lorca and Cabrera share a common goal in their work from this period: a deep desire to write into the literary construct the primordial voices and longings of the marginalized, silenced and unheard.[6] By infusing their work with Black voices and subaltern energies through the use of oneiric landscapes, ambiguous forms and disruptive linguistic devices Lorca and Cabrera problematize and reimagine the space and purpose of artistic creation. In effect, their works perform the acts of ritual, resistance and renewal that inform them by challenging dominant structures and fixed identities, allowing borders to fall away and a renewed sense of freedom and belonging to emerge. The authors' choice of poetic expression and ethnography respectively as a means through which to bring to the foreground discordant voices, form-shattering imagery and perspective-enhancing linguistic and literary techniques unites their work in unexpected and interesting ways. Moreover, their engagements with the concepts of "duende" and "monte" highlight ancient desires and spiritualities that made their way from Africa through Spain and the Americas unsettling false notions of homogeneous identities, and creating instead hybrid spaces that defy strict borders or categorizations. These ideas, central to Lorca's Black poems and Cabrera's African tales, will frame my discussion as will the studies of Lorca and Cabrera scholars, particularly Christopher Mauer, Martha Nandorfy and David Richter (Lorca) and Isabel Castellanos, Edna Rodríguez-Mangual and Julia Cuervo Hewitt (Cabrera), among others.

Ritual and Resistance

Lorca's fascination with the multiple influences and ancestries embedded in Spanish and Cuban culture is a continuation of interests and ideas he first explored with respect to Andalusian Gypsy culture in Spain, and then later expanded to include considerations of African American life in Harlem. A gifted practitioner of various artforms throughout his career, Lorca continually pondered the remote origins as well as the essential nature of artistic expression. In *Teoría y juego del duende*, Lorca praises the unmediated creativity inherent in the life and death ritual of the bullfight as well as in the spontaneous cries and unscripted movements of flamenco dancers and singers. Emerging from a complex circuit of influences between Africa, Spain and the Caribbean colonies dating back to the arrival of the Moors in 711 (bullfighting) and up through the colonial projects of the 16th – 19th centuries (flamenco), these artforms became for Lorca a means through which to explore rebellious Black bodies and ancient primal desires circulating across space and time.[7] Given this, it is not surprising that he defines "duende" as a raw creative spirit emanating from deep within a heterogeneous, multilayered Spanish culture not unlike the one he found in Cuba. From Lorca's perspective, "todo lo que tiene sonidos negros tiene duende…Estos sonidos…son el misterio, las raíces que se clavan en el limo que todos conocemos, que todos ignoramos, pero de donde nos llega lo que es sustancial en el arte" ("everything that has black sounds has duende…These sounds are the mystery, the roots fastened in the mire that we all know and ignore, and from where the very substance of art comes"; *Obras*

completas 111). Thus conceived, and as noted by Nandorfy, duende belongs to the realm of the outcast or indeterminate, and therefore reveals itself primarily in the sorrowful yet sensual pleasure of self-loss (16-17). Accordingly, Lorca finds duende operating in artforms and practitioners that liberate the senses from reason in order to create products of pure desire, that is, those creative or spiritual endeavors that decenter or wound the self so that something Other may express itself there.[8] As Lorca writes, "el duende no llega si no ve la posibilidad de muerte...el duende gusta de los bordes del pozo en franca lucha con el creador...el duende hiere, y en la curación de esta herida, que no se cierra nunca, está lo insólito, lo inventado de la obra de un hombre" ("duende does not arrive if it does not see the possibility of death...duende likes the borders of the well in open struggle with the creator…duende wounds, and in the curing of this wound, which never closes, lies the unusual, the invented part of a man's work"; *OC* 117). Naturally then, it is those that peer over the edge of the abyss to stare down death that channel the purest, most ancient forms of artistry. These are the poets and lovers encountering foreboding blank pages or unreachable objects of desire, the dancers and singers, the marginalized and silenced that carry within them traces of lost or forbidden energies longing to break free.

As the poet explains, for the bullfighter this is the moment when he must kill or be killed, and thus loses the self to a rush of primal energy enabling him to transmit and experience, "una lección de música pitagórica [que] hace olvidar que tira constantemente el corazón sobre los cuernos" ("a Pythagorean music lesson [that] makes one forget that he constantly throws his

heart on the horns"; *OC* 119). Similarly, Lorca points to a flamenco singer who would "quedarse desamparada para que su duende viniera" ("remain helpless so that her duende would come"; *OC* 113) to make her voice "un chorro de sangre digna por su dolor y su sinceridad" ("a gush of blood worthy of her pain and sincerity"; *OC* 113). Thus, the essence of artistry lies not in its support of closed structures outside it – be they corporeal, societal or artistic- but rather in its capacity to shatter such restrictive systems and give voice to alternate discursive energies that threaten to dismantle them. According to Lorca, the artistic spirit or "duende" that he aims to encounter and set free in his work is "un poder y no un obrar, es un luchar y no un pensar...no es cuestión de facultad, sino de verdadero estilo vivo; es decir, de sangre...de viejísima cultura, de creación en acto" ("a force not a labor, a struggle not a thought...it's not a question of skill, but of a style that's truly alive; it's in the blood...it's of the most ancient culture of immediate creation"; *OC* 110). In this way, the poet's concept of duende is truly liberatory in nature for it calls into question all that prevents access to and knowledge of a full range of identity and expressive potential.

