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From the Editors

SPECIAL ISSUE: LANGUAGE VALUE IN MINORITY LITERATURES

In the wake of Nigerian independence and in contrast to African writers who took an essentialist view that equates language with cultural identity (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example), Chinua Achebe declared that "[a] language spoken by Africans on African soil, a language in which Africans write, justifies itself" (1975: 67). According to his vision, the colonizers' languages, English and French, even if they were not African languages, because of their grasp on African history, were part and parcel of African experience. Yet, for Achebe, this did not mean that, through the use of these historically imposed linguistic systems, African authors were simply mimicking the colonizers' Weltgeist, but rather they were using them to empower themselves and fashion them to represent their experience. In this sense, their writings constitute what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* as a "minor literature", that is, a literature which is produced by a minority in a major language in order "to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (1986: 17). "Minor literature" includes three characteristics: "in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization"; "everything in it is political"; and "in it everything takes on a collective value" (1986: 16). The first characteristic enlightens the language question surrounding the discussions of some of the writers studied in this issue of *LANGUAGE VALUE*. Historically dispossessed of their original languages, they turn to English and discover minor usages that open and unsettle the language by creating new meanings. In the same way as Kafka used German, these writers' deterritorialization of English becomes a strategy to deal with the dilemma of deploying English, the master's tongue.

These writers have become "minor", then, not out a personal choice, but out of historical political impositions that deprived them of their native tongues. This is shown in contemporary scholarship in the history of literary writing in the United States.

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Unlike other countries with a clear national linguistic policy secured by their constitutions, recently revised histories of the beginnings of the United States highlight the fact that the language of the United States was never English only. *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature: A Reader of Original Texts with English Translations* (2000), edited by Marc Shell and Werner Sollors, and *Multilingual America: Transnationalism, Ethnicity, and the Languages of American Literature* (1998), edited by Werner Sollors, argue for the acceptance of an early multilingual and multicultural country. Viewing English-written literature as the sole dominion for literary American expression is to displace and marginalize a vast array of legitimate American multilingual articulations.

In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur explains that "[w]e tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative" (Ricoeur 1984: 175). The United States is, according to political theorist Michael Walzer in his *What it Means to Be an American*, "a political nation of cultural nationalities", where "citizenship is separated from every sort of particularism: the state is nationally, ethnically, racially, and religiously neutral" (1992: 9). This issue of *LANGUAGE VALUE* aims at studying how writers belonging to some of these American cultural nationalities have questioned this ideal of neutrality and have used literature to express their experience as part of a history of the defeated and the lost. To such an end, they have used the English language to dismantle the shortcomings of their abused representations and have secured new, although sometimes problematic and controversial, visible textualities.

For Antonio Gramsci, "[e]very time the question of the language surfaces, in one way or another, it means that a series of other problems are coming to the fore: the formation and enlargement of the governing class, the need to establish more intimate and secure relationships between the governing groups and the national-popular mass, in other words to reorganize cultural hegemony" (1991: 183–84). His words clarify the fact that speaking about language is always a political question, and that national languages are

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bearers of power relations which affect minority communities in processes of adopting, passively or actively, the dominant culture. In "American Citizenship and Minority Rights", Pierre-Luc Dostie Proulx explains the complex interplay of diversity and homogeneity that characterizes American life, and how the main reason for its "political stability, in spite of the strong polyethnic constitution of the country", is due to diverse processes of voluntary integration (1984: 44). In *Multicultural Citizenship*, Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka argues that before the period of the Civil Rights Movement, immigrants were expected to assimilate following what is known as the "Anglo-conformity" model of immigration. Assimilation was considered "essential for political stability, and was further rationalized through ethnocentric denigration of other cultures" (1995: 14). Kymlicka makes a distinction between national and ethnic communities, and claims that, when minorities integrate into a larger community, they shape their political status, following two broad patterns of cultural diversity – national minorities and ethnic minorities. For Kymlicka, a nation is "a historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture. A 'nation' in this sociological sense is closely related to the idea of a 'people' or a 'culture'" (1995: 11). These national minorities may have undergone a process of forced conquest or voluntary assimilation. Native Americans and Chicanos (Hispanics in the Southwest who were annexed after the Mexican War of 1846-1848 and who had previously formed part of the northern provinces of Mexico) would come under the first categorization. Ethnic minorities, on the other hand, would include immigrants, whose cultural heritage (even with rights to be respected) must not thwart their expected integration into the larger community. For Kymlicka, however, the main obstacle hindering the creation of "a fluid conception of American multiculturalism remains the disadvantaged and stigmatized status of African Americans" (1998: 73). This is so because "being 'black' is an ascribed identity that is difficult for most African Americans to escape or renounce", and the main challenge is to reduce this stigmatized element, so that being black can come to resemble other ethnic identities in America.

In *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*, Louis Owens declares that human beings have "the power to heal our tongues and learn to speak in any language

on earth or to imagine a new one". Furthermore, we have "the ability to appropriate and liberate the other's discourse. Rather than merely reflecting back to him the master's own voice, we can, in an oft-quoted phrase, learn to make it bear the burden of our own experience" (1998: xiii). In the contributions to this issue, their authors study how the colonizer's language in the hands or, better, in the tongues of Native American, African American, Japanese Canadian, Chicano, Panlatino and Catalan writers articulate worlds that, paraphrasing Owens's terminology, "find themselves whole" (1998: xiii). Kalenda Eaton and Agustín Reyes Torres focus on how African American writers have redefined their histories of slavery and racism through the neo-slave genre and children's literature. Nephtalí de León and María Henríquez-Betancor address the situation of Chicanos and Latinos as national and immigrant groups from different perspectives that shatter the image of a monolithic approach by peoples of Hispanic descent in the United States when confronted by the ongoing attacks to disempower them and eliminate their sense of a distinct national identity. Anna Brígido-Corachán analyses how American Indian writers make a claim for the distinctiveness of their cultural and historical differences through performative uses of language that go back to native traditions of storytelling. Eva Pich Ponce studies Canadian nationalism as it appears linked to the questionings of ethnic minority groups. Unlike the American Anglo-conformity model of assimilation, which advocates a kind of immigrant integration that entails the loss of the different ethnical distinctive cultural elements, Canadian society has created the "multicultural mosaic" metaphor. This multiculturalist policy, adopted in 1971, conveys the image of a country in which different races, cultures and religions live together on an equal footing. It treats "immigrant ethnocultural affiliation as voluntary and encourages the members of the different immigrant groups to interact, to share their cultural heritage, and to participate in common educational, economic, political, and legal institutions" (Kymlicka 1998: 74). However, Pich Ponce focuses on Hiromi Goto, a Japanese Canadian writer, to show how authors writing from within that cultural minority experience denounce this contradiction. Last but not least, Dídac Llorens Cubedo delves into the literary correspondence between Salvador Espriu and African American Cyrus Cassells and how Cassells, from his own liminal condition of being

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black and gay, has felt inspired by the plight the Catalan poets living in linguistic and political borderlands of Fascist Spain.