With these views there is no denying the Nietzschean roots of Lorca's thinking nor its intersection with the prevailing avant-garde tenets and practices of his day. The poet's descriptions of sensual yet violent fusions of self and other, past and present, art and life echo Nietzsche's call for the reincorporation of Dionysian impulses into artistic expression to recover what the philosopher deems "a natural, healthy creativity wherein the breakdown of the

principium individuationis becomes an artistic phenomenon" (*Birth of Tragedy* 20). Similar efforts to recall a primary past by undermining the fixed realities and exclusionary discourses of the present are evident in the Cubist experiments with African masks and artefacts, the surrealists' embrace of unconscious desires, and the French Négritude Movement's revaluation of the mythic world and traditions of Africa, all of which also had a profound impact on the *afrocubanía* project in Cuba.[9] This is due to the fact that in these artistic enterprises of 1930s Paris Cuban writers and artists living there at the time - Lydia Cabrera, Nicolás Guillén, Wilfredo Lam - saw something necessary and transferrable within a Caribbean context. They found and brought back to Cuba upon their return a more defiant approach to *afrocubanía*, one that no longer looked at Afro-Cubans as mere objects of study but instead included and valued their voices and histories in the formation of national cultural identity (Hewitt 126).

Also involved in the vanguardist push to return artistry to its natural origins through a defiant embrace of distant cultures is the French dissident, philosopher and author Georges Bataille. As Richter attests, by the mid to late 1920s Bataille had rejected the surrealist pursuit of an idealized "hyperreality" accessible through dreams and automatic writing, favoring instead a pure primitivism situated firmly in the world of the real (2-3). This led Bataille to explore and depict in his writing images of sacrificial or erotic violence, base material and decaying lifeforms, underscoring his fascination with the commingling of pleasure and pain, or those moments in which "individuals risk themselves, each lacerated and suspended, perched atop a

common nothingness" (*On Nietzsche* 21). Further, like Nietzsche and Lorca, Bataille links access to this "void" or "abyss" to a surge of desire that moves subjects to extreme states of vulnerability culminating in the rupture of boundaries and a joyous union with Otherness. According to Bataille, this movement toward formlessness, born of desiring tensions, crisis and ambiguity, is grounded in the sacred and cannot be divorced from the realm of art, particularly poetry. In his words, "poetry leads to the same place as all forms of eroticism - to the blending and fusion of separate objects. It leads us to eternity, it leads us to death, and through death to continuity" (*Erotism*, 25). Lorca's essay on "duende" also ties artistic or poetic expression to the same movement toward formlessness and rupture, to those moments when desire permits opposites to coalesce and foments radical, unexpected changes in form and structure that cannot be divorced from contact with the sacred.

In the context of Afro-Cuba, Lydia Cabrera also explores and records in her work similar sites and surges of dissonant, desiring and sacred energies. In her ethnographic studies on the belief systems of the Yoruba and Bantú populations of Cuba as well as in her fictional work Cabrera identifies these hidden sources of desire and disturbance with the presence of Africa in the Antilles. Hewitt confirms that Cabrera's work lays bare the notion that within the false construct of a homogeneous Cuban nation there is a deeply rooted African presence that serves as a constant reminder of a painful separation, lost origin or sacred (M)other space to which Afro-Cubans long for reconnection and return (121). That is, the memory and traditions of Africa

fester within the Cuban nation like an open wound emitting streams of destabilizing energy. Notably then, the healing of this wound requires the bridging of a vacuous gap and a curative reimagining of the nation through rediscovery of the outcast Other. Thus, Cabrera insists, "No se comprenderá a nuestro pueblo sin conocer al negro...No podemos adentrarnos mucho en la vida cubana, sin dejar de encontrarnos con esta presencia africana que no se manifiesta exclusivamente en la coloracion de la piel" ("We cannot understand our people without understanding Black Cubans...We cannot go very deep into the life of the people in Cuba without finding the African presence, which is not manifested exclusively in the coloration of the skin"; *El monte* 9). Understood in these terms, to know Cuba is to reconnect with Africa not just in terms of its visible remains, but with what lies hidden beneath that surface, that is, with the vibrant and resilient system of hidden cosmologies, dispersed religious and cultural histories that define and animate the nation.

Thus, a central feature of Cabrera's exploration of Blackness as a pathway back to lost knowledge and healing is the Afro-Cuban concept of "monte", which provides the thematic and structural basis for her *Cuentos negros* as well as the title and subject matter of her 1954 ethnographic masterpiece, *El monte*. Considered "a space of refuge and freedom...a thick forest, and a sacred high ground" (Hewitt 150), "monte" is an innately hybrid realm occupied by androgynous deities capable of both good and evil, creation and destruction. As such, the concept recalls the Dionysian underworld or form-defying void described by Nietzsche and

Bataille as well as the locus and performance power of Lorca's "duende." By serving as a repository of ancestral myth and memory, a point of access to Otherness, "monte", like "duende", houses and harnesses the transformative powers of the earth; powers that expose and inflict the kind of wounds and ecstatic pain linked to artistic expression. The Cuban poet Reinaldo Arenas describes this by noting how Cabrera 's work summons "la voz del monte, el ritmo de la Isla, los mitos que la engrandecen y la sostienen. La magia con que todo un pueblo marginado y esclavizado se ha sabido mantener (flotar), imponer siempre" ("the voice of the monte, the island's rhythm, the myths that makes the island great, and give it life. The magic with which a marginalized and enslaved people has been able to survive and prevail"; 15). Likewise, María Zambrano connects Cabrera's recovery of the African spirit to a form of writing that, "puede juntar el conocimiento a la fantasía y realizar así la poesía en sentido primero de ser reveladora de un mundo, el agente unificador en que las cosas y los seres se muestran en estado virginal, en éxtasis y danza" ("can bring together knowledge and fantasy to create poetry as a primordial revelation of the world, the unifying agent in which things and living beings are seen in their virginal state, in ecstasy and dance"; 8-9). Through contact with and resurrection of an African spirit world that defies strict form and order to sustain a once enslaved people Cabrera's ethnographic research is indeed both a spiritual and an artistic or poetic endeavor. That is, not unlike poetry as conceived by Bataille or Lorca, its aim is to encounter and inject dark, primal and dissonant forces into a closed nation, imaginary or construct built around rejecting or taming

such forces. The result is a defiant, revelatory reimagining of that space, one that showcases the creative yet destructive forces within it, and how those point toward expressive freedom.

Creative renderings connecting recovery of lost cultural knowledge and peripheral voices to anguished yet joyful expressions of artistic resistance and renewal are on full display in Lorca's Black poems. In these texts that include "Norma y paraíso de los negros" ("Standards and Paradise of the Blacks"), "Danza de la muerte" ("Dance of Death,") and "El rey de Harlem" ("The King of Harlem") the poet decries the soul-crushing limits of urban life through the lens of racial marginalization and displacement (Maurer, xx-xxi). Lorca speaks to this aspect of his New York collection when recalling the impact of his visits to Harlem: "Lo que yo miraba y paseaba y soñaba era el gran barrio negro de Harlem, la ciudad negra mas importante del mundo donde lo lúbrico tiene un acento de inocencia que lo hace perturbador y religioso...Yo quería...subrayar el dolor que tienen los negros de ser negros en un mundo contrario" ("What I looked at, strolled through, dreamed about, was the great black neighborhood of Harlem, the most important black city in the world where obscenity has an accent of innocence that turns it into something disturbing and religious...I wanted to...underscore the pain the blacks feel to be black in a contrary world"; *OC* 1714). While Lorca captures Black marginalization and despair in his images of anguished, fractured figures stranded in a hostile urban environment, the Black poems also highlight ecstatic breakthroughs of African energies in the form of memory, ritual, music and dance. Thus conceived, the poems reflect the duende-infused, *contrapunteo* of Andalusian

cante jondo, the improvisational rhythms of African drumming and dance, and the spontaneous upbeats of Black jazz. That is, they illustrate how unscripted breaks in form and order allow discordant voices and energies to come in, resulting in a sacred conjoining of oppositional forces, suffering and joy, "lo lúbrico y lo religioso."[10]

"Norma y paraíso de los negros" is an effective example of this. From the start, Lorca depicts subjects struggling against erasure, containment and exclusion, trapped by tired, modern standards that have distanced them from a lost primordial paradise:

> Odian la sombra del pájaro
> sobre el pleamar de la blanca mejilla
> y el conflicto de luz y viento
> en el salón de la nieve fría.
>
> Odian la flecha sin cuerpo
> el pañuelo exacto de la despedida,
> la aguja que mantiene presión y rosa
> en el gramíneo rubor de la sonrisa.
>
> (They hate the bird's shadow
> on the white cheek's high tide
> and the conflict of light and wind
> in the hall of white snow.
> They hate the unbodied arrow

the punctual handkerchief of goodbye
the needle that maintains pressure and redness
into the grassy blush of their smiles.; *OC* 477, lines 1-8)

Here, the black subjects appear disembodied and deadened in spirit as Lorca does not directly reference them as the subjects of the verb "odian" nor does he portray them as fully alive or thriving. Instead, they are ghostlike, encased in shadow or a hall of snow, victims of the battle between light and wind, an arrow lacking a body. The loss of vitality is also evoked by the images of the "punctual handkerchief" and "the needle pressing redness into grassy green smiles" for they suggest the dull routine of comings and goings, and the false liveliness of the existentially sick, both of which underscore a craving for new life.

Thus, what follows is a retreat to the archive of Black memory: "Aman el azul desierto, / las vacilantes expresiones bovinas /...la danza curva del agua en la orilla" ("They love the deserted blue, the swaying bovine expression / ...the water's curved dance on the shoreline"; *OC* 447 lines 9-10, 12). The contrasting calm of the memorialized blue dotted with meandering animals and dancing waters knocks down and reimagines the frozen, regimented world of the opening. Moreover, the recalled world lays atop the transactional metropolis in a way that not only repeats the collision of the opposing terms, "odian" y "aman", but also implies a new-found coexistence. Lorca examines this further in the next strophe, noting how "la ciencia del tronco y el rastro / llenan de nervios luminosos la arcilla / y patinan lúbricos por aguas y arenas / gustando

la amargura de su milenaria saliva" ("the science of the tree trunk and the rake / fill the clay with luminous nerves, / and as they skate, gliding over water and sand, / they taste the bitterness of their millenary spit"; *OC* 477, lines 13-16). Here, the reference to science and the playful obscenity of nerve cells suggests a view through a microscope, and from that magnified perspective, the life forces, (water, sand, millenary spit), while contained, remain free to challenge limits and showcase the ancient beauty of their restless chaos.[11] This portrait of free-flowing chaos, emblematic of cante jondo, jazz, and now of a look through a microscope, is also tied to the Black subjects themselves as their very presence implies connection to a distant realm or Otherness that threatens the homogeneity of the space they occupy. So too, the poetic elements of contrast, repetition and seemingly illogical metaphors push at the strict boundaries of language and compositional structure, essentially performing the acts of disruption and reimagination that are the thematic focus of the piece.