These scholars show, then, how authors belonging to the American minorities analysed here confront American and Canadian processes of assimilation through an energetic reclamation of the English language to shake the embedded principles of cultural and political hegemony. English is undoubtedly a tool that can be used to oppress and dominate, but it is also their most powerful instrument for self-definition and communal resistance.

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In "Diasporic Dialogues: The Role of Gender, Language, and Revision in Neo-slave Narrative", **Kalenda Eaton** studies how, throughout the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, two black authors, Ishmael Reed and Maryse Condé, have re-rewritten early African Diasporic experience through the genre of "neo-slave narratives". In *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999), Ashraf H.A. Rushdy defined the genre as composed of "contemporary novels that assume the form, the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative" (1999: 3). These works allowed him to study the social logic of the literary form of the neo-slave narrative: its origins, in the social, intellectual and racial formations of the sixties, its cultural politics as these texts intervene in debates over the significance of race, and its literary politics as these texts make statements on engagements between texts and between mainstream and minority traditions" (1999: 3). Taking into account this previous scholarship, Eaton explains that, unlike the slave narratives composed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976) and Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1992) tell palimpsest narratives deploying new uses of form and style that afford them the ability to re-create, re-member, and re-historicize their texts, in a process that renders their narratives liberated from the static representations of slave experience. Without obviating the seriousness of struggling with the plight of slavery conditions, Reed and Condé confront the reality of chattel slavery in the Americas through narrative experimentation using parody or satire, "a survival technique and a weapon of the weak

against the strong" (Jones 1969: 3) and black humour, to come to terms with the suffocating and annihilating historical circumstances surrounding slaves' lives. At the same time, Eaton promptly readdresses her analysis to the ways the empowering use of satire in the neo-slave narrative might reinforce the gender and racial stereotypes Reed and Condé are attempting to subvert. Yet, as she explains, Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976) and Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* (1992) go beyond a mere depiction of dynamics of masters and slaves, and delve into the intricacies of black slave experience, Africans in the diaspora, capitalism, and gender relationships.

Eaton discusses the controversies generated around Reed's negative deployment of black female characters in his text. The language of satire, though, provides his characters with an agency to decide their fate, which in the case of Mammy Barracuda apparently parodies the traditionally idealized mammy figure, a construct of white sentimentalization that ignored the humanity and womanhood of black women. Yet, for all his good intentions, Reed's use of satire as a playful style does not address the issue of gender imbalance in the text. Whereas his male slave characters seem to subvert the myths about black male experience in slavery through the textual opportunities granted to them in the text to redeem their previously silenced voices, his female slave characters remain a caricature, cornered in the interstices of history.

Unlike Reed's *Flight to Canada*, Condé, according to Eaton, plays with conventions but steers clear of the caricatures of his text. Conde's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* makes full and explicit use of comic irony and satire to refashion the female protagonist's servitude in New England and her role in the cause of the seventeenth-century witchcraft hysteria. This neo-slave narrative transforms the flimsy existence of Tituba as a mere footnote in historical records into a full-fledged character, whose voice was always a matter of speculation. To do so, Condé manipulates Western concepts of speech and projects Tituba's voice through alternate means of communication and parodies of various episodes of historical collective consciousness. Playing with the title of one of Audre Lorde's celebrated essays (1984/2007), Condé uses the master's tools to dismantle the master's house and attempts to recreate the colonized language in a new context. Thus, for Eaton, *I, Tituba*, acknowledges the issue of an authoritative

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presence that attempts to erase the voice of the subject while at the same time, through imitation and parody, Condé revises the silencing tropes of the nineteenth-century slave narrative and disrupts any serious imaginings of the character. For Eaton, both *Flight to Canada* and *I, Tituba* might be considered examples of what Linda Hutcheon (1988) labelled as "historiographic metafiction", and thus problematize history's objectivity and the possibility of knowing the past through historical fiction. As such, both novels are self-reflexive, lay claim to historical characters and events, and manifest a theoretical self-awareness of History and fiction as human constructs that question historical discourse as a discourse of power. Both works then use language with a post-modern reliance upon textual play, parody and historical re-conceptualization.

The question of how literature, through the values encapsulated in language use but also through visual images, gives form to the experience of the cycle of life and how this process needs exploring in accordance with the particular historical circumstances of human beings is studied by **Agustín Reyes Torres** in "Jacqueline Woodson´s Narrative Style in *The Other Side*: An African American Picture Book for Children". Reyes Torres analyses *The Other Side* (2001), a children's picture book written by Jacqueline Woodson and beautifully illustrated by E.B. Lewis's evocative watercolours. The plot of the book brings to mind Robert Frost's famous poem, "Mending Wall". Frost published this metaphorical piece written in blank verse in his *North of Boston*, his second collection of poetry. The poem tells about a man who asks why he and his neighbour must rebuild the stone wall dividing their farms each spring. As if offending nature, the wall stones crumble every year and the wall needs rebuilding. "Good fences make good neighbours", insists his neighbour rejecting any possibility of destroying the border dividing their properties. For Reyes Torres, *The Other Side* is articulated around the central metaphor of the fence that divides blacks from whites, and makes use of children's literature to delve into the experience of what it means for a young black girl to grow up in the United States and to come to terms with a racial reality that stubbornly builds and, if ever broken, mends dividing walls.

Reyes Torres highlights how African American children's literature was from its inception a radical site of representational resistance and "has its roots in African

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Americans' determination to maintain a sense of themselves as fully human in the face of their legal status as property and to maintain some control over their own lives" (Bishop 2007: 4). Thus, Woodson firmly establishes herself within a tradition strengthened during the first half of the twentieth century to counteract the pernicious effects of black representation by white culture, in an attempt to foster a dignified view of blacks maligned by both written and visual exclusionary practices. *The Other Side* caters for the need to have more children's books through which young African American readers can relate to the protagonists. As in other textual practices, children's literature has always been part and parcel of the process of colonization, where the language of racialization implemented by the colonizing power was imposed on the black community through legal and educational measures. In *The Other Side*, both Woodson and Lewis try, through words and pictures, to break black children's isolationism, promote acceptance of themselves and others, and foster commitment to family and community. Woodson's language is enhanced by Lewis's watercolour illustrations, which set a tone of warmth, happiness and love, and symbolize knowledge, dignity, creativity and self-esteem. Furthermore and in the same way as the written plot, Lewis's expertise and proficiency break old stereotypes about the visual representation of black people. From the tandem struggle against linguistic homogenization and essentialism encapsulated in traditional children's literature, Reyes Torres concludes that *The Other Side* portrays the initiation of children's racial reality in the United States and teaches them to be brave and overlook differences in skin colour in favour of friendship, knowledge and solidarity.

Nephtalí de León, one of the most important contemporary Chicano authors, honours this issue with "The Use and Abuse of Language by a Chicano from Aztlán (both words unknown)" in *A Poet Speaks about...* His piece is not an academic article but a manifesto about what it means to be a Chicano in the United States of the third millennium. De León, who calls himself "the Gypsy vagabond poet of his community", grew up as a migrant worker and lives his life in a territory that might undoubtedly be dubbed as physical, spiritual and linguistic borderlands. Self-taught, his approach to his craft is non-academic and, as he himself highlights, it is the result of his multilingual and multicultural dialogue with immigrants and natives. This has also encouraged him

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to freely practise "the visual and literary arts that have a resonance and relation to the community he comes from". He is also the author of one of the first books to come out in the early 70s that theorize about the creative force of the Chicano community and tackle the issue of their bilingual and bicultural identity: *Chicanos: Our Background & Our Pride* (1972, reissued by PUV in 2010), a volume that traces the origins and traditions of Chicanos and pays homage to their struggle for dignity in Anglo-American territory.

As a manifesto, his article celebrates the importance of language as the most relevant tool of humankind, and focuses on a very specific use and abuse of it: how it has identified, trapped, occupied and liberated the Chicano people of the nation of Aztlán. De León explains that Chicanos are those Native Americans often referred to as Latinos, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, Mestizos, Cholos and Raza. In fact, they are the descendants of the people that once lived and continue to live in their homeland, Aztlán. As such, their native language is neither English nor Spanish, but Azteca Náhuatl, a language suppressed to such a degree that very few Chicanos are even aware of it. The political oppression exercised by the United States government on Chicanos through the exercise of a policy of genocide, based on the use and abuse of language, is responsible for what De León calls the life of semi-existence of Chicanos. The abuse of language originated the blurring of the race and triggered an extreme xenophobia about their presence that has historically brought about the dehumanization of Chicanos through a process of their being labelled as "illegals", "undocumented" and "aliens". In America, claims De León, the possessors have ignored the language of the dispossessed, have used language politics to mask unbalanced power relations which cloak, deceive, distract and euphemize "what has been a constant realpolitik of destruction meant to annihilate my people, community and ancestral memory". Political violence exerted on the Chicano community has, according to De León, succeeded in erasing their language. Yet, constant aggressions have failed to obliterate the most important element in their ancestral roots and in the memory of themselves, namely, their knowledge that they descend from a people of mythical proportions.

Similarly to Nephtalí de León**, María Henríquez-Betancor** devotes her article to the Chicano experience, yet with a focus on Gloria Anzaldúa's construction of identity as "the new mestiza" in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), a turning point in the studies of race, class, gender and sex in the 1980s. Henríquez-Betancor analyses how, in the seventh essay of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, entitled "*La conciencia de la mestiza*: Towards a New Consciousness", the author contests and revises inherited gender and cultural roles. Anzaldúa rejects the dual personality that classifies her as a Mexican-American and embraces the "new mestiza's" plural identity in order to break alienating dichotomies of thought. The "new mestiza" is a survivor who has overcome the rupture with cultural patriarchal patterns and the limitations of gender. For Henríquez-Betancor, the consciousness of Anzaldúa's "new mestiza" is "a structural process of change in which the acceptance of cultural and personal problems, the meeting and intermixing of different groups with which Anzaldúa identifies, and the possibility of reconciliation with the white society conflate in a linear and non-linear fashion". She questions the concept of masculinity in the Chicana community to finally return to her homeland, but carrying out a transformation.

Henríquez-Betancor explains how Anzaldúa traces the journey towards the mestiza consciousness and how Anzaldúa represents three voices – the "I", the "we" and the "she" – as her strategies to explore what she deems as her collective identity as a Chicana and as a "new mestiza". This positioning of herself in three different voices bespeaks the complexity of her identity. When she uses the "I", she links herself with her personal identity, defines her feminism and creates a new culture as a "new mestiza. Her "I" is a new hybrid identity that transcends her origins to become a critical being. When she uses the third person singular, "she" ("the new mestiza"), she adopts a chosen subject with the purpose of triggering change, and it becomes a potential "we" since it invites the collectivity of Chicana women, but also homosexual men of all races and nationalities together with lesbians, to join in the regenerative process of establishing a new and powerful identity. For Henríquez-Betancor, Anzaldúa creates what she calls "a collective and cultural self-definition as she mixes the personal with meaningful shared cultural elements" in a process that is non-linear and progressive, fluid and concrete. This multiplicity of identities resists exclusionary linguistic practices and aims at a real

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representation of transnational historical memories, forging solidarity across experiential borders.

Anna M. Brígido-Corachán's "*Wordarrows*: The Performative Power of Language in N. Scott Momaday's Non-Fiction Work" analyses how contemporary Native American literary works, mostly written in English, reflect on the role of tribal native languages as part of their legacy, taking into account the fact that out of the two hundred indigenous languages spoken in United States now, only twenty are taught at home as a first language. Brígido-Corachán argues how the unstoppable erosion of tribal languages by the overwhelming presence and historical educational imposition of English on Native Americans explains why most contemporary authors use English and exhibit very little command of the languages once spoken by their ancestors. That being the case, Native American writers, if interested in contributing to reverse the colonial imbalance, must necessarily subvert the language of historical subjugation and dominion, and deploy new language strategies to rewrite their personal and communal histories.