The poem's concluding verses reiterate how dissonance and disruption yield more inclusive forms of expression, and how the wounds of existential despair create openings for new voices: "Es allí donde sueñan los torsos bajo la gula de la hierba. / Allí los corales empapan la desesperación de la tinta, // y queda el hueco de la danza sobre las últimas cenizas" (It's there where the torsos dream beneath the hungry grass. / There the coral moistens the desperate ink, / and the empty space of the dance remains above the last of the ashes"; *OC* 478, lines 25-27, 28). The images of interred remains continuing to dream, and remoistened ink ready to know the

wound that is the source of the dance imply that artistry lives among the fallen and marginalized. In that burial ground of wounds or "huecos" duende awaits its hosts to bring forth primal forms of artistic expression no longer detached from their sacred origin.

In "Danza de la muerte" the breakthrough of duende in the form of repressed Black culture is more stridently announced. Utilizing the metonymic element of the "mascarón" (mask) to symbolize ritualistic impulses from out of the void, the poet exclaims: "El mascarón. ¡Mirad el mascarón! / ¡Cómo viene del África a New York! ("The mask. Behold the mask! / As it arrives from Africa to New York!"; *OC* 484, lines 1-2). The injection of African elements transforms the cityscape as evidenced by the disappearance of "pequeños botones de fósforo" ("the small buds of phosphorus"), "el óxido de hierro de los grandes puentes" ("the large, rusting bridges"), and the "definitivo silencio del corcho" ("the definitive silence of cork"; *OC* 484, lines 4, 9-10). Having driven out or dulled the materials of the metropolis, the invading African culture now fills that void, remaking the space through the readmittance of fallen forms: "Era el momento de las cosas secas, // Era La gran reunión de los animales muertos / traspasados por las espadas de luz // ¡Arena, caimán y miedo sobre Nueva York!" ("It was the time of dry things, // It was the great gathering of dead animals / run through by the swords of light / Sand, crocodile and fear over New York!"; *OC* 484, lines 7, 11-12, 20). Newly invested with elements and memories of Africa (ritual, dance, mask, sand, crocodile) the urban stage is now set for a spectacular clash of cultures, out of which new voices and imaginaries emerge.

The creative tension reaches its climax as the mask dances through deserted streets, calling forth, "las voces de los que mueren bajo el guano." ("the voices of those who die under the guano"; *OC* 485, line 22). On Wall Street the poetic subject witnesses the final take down of the city:

> El mascarón bailará entre columna de sangre y de números,
> entre huracanes de oro y gemidos de obreros parados
> que aullarán, noche oscura, por tu tiempo sin luces,
> ¡oh salvaje Norteamérica!, ¡oh impúdica!, ¡oh salvaje,
> tendida en la frontera de la nieve!
> ….
> Que ya la Bolsa será una pirámide de musgo.
> …
> ¡Ay, Wall Street!
> El mascarón. ¡Mirad el mascarón!
> Cómo escupe veneno de bosque
> por la angustia imperfecta de Nueva York!
>
> (The mask will dance among columns of blood and numbers,
> among hurricanes of gold and the moans of the unemployed
> who will howl in the dark night, for your dark time,
> Oh, savage, savage, shameless North America!
> laid low on the frontier of snow!
> …

> The Stock Exchange will become a pyramid of moss.
>
> …
>
> Ay, Wall Street!
>
> The mask. Look at the mask!
> How it spits poison from the forest
> through New York's imperfect anguish! *OC* 486, lines 45-49, 84-86)

In these verses, the outpouring of duende has ripped into the concrete columns of Wall Street, covering its sacred temple (the Stock Exchange) in moss, and exposing its sinful devotion to capital that has relegated the vulnerable Other to lives of poverty and despair. As the lyrical voice asserts in a triumphant reversal of an ingrained stereotype, it is North America that is savage and imperfect and not the Blacks for the latter retains a vital link to the sacred forest, the space where disruptive energies become ritualistic artforms promising redemption and renewal.

Another powerful reflection on Black pain culminating in a clash of cultures and the overthrow of structures that marginalize Black expression is presented in "El rey de Harlem." The irruption of primitive forces appears in the opening image of the Black king sacrificing animals and participating in the rhythmic music of jungle life: "Con una cuchara de palo / le arrancaba los ojos a los cocodrilos / y golpeaba el trasero de los monos" ("With a wooden spoon / he dug out the crocodiles' eyes, / and swatted the monkeys' asses" (*OC* 478, lines 1-3). By recollecting a sacred Dionysian space of discordant, pulsating rhythms, Lorca identifies his king

as both outcast and artist. Residing in the dark spaces, "cubierto de setas /...donde lloraban los negros" (covered in mushrooms / where the blacks wept"; *OC* 478, lines 8-9), the king of Harlem longs for the resurrection of the ancient world from which he has been exiled: "Es preciso cruzar los puentes / y llegar al rubor negro / para que el perfume de pulmón / nos golpee las sienes con su vestido de caliente piña. // para que el rey de Harlem cante con su muchedumbre" (It's necessary to cross the bridges / and reach the murmuring blacks / so the perfume of their lungs / beats our temples with a covering of warm pineapple // so that the king of Harlem sings with his multitude"; *OC* 479, lines 17-21, 26). Crossing the bridge into the space of Otherness, the king escapes the urban darkness and rejoins the chorus of resistant voices emanating from the past.

Still, the recovery of Black authenticity described here does not come easy. It is thwarted by limitations imposed by hegemonic structures and hierarchies designed to stifle or suppress it. Lorca notes this through various images of violent struggle throughout the text, each signaling the buildup of Black rage expressed as "sangre estremecida" ("shuddering blood"), "violencia granate" ("garnate violence"), "sangre que no tiene puertas" ("blood that has no doors"; *OC* 479, lines 33-34, 53). He also highlights the Black populace's need to "dar con los puños cerrados" ("strike with cold fists"; *OC* 479, line 23) all that seeks to restrict and contain "la infinita belleza" ("the infinite beauty"; OC 479, line 28) of their sacred artforms. Notably, among the oppressive forces contributing to this rage and marginalization are rigid class divisions that have imprisoned a great king "con un traje de conserje" ("in the uniform of a doorman"; *OC* 479, line

35), the purveyors of cold capitalism that carry "niños y monedas en el vientre" ("children and coins in their wombs"; *OC* 479, line 38), and the urban landscape enclosed by "cielos yertos, en declive" ("rigid, descending skies"; OC 480, line 58). As in the previous poems this picture of Black despair and alienation concludes with a withering critique of modernity that has turned away from its sacred origins:

> ¡Ay, Harlem, disfrazada!
> Ay, Harlem, ¡amenazada por un gentío de trajes sin cabeza!
> Me llega tu rumor.
> Me llega tu rumor atravesando troncos y ascensores,
> a través de láminas grises,
> donde flotan tus automóviles cubiertos de dientes,
> a través de los caballos muertos y los crímenes diminutos,
> a través de tu gran rey desesperado
> cuyas barbas llegan al mar.
>
> (Ay, Harlem in disguise!
> Ay, Harlem, threatened by a mob of headless suits!
> I hear your murmur,
> I hear it moving through tree trunks and elevator shafts,
> through gray sheets
> where your cars float covered with teeth,
> through dead horses and petty crimes,
> through your grand, despairing king

whose beard reaches the sea.; *OC* 482, lines 111-19)

Even within this final outpouring of rage and disillusionment the murmur of the past remains. The Black king, while entombed in an inauthentic mask and surrounded by the rot of trees, automobiles and dead animals, still seeks redemption. The closing image of his beard flowing out across the sea suggests this as it signals an irrepressible pathway back to the sacred, back to ritualistic artforms in which plurality and dissonance yield new artistic arrangements where outcast voices are heard and new futures imagined.

Renewal

The wounds of separation that reveal and recover artforms and experiences rooted in ritual, resistance and renewal are also featured in Lydia Cabrera's *Cuentos negros de Cuba.* Just as Lorca's Black poems summon ancient energies lying dormant in Harlem, Cabrera's tales recover African histories/stories that, while denigrated and partially hidden, continue to echo in the life blood, religious and cultural practices of Cuba. This dynamic, where Africa is visible in Cuban music, dance and religious practices while it is simultaneously erased within Cuban national identity, situates Blackness and Black expression at an existential and cultural crossroads. That is, as both a vital co-participant and a cultural outlier, Blackness occupies an in-between or liminal realm; it straddles two worlds: one of presence and one of absence, one of joy and one of pain, one of belonging and one of separation. (Hewitt, 20-21). Given this, the African element in Cuba essentially presents itself as a living testament to duende, an operational,

Dionysian chaos or a Bataillean formlessness that challenges and remakes the dominant structures that attempt to absorb or constrain it. Variations on these ideas appear in two particular stories from *Cuentos negros*, "Walo-Wila" and "El sapo guardiero" (The Guard Toad).

In "Walo-Wila" Cabrera retells the African tale of two sisters, Ayere Kénde and Walo-Wila, the former visible and the latter hidden due to her stated ugliness and deformity. Ayere Kénde wants her sister to marry, so she sits on her balcony and awaits potential suitors, luring them with the promise of her sister's beauty. In succession, half-man / half-animal suitors pass by Ayere Kénde's house. All are thirsty and drink from her golden goblet before agreeing to marry Walo-Wila, and each time, Walo-Wila refuses, singing variations on the refrain: "¡Ay, que yo soy fea, / Que yo soy tuerta / Que yo soy gambada / Que tengo sarna!" ("Alas! How ugly I am! / I've only one eye! / How twisted my legs are! / And how mangy I am!; 54). Finally, Venado (deer) approaches and this time, intrigued, Walo-Wila sends him to the bottom of the sea to fill her empty gourd. Venado does this and sings Walo-Wila's name at the shoreline, which spurs the moon to open a slit in the sea to let him enter. When Venado returns to the balcony offering the gourd filled with the blue waters and sapphires of the god Olokun, Ayere Kénde sends him to her sister's bedroom where a beautiful Walo-Wila appears before him. The story closes with the line, "Cuando se besan la luna y el mar…" ("When the Moon and the sea kiss..."; 56), implying through the ellipses that this is not a closing, but rather the start of a sensual new beginning.