Her essay then focuses on Momaday's non-fiction piece *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969/2001) and on his seminal essay "The Man Made of Words" (1997), as examples of orality and performative conceptions of language in the Kiowa storytelling tradition. In "The Man Made of Words", Momaday declares: "We cannot exhaust the power of words; that power is intrinsic". This is further explained in his essay "The Native Voice in American Literature", where he defines what language stands for in the Indian tribal worlds: "Words are intrinsically powerful. They are magical. By means of words one can bring about physical change in the universe". Momaday holds a relevant position within what, in 1983, Kenneth Lincoln baptized as the *Native American Renaissance*. In fact, the crucial event that marked its origin was the awarding of the 1968 Pulitzer Prize to Momaday, a Kiowa writer, for his novel *House Made of Dawn*. After his national and international recognition, other Native American writers followed. Yet, the division of Native American traditions into two stages has been opposed by some critics, since the period inaugurated by Momaday obscures not only the written work of previous nineteenth-century authors, but also the extraordinary legacy of oral works created in the different tribal languages spread around the North American continent.

For Brígido-Corachán, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* – thematically divided into three blocks having to do with the Momaday's personal spatial dis-locations – traces the movement of his affiliation strategies into tribal culture from his academic studies in California. This journey back into the heart of his indigenous community is shaped by juxtaposing not only words (the mythical, the historical/anthropological, the family version of stories and reminiscences) but also his father's drawings, and creates a polyphonic version of Kiowa historiography that breaks the boundaries between fact and fiction, history and myth. Thus, for Brígido-Corachán, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* becomes a resisting text that questions the authority of the written word and echoes the structural and aesthetic traits that conform traditional native storytelling, boldly recreating its performative aspects as it reproduces an audience, a place, a particular oral rhythm and the voices from the past. As a Native American storyteller, Momaday develops what Brígido-Corachán calls "a sort of cartographic language" in this work. He facilitates a map for readers with the paratextual pieces wrapping up the text, thus allowing them to infer ultimate meaning out of the active weaving of the passages in their minds. Taking into account Gerald Vizenor's new coinages and the way they construct a new vision of the world that moves away from the hackneyed language of victimry, Brígido-Corachán concludes that Momaday's language can also be articulated around the notion of Vizenorian *wordarrowary* and, as such, a powerful vehicle that opens up a new historical space for his personal and communal imagination. Engaging in an act that Arnold Krupat calls "anti-imperial translation", Momaday's performative use of storytelling both in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and "The Man Made of Words" reconstitutes the English language as a linguistic code capable of tracing new and transfiguring *Kiowascapes*.

In "Memory and Language in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*", **Eva Pich Ponce** focuses on how Japanese Canadian author Hiromi Goto deploys linguistic codes to construct social and cultural identities that break stereotypical images of the Japanese in the country. The novel describes the intercultural experience of these Asian immigrants through the lives of three generations of women belonging to the same family. The polyphonic nature of the narrative, the choral rendering of living in new cultural and social borderlands, enhances Goto's intention to embrace a diversity of discourses on

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immigration, ethnicity, and identity. These discourses are widely represented by the inclusion of personal recollections, Japanese legends and journal articles. Taking into account the metafictional categorization of *Chorus of Mushrooms*, Pich Ponce analyses Goto's subversion of realism and her strategies to destabilize narrative unity, reliable point of view and coherent character presentation, in an attempt to problematize Canadian fixed notions of multiculturalism. For Goto, Pich Ponce argues, the protagonists' construction of an identity together with their willingness to keep their native cultural and national legacies are mainly rendered in terms of linguistic conflicts. In the face of the colonizing changes suffered by these characters, Goto tackles the thorny question of assimilation in the Canadian scenario. Naoe, the grandmother, tries desperately and against all odds to remain faithful to her roots, refuses to forget her past and Japanese culture, and defiantly rejects using the English language. Her language is pierced by memories, pain and desire that, far from romanticizing the past, question her native culture and history. Keiko, her daughter, decides to go Canadian for the sake of Muriel, her own daughter, who has embraced English as her language. Her will to assimilate into Canadian culture reveals how the country's rhetoric of multicultural acceptance is in fact pervaded by racism and homogenizing tendencies that betray an exclusionary politics.

Language, then, becomes a site of struggle for Goto as she describes the reapproachment of the three women through their deployment of new linguistic practices. The narrative includes many words in Japanese without translation into English, a conscious strategy to invert the relationship between the margin/immigrant Japanese and the centre/national Canadian, and highlight the fact that differences exist. This omission forces readers to reflect upon the fact of translation and how new kinds of communication can be established through body language and imagination. The protagonists change names, play with Japanese and English throughout the text, composing a hybrid narrative that challenges accepted notions of identity. Refashioning the oral tradition of telling stories, these characters reinvent themselves as hybrid ethnic subjects and show that, as one of them declares, the nature of words changes with the telling. Thus, their ultimate truths offer multiple perspectives that disrupt readers' stereotypical expectations about the Japanese immigrant minority in Canada.

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In “The Voice of the Cypress. Cyrus Cassells and the Poetry of Salvador Espriu”, **Dídac Llorens Cubedo** tackles transnational and translinguistic influences between one of the most revered twentieth-century Catalan poets, Salvador Espriu (1913-1985), and African American poet Cyrus Cassells. As the president of the International Association for the Defence of Menaced Languages and Cultures, during the early 1970s, Espriu campaigned for the survival of minority languages spoken all over the world. As a writer, he produced a body of literature that attests to his unflagging vindication of Catalan, a language persecuted during Franco’s regime. Cassells’s own sense of marginalization, as a man who is both black and gay, has drawn him to read and translate Catalan poetry into English. Similarly to Espriu, he is a poet in debt with previous poetical traditions and poets. Llorens Cubedo focuses on Cassells’s poem “To the Cypresses Again and Again” (1986), a piece published a year after Espriu’s death, which was meant to pay homage to the Catalan bard. His analysis on aspects such as the point of view, the imagery and the themes, as well as his exploration of the reasons that engaged Cassells’s passion for Espriu, shows how two apparently divergent poetical traditions converge through space and time in Cassells’s poetry. Llorens Cubedo brings to the fore the importance of how artists’ creativity is reinforced across historical, personal and communal experiences and, most relevant to the point analysed in this issue, how it is forged across and against different languages.