The porousness of boundaries is a key feature here given the many crossable lines and tenuous separations that appear throughout the text: the balcony railing, the curtain, the half-man/half-animal figures, the shoreline, the sea, and the god Olukun, who in the Afro-Cuban pantheon doubles with the Christian Virgin of the Regla as the keeper of great waters. All of these textual elements and references stress the idea that self-separating limits can and will be breached as desire or duende breaks free and comes into play. The catalyst setting this in motion is Ayere Kénde's desire to find a husband for her sister, which in turn piques the desiring interests of potential mates, one of whom, Venado, successfully triggers the release of ancient, sensual impulses in both the natural and supernatural realms, as well as in Walo-Wila. The result is a narrative vision of plurality and instability where contrasting elements, spaces and characters unite in ecstatic communion.

An artful display of this dynamic takes shape at the outset through the presentation of the curious symbiotic relationship between Ayere Kénde and Walo-Wila. As described, Ayere Kénde serves as both a go-between and gate-keeper of her sister's bedroom, which identifies her as an intimate co-participant in the buildup and release of the sensual tension to come. The ambiguity of the sibling relationship is highlighted further in the various call and response exchanges (African chants) within the text. One such example reads:

> "Walo-Wila, Walo Kénde,
>
> Ayere Kénde,
>
> ¡Aquí hay una visita, Kénde Ayere!

Preguntó Walo-Wila:
Walo-Wila, Walo Kénde
Ayere Kénde
¿Quién es la visita Kénde Ayere?

(Walo-Wila, Walo Kénde,
Ayere Kénde,
You've got a visitor, Kénde Ayere!"
Walo-Wila asked:
Walo-Wila, Walo Kénde,
Ayere Kénde,
Who's the visitor, Kénde Ayere?" (52)

In this exchange, and others like it, the naming process that fixes identity is disabled as each sister retains a portion of the other's name, affecting a visual image of the two acting and speaking as one blended being. A similar blending effect is produced positionally as Walo-Wila's placement behind the bedroom curtain mirrors Ayere Kénde's position behind the balcony railing, creating another double image. Given this, the women occupy an in-between space as they consistently belong to and participate in areas of Otherness outside them. This is verbalized by the crisscross of voices and desires as Ayere Kénde relays the messages of the suitors coming up from below, and Walo-Wila responds to them through her sister from behind the curtain. Thus, the sisters' latent presence in multiple spaces at one time is foregrounded,

thereby visualizing what the call and response dialogues perform orally. Both the dialogue and positioning showcase simultaneity, blended terms and agencies, all of which erodes standards of self-differentiation, represented here as a painful lack or unfulfilled desire that pushes subjects to seek communion with another.

The collapse of self-restricting boundaries continues as the long-awaited erotic encounter between Walo-Wila and Venado unfolds. Anticipated early on through references and images connoting sensuality, (thirst, the filling and emptying of gourds), it is also telling that the desired sexual act is not restricted to human participants. In fact, the entire cosmos joins in as the shoreline wills the moon's phallic rays to slice an opening in the sea so that Venado may penetrate it and bring forth Olokun's hidden liquid treasure. When read together with the description of Walo-Wila and Venado's union, "when the moon and the sea kiss," this parallel imagery confirms the march toward formlessness that began with the blended identities and the polyvocal, multidirectional verbal entanglements among the characters. The picture of formlessness is also conveyed by the resurfacing of a hidden ancient realm into the present frame. We see this as what is hidden is revealed: Walo-Wila shows herself to her lover, the underworld of Olokun rises up, induced by the magical call and the ritualistic return of Venado to the sea. The same can be said of the text itself. By retelling an ancient African tale complete with African linguistic terms breaking into the Spanish narration, Cabrera quite literally announces the return of voices and energies from the past. In this way, the text itself is a hybrid

creation; it consists of multiple linguistic and cultural layers as it relays the stories of Africans as they were passed from generation to generation and then transcribed and recounted by a white female author (Rodríguez-Mangual 75). This kind of structure-busting defiance mirrors the disruptive desiring impulses that push the fictional characters and spaces to exceed their limits and join together in selfless, performative acts of ritual communion and rebirth.

A similar picture of continuity ushered in through love and renewal emerges in "El sapo guardiero." In this tale, reminiscent of *Hansel and Gretel*, an old toad awakens to the cries of twins who are lost in the forest: "andaban solos por el mundo...los mellizos..." ("They were walking alone in the world...the twins; 272). After a *palera* or Lucumí witch attempts to conjure a spell of dirt and bones to capture the twins, the toad decides to save the children by swallowing and carrying them to safety at the forest's edge: "se tragó a los mellizos...Atravesó el bosque, huyendo como un ladrón" ("he swallowed the twins...He crossed the forest fleeing like a thief"; 274). Once the twins are safely delivered, "cantando y riendo por el camino blanco" ("singing and laughing along the white road"; 278), the toad dies, comforted by the depth of his love and sacrifice: "el sapo, traspasado de suavidad, soñaba en su charca de fango con el agua más pura...ya él estaba dormido, muerto dulcemente en aquella agua clara, infinita. Quieta de eternidad" (the toad, pierced with softness, dreamed in his mud pond of the purest water..he was already asleep, sweetly dead, in that clear, infinite, water"; 278).

The story again relies on a weave of blended figures and spaces expressed in a narrative style that repeats the hybridity. An initial indication of this plurality appears in the characters of the twins and the toad, for both represent liminal subjects known for their ambiguity and symbolic association with the idea of ordered chaos. Twins, for example, are two halves born of the same whole, separate yet identical, while a toad symbolizes change and metamorphosis, disorder turning to order. As such, the characters bear the mark of duality and represent an open challenge to fixed order and stable identity. Indeed, Cabrera describes the twins as "hijos de nadie" ("children of nobody"; 272), situates the living toad in "agua muerta" ("dead water"; 273), and then finishes with duality itself, the twins, literally taking refuge inside him. This presentation of plurality standing in opposition to structured, well delineated order is also captured when the toad "con los sueños de los niños fluyendo por sus venas" ("with the dreams of the children flowing through his veins"; 273) defies the witch's command that he turn the twins over: "Dame lo que es mio" volvió a decir la bruja. El sapo abrió apenas la boca y manó un hilo verde, viscoso." ("Give me what is mine" the witch said again. The toad barely opened his mouth and let out a sticky green spit"; 276). The toad's resistance is marked by the visual image of Otherness flowing within him and also by his refusal to bend to the order and control of the witch.

The actions of the toad, in accordance with its shape-shifting nature, send him on yet another transformational journey, this time through the equally ambiguous space of the forest.

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There too, divergent energies coalesce resulting in a resplendent picture of hybridity. As described, the forest, like the toad, shakes off its ominous identity to become another defiant protector of the cherished twins. Cabrera first describes the forest as, "una negrura interminable" ("an unending darkness"; 272), but the further into that space the toad penetrates the more the forest mirrors his urgency and concern: "El bosque...le espiaba angustiosamente. De las ramas muertas colgaban orejas que oían el latir de su corazón: millones de ojos invisibles...agujereaban la oscuridad compacta." ("El bosque...spied on him in anguish. From the dead branches, ears hung listening to the beat of his heart: millions of invisible eyes...punctured the compact darkness"; 274). Personified and filled with a matching amphibian desire, the forest aids in the twin's salvation by responding to the toad's tender plea and opening a pathway toward the light: "el sapo dijo la palabra incorruptible...se hizo luz de amanecer...y los mellizos vieron retroceder el bosque" ("the toad said the incorruptible word...and it became dawn...and the twins saw the forest recede"; 278). Thus, the forest, operating in concert with the toad's desire, loses its darkness and becomes a place of light - a sacred space of new beginnings.[12] In this way, it is clearly emblematic of the African "monte", the site where the syncretic Black spirit world resides, defiantly protecting the memories and rituals of the ancestors who, like the twins, find themselves equally lost, ambiguous and unheard.

Here again, the syncretization of characters and spaces reflects back on the text itself for it too displays dynamic exchanges and entanglements of energies that both resist and rupture the

totalizing whole, permitting a desired metamorphosis to unfold. We see this in Cabrera's use of African words and incantations as markers of difference and defiance within the text. Samples include instances where African words press up against Spanish ones in the same sentence: "¡Tun, tun! Tumbiyaaya! / ¿Dónde me lleva? ¡Tumbiyaya! ("Tun, tun! Tumbiyaaya! / Where are you taking me? Tumbiyaya!"; 275), or "¡Allá Kiriki, allai bosaikombo, allá, kiriki!" (There, Kiriki, allai bosaikombo, there, kirki!"; 276). Like the twins, the toad or the sacred "monte," these subaltern words and polyvocal phrases serve as linguistic reminders of the need to rescue border voices and histories denied or cast out by restrictive textual norms and cultural frameworks. Likewise, Cabrera's transcribed record of these texts houses, protects and carries forth the remote, ancestral voices from out of the darkness and into the light.

The aesthetic principles, philosophical and cultural perspectives delineated by Lorca and Cabrera, Nietzsche and Bataille clearly foreground a sacred, redemptive and revolutionary role for artistic expression. When invested with "duende" - ancient, transgressive energy from the margins - artistry returns to its remote, Dionysian origins, revealing painful wounds, sensual pleasures and silenced voices that open a pathway toward plurality and belonging. In Lorca's Black poems and Cabrera's African tales "duende" reveals itself primarily through the irruption and recovery of disruptive desiring impulses and marginalized histories that rigid social systems and artistic spaces have repressed or cast out. Indeed, Lorca and Cabrera find "duende" residing in Blackness, in the bodies and memories of a people whose longing for a lost African homeland

or spirit space is preserved and passed down through ritualistic forms of expression rooted in crisis, ambiguity and renewal. We have seen this in the lyrical subjects and characters that populate their texts as well as in the oneiric spaces and linguistic techniques they employ for all display a deep resistance to prescribed form and order. The Black subjects of Lorca's Harlem rebel against the hostile cityscapes and closed systems of capital around them by calling back ancient memories and the sacred symbols and ritualistic practices of Africa; Cabrera's mythical African characters reveal again and again their blended nature, which is matched by the hybrid in-between spaces inhabited by their androgynous, syncretic gods; For both authors, words, language and dialogic agencies become entangled with their opposites through unsettling metaphorical combinations and the irruption of unexpected rhythmic and linguistic combinations. On multiple levels the texts discussed perform what they seek: an erasure of borders made possible through a duende-inspired, writing of resistance; one that expands and revitalizes the space and practice of artistry so that alternative imaginaries and the borderless territories of love and acceptance may thrive there.