Finally, before concluding this introduction, it is worth remembering that, with regard to language rights in American multicultural society, in 1998 the Linguistic Society of America issued a “Statement of Language Rights”. This document recognizes that the eradication of most of the indigenous languages of the United States was a “deliberate government policy” and that their decline “has been closely linked to the loss of much of the culture of their speakers”. And secondly that the country is “home to numerous immigrant languages other than English”, the presence of which offers “both challenges and opportunities”. Both indigenous and immigrant non-English languages conform a multilingual America and present the nation with “many benefits and opportunities” (1998: 389-390). Hence, the contributions to this issue of *LANGUAGE VALUE* attest to the multiplicity of approaches followed by ethnic minority American and Canadian writers to tell their stories, leaving behind complaints of the colonizing effect of English

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and revealing its liberating potential in the tongues of the inhabitants of linguistic borderlands.

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Diasporic dialogues: The role of gender, language, and revision in the neo-slave narrative

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ABSTRACT

In this article I examine the creation of neo-slave narratives, or fictional texts written in the 20th and 21st centuries, yet set during an imagined period of American slavery or indentured servitude. In these novels the authors, usually African-descended, depict slavery and/or plantation life, generally, to privilege the experiences of the slave. The process of actively writing against traditional plantation narratives of the 18th and 19th centuries can liberate slave histories and allows silenced actors to speak. However, in this paper, I argue that there is a danger of further marginalization when History is the platform for creative expression. I examine two novels whose authors employ the use of *satire* to discuss slave experience and by doing so, I explore how the images of Black slave and servant women can be either devalued or empowered depending on authorial representation and intent.

Keywords: slave narratives; women; African American; satire, historical fiction

I. INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, many authors have found their voices through the process of re-writing early African Diasporic experience. One product of this self-conscious act is the creation of the "neo-slave narrative"; a subgenre of historical fiction, which often address possibilities of slave experience, word play, and re-memory absent from many writings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unlike fugitive authors, composers of recent narratives come from a position of relative privilege produced by a theoretical and chronological distance. These authors discuss slavery from the perspective of free citizens who have learned, but not lived, the history of societies in which their characters exist. In addition, the contemporary treatments are largely fictional accounts, whether they are historical narratives, "palimpsest narratives", "genealogical narratives", or a close imitation of the original slave narrative[1]. Freedoms with form and style, numerous literary movements, and Western

[1] For a detailed description of the Neo-Slave Narrative see Andrews et al. (1997).

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education have afforded writers the ability to re-create and re-historicize the text, thus liberating static representations of slave experience.

With creative freedom comes the opportunity to vindicate former fictional depictions of slaves and slave life, generally found in literature written by nineteenth and twentieth century white male and female authors. As early as the late nineteenth century, black authors began to question the literary standard for addressing slavery and swiftly provided alternatives to narratives that presented unsophisticated caricatures of plantation slaves that portrayed the "runaway" as treacherous and the unloyal slave as "vile". Examples of these rewritings include works by Pauline Hopkins, Charles Chesnutt, William Wells Brown, Victor Séjour, and others who used their literacy to reinscribe history. Throughout the twentieth century, the relative distance from a slave past coupled with increased educational access and freedom of expression created a literary environment ripe for intellectual query and liberty with form, style, and subject matter.

Though most writers create full characters seriously wrestling with the hardships of their slave (or neo-slave) experience, others reproduce important parts of this re-reading in a satirical or parodic form. Contemporary writers concerned with slavery see themselves disrupting the typically sensitive nature of the subject by actively confronting accepted realities of the capitalist enterprise. Interestingly, the choice to use satire to convey early black American experience is more than experimentation with craft. Several authors are paying homage to the persistent satirical tradition that exists within African Diasporic oral culture which was later transferred to the black written text. For example, in an essay on "Third World Aesthetics", novelist and literary critic Gayl Jones proclaims:

> I am a novel of the Third World, and so you would expect me to be different from those other novels, to have a different aesthetic, to revise (or rewrite) genre, characterization, style, theme, structure, viewpoint, values, and so I do. Paradox and ambivalence may be seen in the margins of this marginal text; and may be read in and between then lines. *Satire and irony is plentiful here, for it's part of my tradition.* (Jones 1994: 508, emphasis added)

Likewise, in a separate essay Harry L. Jones argues, "For three hundred and fifty years, black humor has been a survival technique and a weapon of the weak against the strong" (Jones 1969: 3). Both scholars speak to the ways "black" or "Third World" people use satire and humor to react to their environments, a skill that is consequently

reproduced in black literature.

When considering the empowering use of humor or satire in the neo-slave narrative one must also be aware of ways "new" narratives can reinforce the same gender and racial stereotypes writers are attempting to subvert. For example, in the novels *Flight to Canada* and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* Ishmael Reed and Maryse Condé (respectively) complicate the relationships between oppressors and oppressed in deliberate ways. The authors skillfully bend bondage narratives to address intricacies of black slave experience, Africans in the Diaspora, capitalism, free choice, and the master-slave dynamic[2]. However, the novels produce challenging depictions of black male/female relationships which seem to argue against attempts at collective rebuilding and inclusion. Conversely, one can also argue that any interpretation by black writers of a "system" as deleterious and demented as slavery can be read as a revolutionary act, regardless of the content or the satirical style.

II. FLIGHT TO CANADA

Written in response to the lack of black male protagonists in 19th century slave narratives; *Flight to Canada*, Reed's early novel about the economics of slavery, the power of literacy, and impossibility of escape, curiously employs black female characters as comic relief in an attempt to vindicate the fully developed male characters. This move assumes black women have the power of collective agency, absent in communities of black men, which allows them to withstand unfavorable images. Therefore, the use of parody and satire becomes intricately tied to a (mis)read of gender dynamics within the black slave community in the authors' attempts to rescue the male figure from the annals of history. In *Warriors, Conjurers, and Priests,* Joyce Ann Joyce notes, "Not surprisingly, one of the most important problems in scholarship on [Ishmael] Reed involves his negative characterizations of Black women" (Joyce 1994: 244). She then continues to argue in Reed's favor and states, "Though he challenges

[2] This is not to say that these authors are the only using satire to comment on social relationships and/or racial injustices. I am aware of the long-standing tradition of satirical writing within the African American literary tradition. For example, Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, Gloria Naylor, Ralph Ellison, Mel Watkins, Charles Chesnutt, and Toni Morrison, are just a few that are noted for their satirical works.

societal evils, he is not didactic, and no one, neither man nor woman, escapes from his novels unscathed" (Joyce 1994: 269).