Notes

1. On Lorca's reception in Cuba Juan Marinello writes, "Porque es lo cierto que nuestros mejores hombres del año 30 ofrecieron al muchacho presuroso y alegre un homenaje de escritor clásico" ("Certainly, our best men of 1930 offered the hurried and happy young man a homage fit for a classical writer"; 8). For more on Lorca's time in Cuba including his social outings, meetings and lectures, see Birkenmaier 99-100 and Eisenburg's "Chronology of Lorca's Visit to New York and Cuba," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, (1977): 24, 233-50.

2. The factors contributing to Lorca's emotional distress during his time in New York include a prior painful breakup with the sculptor Emilio Aladrén, a general feeling of homesickness, and an antagonism toward the impersonal and mechanized city. Christopher Maurer quotes Lorca's negative remarks and attitudes toward the city in his introduction to *Poet in New York: A Bilingual Edition*, xix. See also Richter's *Garcia Lorca at the Edge of Surrealism* p. 70 and Andrew Anderson's article, "Lorca at the Crossroads: 'Imaginación, inspiración, evasión' and the 'novísimas estéticas.'" *Anales de la Literatura Española Contemporánea* (1991): 16 149-73.

3. Ñáñigo, also known in Cuba as Abakúa, is a secret fraternal society that originated in southern regions of Nigeria and Cameroon. Members perform highly theatrical rituals and ceremonies consisting of drumming, dancing and chanting in the secret Abakúa language.

4. All translations of quoted materials throughout this study are mine.

5. For details on the efforts to expand the scope of Cuban national identity through the rediscovery of Africa, including the anthropological contributions of Fernando Ortiz, and the

artistic recuperation of Afro-Cuban folklore, rituals, music, and dance, see Birkenmair 111-112, Rodríguez-Mangual 3-5; 21, and Hewitt 36-45. Lorca's arrival in Cuba coincides with these efforts, and given his long-held interests in Spain's outcast cultures and traditions, "his work provided new models and new ways of expressing the preoccupations of Cuban writers, especially on the question of culture, nation and aesthetics" (Hewitt, 44).

6. Hewitt also observes that, "Like other Cuban writers of this period, Cabrera's *Cuentos negros de Cuba* dialogues with García Lorca's system of symbols, his sense of violence, beauty, mystery, and the plasticity of his musical and metaphoric images, with which he expressed the unique magic and cultural vitality of his native Andalucía…Cabrera showed him an Afro-Cuban world whose magic and vitality equaled, in a Caribbean context, the Andalusian "soul" of his texts" (134).

7. See K. Meira Goldberg's fascinating study, *Sonidos negros: On the Blackness of Flamenco* for more on the racialized origins of flamenco, its trajectory from Africa through Spain, to the Caribbean and back, as well as the place of the outcast Black bodies and desires that inform it.

8. Lorca describes this as "el hecho poético" (the poetic fact) in his essay "Imaginación, Inspiración, Evasión (Imagination, Inspiration, Evasion) noting that in duende-driven poetry, "ya las cosas son porque sí, sin efecto ni causa explicable. Ya no hay términos, ni límites, admirable libertad" ("things are just the way they are, without affect, nor explainable cause. There are no terms or limits, admirable freedom"; *OC*, 88). Nandorfy describes this in terms of an apocalyptic

performance wherein duende leads the artist to an abyss where unbound by fixed limits and self-separating structures he "performs the impossible: summons death in the name of everlasting life and attempts to give voice to the silence….to speak using the Other's voice" (16-18).

9. The reader can find additional information regarding the avant-garde movements to which Lorca and Cabrera were exposed and with which they experimented in most critical appraisals of their work. Given the purpose of this study Richter 4-10 and Hewitt 44, 126-127 will suffice to acquaint the reader with the revolutionary artistic spirit in the air at the time the authors composed the works examined here.

10. Richter connects the influence of cante jondo and jazz music to Lorca's Black poems (115). See also Stallings who writes, "jazz, like sexuality, possesses an *anti-Platonic* quality: it wounds previously stable identities, causing a fall toward formlessness" (207).

11. For a fascinating study on Lorca's exposure to scientific ideas and practices in the early twentieth century and their effect on his work from this period see Cecelia Cavanaugh's *New Lenses for Lorca*. Bucknell UP, 2011.

12. Lorca conceives the forest in much the same way in his lecture, "La imagen poética de Don Luis de Góngora." Identifying "el bosque" with the imaginative world into which an artist much venture in order to capture and bring to the light a sacred form of unmediated artistry Lorca writes, "El poeta que va a hacer un poema tiene la sensación vaga de que va a una cacería nocturna…un miedo inexplicable rumorea en el corazón…Delicados aires enfrían el cristal de

sus ojos. La luna redonda como una cuerna de blando metal, suena en el silencio de las ramas últimas…El poeta se mantendrá firme contra los espejismos y acechará cautelosamente las carnes palpitantes y reales que armonnicen con el plano del poema que lleva entrevisa" ("The poet creating a poem has the vague sensation that he is going on a nocturnal hunt…an inexplicable fear murmurs in his heart…Delicate breezes cool the glass of his eyes. The round moon like the bland metal of a horn, makes a sound in the silence of the last branches…The poet will stand firm against the mirages and he will cautiously watch the palpitating flesh que harmonizes with the glimpsed poem"; OC 1044). The connections between Lorca's vision of "bosque" and the Afro-Cuban concept of "monte" are worthy of future study.

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