In the introduction to the *Ishmael Reed Reader* Reed acknowledges that in *Flight to Canada* he "refers to four slaves who represent the different approaches used by Africans to deal with the situation in which they found themselves" (Reed 1976: xxi). In the narrative, it appears that Reed rewrites their experiences in satirical form to give the characters agency to decide their fate. When examined more closely there is a definite distinction between the agency given to the male characters and the agency taken by the female characters. Therefore, the question regarding the depictions of the black female characters is: what exactly is Reed rewriting?

Reed's novel follows Raven Quickskill's escape from a southern plantation and the effect his flight has on the remaining inhabitants. He is able to write himself into being with crafty poetry and frequent letters detailing his exploits in the northern United States. Through his satirical representation of 19th century America, Reed challenges Abraham Lincoln's rhetoric, white gentility, and the "cult of true womanhood", while also exposing the exploitation of the fugitive slave on the lecture circuit and Harriet Beecher Stowe's "theft" of Josiah Henson's life story among other tantalizing historical truths. Reed uses the space of the novel to tackle the weighty issue of black complicity in the slave system as well as cross-racial intimacy (cordial, not romantic) fostered by the isolation of plantation.

At first glance, Reed's unbalanced depiction of black female and male characters in the novel supports Hazel Carby's statement that, "The institution of slavery is now widely regarded as the source of stereotypes about the black woman" (Carby 1987: 20). For example, throughout the text Reed positions the mammy figure ("Mammy Barracuda") in direct contrast to the vilified Uncle Tom ("Uncle Robin") character. She accurately embodies her namesake (Barracuda), with her vicious attacks on every slave in the narrative and the unrelenting torture of her white mistress. In *Reconstructing Womanhood,* Carby continues to argue that stereotypes of the black slave woman adversely affect contemporary perceptions of black women. Given this knowledge, it is possible to understand Reed's conscious decision not to depict the humble, docile, selfless "mammy" that appears in antebellum (and Reconstruction era) literature written

by white American authors. That idealized mammy was a construct of white sentimentalism and ignored the real properties of her womanhood and family life.

Where the traditionally popular mammy figure was maternal, asexual, selfless, caring, plump, and jolly, *Flight to Canada*'s Mammy Barracuda parodies these characteristics. She retains the maternal qualities in the sense that her white charges can "curl up fetus like in [her] lap" and be "rock[ed] in the rocking chair" (Reed 1976: 20-21). She also provides the Swille's with opium-induced comfort by calming them with an injection when they are unable to handle the pressures of plantation life (Reed 1976: 108-9). While Ishmael Reed reconstructs the asexual, effeminate characterizations of the historical "Uncle Tom" by including the fact that Uncle Robin is married and very sexually active; conversely, the asexual Mammy experiences very little change in the perceptions of her sexuality. The major deviation in her behavior remains her excitement by the possibility of tormenting other slaves with "whips and chains". Accordingly, in the novel she uses these tools to inflict pain in a disturbing sadistic fashion.

Though it is obvious Reed uses these and other deliberately ludicrous scenes to comment on problematic notions of gender in the antebellum South, the Mammy becomes a female version of a cad. Earlier in the novel, she is described as wearing a "silk scarf" that replaces the traditional worn, tattered "head rag". The presence of silk attests to her prominent position in the Swille household and assumes much more. As the text infers, Mammy receives her jewels and riches from "Arthur" (whom the other slaves know only as "Massa Swille") in exchange for her numerous services — including prior sexual encounters. Her hinted at, but unstated relationship with the master boldly addresses the complicated narratives surrounding sexual activity and subservience on the plantation. In an infamous book review of *Flight to Canada*, Sondra O'Neale argues, "…for the black woman Reed intends no sympathy; as represented by Swille's human cudgel, Mammy Barracuda, whose whore-begotten wealth is so heavy that it bends her back and [is used] to 'blind' her master's slaves (O'Neale 1978: 174-177).

Within Reed's description of Mammy's possessions is a parody of the perceptions surrounding the religious and self-righteous slave woman. The 'blinding' element to

which O'Neale refers is a diamond crucifix on Mammy Barracuda's bosom, which is "so heavy she walks with a stoop". Later in a conversation between Uncle Robin and his wife, the reader learns that Mammy formed a "Jesus-cult" that was put in place to stamp out the heathenism — of African slaves. The pointed critique of imbued Christianity as opposed to an embrace of polytheism or a form of "African spirituality" places her at the forefront of the debate over the acceptance of the "white-man's religion" and the appropriation of European culture. Also in the text, Barracuda proudly "waltzes" out of the room with Abraham Lincoln and she proudly sings at the "last reunion of Confederate soldiers" as a testament to where her true loyalty lies (Reed 1976: 39, 14).

Again, one can argue that all of the aforementioned acts add to and support Reed's critique of the stereotype of the plantation mammy's undying love for white Southern livelihood. However, a more critical look questions if Mammy Barracuda's actions do anything to relieve the black woman who has often been accused by those in her own ethnic community of being a servant, lover, and supporter of white patriarchy from time immemorial. No matter how ridiculous the package, in this novel, Mammy Barracuda appears to fulfill her culturally supported role and for the unskilled reader may not be a deviation from the plantation tradition that Reed mocks.

For example, in one poignant exchange between Mammy and Mrs. Swille, Reed uses mammy's power to "attack" (literally) nineteenth century demands for women's suffrage that ultimately eschewed the positionality of black women. Throughout the novel Mrs. Swille stages a one-woman protest against her husband. She attempts to align herself with the injustices on the plantation when she accuses her husband of treating her as a slave in her own home. She stages a dramatic protest scene in her room and claims that all disadvantaged people (primarily women) regardless of color are fighting the same struggle against white patriarchy. Subsequently, Master Swille grants a terribly annoyed Mammy Barracuda permission to make Mrs. Swille "act right" by any means necessary—once again suggesting collusion between the master and black former mistress who now runs his home. Barracuda uses this opportunity to beat Mrs. Swille, "grab her hair and throw her to the floor", and "give her a football-punt kick to her naked hip, causing and immediate red welt" (Reed 1976: 112). The abuse continues until Mrs. Swille is finally "cleaned up" and given an injection of barbiturates to help

her sleep. Soon after, Mammy Barracuda assures Mrs. Swille that she was doing this for her own good and that she "hates to do what she had to do with her darlin" (Reed 1976: 114).

Through parody, Reed appears to vindicate the "traditional" mammy by demonstrating her actual power, supplying a voice, and making her the epitome of the "strong black woman". Unfortunately, she remains stereotypical in other, more complex ways as she is transformed from one image of black womanhood into another. Interestingly, with the flick of a pen the traditionally accommodating "mammy" becomes the vile "Sapphire". In an excerpt from *Ain't I a Woman*, bell hooks asserts,

> As Sapphires, black women were depicted as evil treacherous, bitchy, stubborn, and hateful, in short all that the mammy figure was not…White men could justify their dehumanization and sexual exploitation of black women by arguing that they possessed inherent demonic qualities…And white women could use the image of the evil sinful black woman to emphasize their own innocence and purity (Hooks 1999: 85).

Though comedic in nature and possibly political in intent, Mrs. Swille's violent encounter with Mammy Barracuda places her on the receiving end of the mammy's rage preserving her womanhood and demonizing Barracuda. Mrs. Swille is depicted as a helpless victim of Mammy's oppressive aggression. One can argue that the above scene confronts the fallacy that "sisterhood is global" and reproduces Black women's feelings of betrayal during the height of exclusivity in the second wave of the feminist movement. Or, on the other hand that the satirical framework created for the text blurs the real meaning behind the action. The question then becomes, why is it when confronted with white womanhood the Black woman's (alleged) internalized violent and destructive feelings can only manifest in the pages of a text written by a male author?

Mammy Barracuda remains a troubled character throughout the narrative. The fact that she is only one of three African American females used in the novel to depict a portion of slave life is additionally problematic. Uncle Robin's wife, "Aunt Judy", exists in the novel as a "bedmate" and rarely, if ever, leaves the confines of their home. Mammy Barracuda's sidekick, "Bangalang", is an incomplete representation of anything substantive as she is depicted as a floundering, senseless woman. For example, in one scene she leaves the water running because Mammy did not tell her to turn it off. Later, when Uncle Robin reluctantly attempts to extinguish Master Swille (who is ironically

set aflame by his own Poe-esque gothic incestuous desires), she impedes his progress by stopping the water — because after the previous incident, Mammy told her "when you turn the faucet on, you're not suppose to forget to turn it off" (Reed 1976: 136-7)[3]. In sum, many representations of black women in the novel appear as "comic capital"[4], at more intelligent points in the novel.

It is obvious to the reader that the "Mammy" character in *Flight to Canada* is not supposed to be fully redeemed. She is overbearing, emasculating, and a close second to the myth of the black matriarch detailed in documents like "The Moynihan Report" released a decade prior to the publication of Reed's text[5]. In defense of Reed, Linda Hutcheon argues:

> Reed is always serious, beneath his parodic play. It is this basic seriousness that critics have frequently been blind to when they accuse postmodernism of being ironic—and therefore trivial. The assumption seems to be that authenticity of experience and expression are somehow incompatible with double-voicing and/or humor. This view seems to be shared not only by Marxist critics, but also by some feminist critics. And yet it is feminist *writers,* along with blacks, who have used such ironic intertextuality to such powerful ends—both ideologically and aesthetically (if the two could, in fact, be so easily separated) (Hutcheon 1988:134).

In slight opposition, Sondra O'Neale argues, "The moral [regarding Flight to Canada] is not an aesthetic one—but then a stance of the black Aesthetic is that political and humanistic statement is an undeniable force in art. If Reed purposes to free the black man with his writing, let us hope that he will magnanimously enlarge his vision to free all the race…" (O'Neale 1978: 177). While championing the power in narrative, O'Neale calls for a realistic view of the "political".

Can one fault Reed when he purports, "My writing is real cutup, it's provocative, and I make no apologies about that" (Carroll 1995: 193)? Or is it true that "there is generally never a one-to-one correspondence between what a novel is and who/what a novelist is" as Gayl Jones argues? Even if the "blame" is not on the author, per se, and/or rests in the representation of the female characters by other male characters, (e.g. Charles

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[3]Her character is reminiscent of minstrel characters, like Stepin Fetchit, and other daft characterizations of African Americans in early American cinema. Generally men, these accomplished actors perpetuated the stereotype of the "foolish Negro" in order to retain employment. An allusion is also made to Prissy, Butterfly McQueen's flighty character in the cinematic version of "Gone with the Wind" who famously confesses, "I don't know nothing 'bout birthing no babies".

[4] Term used in Elizabeth Muher's essay, "Isadora at sea: Misogyny as comic capital in Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage*". *African American Review*: Winter 1996.

[5] For further analysis of the black family as perceived by Moynihan, see Rainwater and Yancey (1967).

Johnson's *Middle Passage*), does understanding that satire is a playful form or style sufficiently address the larger issue of re-presentation?

As O'Neale articulates in her argument, there is a definite connection between stories and experiences of *all* African American people, specifically during slavery. The opportunity to rewrite the narratives of experience and reread "unsaid truths" should not have to privilege one story over another. In *Flight to Canada,* Mammy Barracuda misses the opportunity to salvage her 'mammyhood' and escape a prescribed lifestyle. At the novel's end, Master Swille's "last will and testament" relocates her to a "school for Negroes" where it states, she can continue her sadism as headmistress.

In an attempt to fully explain Reed's project, Ashraf Rushdy contemplates the many positive elements of Reed's work. He writes,

> [Reed] offers a parody of slave narratives *as they were read* as a way of reconstructing potential readings of slave narratives *as they can be read*...a parody that renders *Uncle Tom's Cabin* obsolete simultaneously opens up the possibility for fresh readings of those co-opted slave narratives (Rushdy 1999:125).

He later argues, "according to Reed, 'HooDoo writing' is essential to the act of collective healing necessary for slavery to end its influence on the behavior of its survivors" (Rushdy 1999: 130). It is important to reiterate that the primary agenda of these novels is the reclamation of a black manhood that is lost and/or absent in the literature of white American authors. For Reed, the goal may be to vindicate Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom" (and Josiah Henson) through his Uncle Robin and Raven characters. In the now classic critical text, *The Signifying, Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. discusses the reproduction of canonical literary conventions through the language of the black vernacular. He writes,

> Black literature shares much with, far more than it differs from, the Western textual tradition, primarily as registered in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. But black formal repetition always repeats with a difference, a black difference that manifests itself in specific language use. And the repository that contains the language that is the source—and the reflection—of black difference is the Black English vernacular tradition. (Gates 2000: 342-343)

The location of the "difference" is at the heart of the matter for scholars reading the male and female characters in the neo-slave narrative. Reed dispels myths about black male experience during slavery when the text provides clear opportunities for the male slaves to redeem their former selves by giving voice to their histories. Conversely, through this model and use of satire as a weapon, black female characters remain

caricatures placed in the margins of history, as she is denied equal space with her male counterparts, or a voice of her own.

III. I, TITUBA, BLACK WITCH OF SALEM

Therefore, if satire and gendered re-presentations of slave life work in tandem how does one reconcile a novel written by a woman of the Diaspora that recalls the life of a forgotten black woman whose very presence in the New World was considered the cause of legendary witchcraft hysteria in the 17th century? More importantly, how do we read this novel when, in reference to the protagonist, the author warns us afterward: "Do not take Tituba too seriously, please" (Scarboro 1992: 212). In *I, Tituba Black Witch of Salem* Maryse Condé does not shy away from parody in her refashioning of servitude in New England. Although she decides to privilege orality, recovery, and feminine control she openly admits to infusing *I, Tituba* with comic irony and satire, possibly taking a cue from other early regional black texts[6]. What is interesting about her account is the equal space given to multiple voices alongside clever uses of parody and satire.

Condé retells the story of Tituba Indian; a historical figure denied a voice before and after she becomes a footnote to the controversial Salem Witch Trials of 17th century colonial Massachusetts. She is the sole blame for the debauchery among the accused women as her "black magic" is believed to be the source of witchcraft in the village. As a result of her silencing, Condé's fictional Tituba modifies Western concepts of language in an effort to preserve her life. The author conjures an intricate tale that enables Tituba to project her voice through alternate means of communication; not only freeing the subject, but also allowing her the freedom to parody various episodes of historical memory.

Throughout the text it is proven that speechlessness operates as a force that signifies more than mere silencing. Because the events take place in a colonial space prior to full-scale geographic expansion and trans-Atlantic slavery, suppression took many forms. For example, denying and/or inhibiting speech by enforcing a foreign tongue on the oppressed extends the realm of power and remains a destructive by-product of

[6] See Elizabeth Breau's (1993) discussion of the uses of satire in the New England slave narrative *Our Nig*.

colonization. A prime example of the colonized tongue rests with the Trans-Atlantic or African slave trade, where research suggests slaves from corresponding African nations and linguistic backgrounds were separated as a means of deterring possible uprisings on the plantations of the West Indies and the American South. In exchange for the African slave's physical and psychological subjugation, the dominant (i.e. European) discourse was mandated as the only system of effective communication with the colonizer and slave master.

In the historic essay, "On National Culture", Frantz Fanon posits, "The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality" (Fanon 1999: 37). The threat of abandonment speaks to an almost infantile dependence on the colonizer and a rejection of native customs and folkways. What Condé and other post-colonial authors attempt is the "further creation" of the colonized language in a "new context, under new conditions" (Bakhtin 1998: 535). Through the use of satire, *I, Tituba,* directly acknowledges the issue of an authoritative presence that attempts to cancel out the voice of the subject.

In "Tituba's Story", Bernard Rosenthal gives an account of the facts known about the historical Tituba's existence. He notes, "the facts are few" and examines how over the years a majority of the knowledge about Tituba can be traced back to fictional constructions by either authors such as Condé or "historical speculation". He notes that:

> She lived in the household of the Reverend Samuel Parris. Her prior whereabouts are not known. Her culture defined her as an Indian. Her contemporaries offered no verifiable clues about her age. She was accused of witchcraft and confessed. She claimed to have been beaten and to have been herself afflicted by witches. From the beginning of March 1692 until she was brought to a court of General jail. Delivery on 9 May 1693, she presumably languished in prison. Exactly when she was released and whether she was ever reunited with John Indian-or whether she had reason to be-is also not known (Rosenthal 1998: 200).

This account of Tituba's life exhibits the same stolid reportage as her actual court deposition. Tituba exists as an intangible being attached to a name but detached from society. Aime Cesaire calls this the "thingification" of the colonized person. She has no active participation within the environment in which she is placed and is virtually ignored by all who surround her. In *Postcolonial Theory*, Leela Gandhi notes, "the 'third world woman' can thus be seen as yet another object of Western knowledge, simultaneously knowable and unknowing" (Gandhi 1998: 86).

However, it is in the novel that we see Condé's Tituba differ from the silenced historical subject. Tituba, the fictional character, lives a vibrant, subversive life. A revision of this kind is possible because Condé refuses to claim the historical Tituba. The author adamantly denies that the novel is a work of historical fiction, and chooses to create a character from her own imagining. Through this process, Condé has the freedom to play with convention (as does Reed), but notably steers clear of the caricatures discussed above. She identifies her text as the "opposite of a historical novel" noting that she "was not interested at all in what her real life could have been" (Scarboro 1992: 201). The lack of a model gives Condé nothing to reinforce, react to, or push against, again, making it possible for a more balanced rendering of the figure.

Condé's Tituba is first introduced as the product of rape, conceived on the slave ship *Christ the King*, en route to Barbados. These first lines of the text hint at Condé's hidden mission to disrupt serious imaginings of the character. While there is the obvious juxtaposition of domination and forced enslavement with the image of the religious savior (Christ), Tituba's conception and nativity tale does much more. In her discussion of subversion in the novel, Paula C. Barnes notes, "Condé's adoption of the structure of the nineteenth-century slave narrative is completed in the narrative itself… [but] as seen with the pre-and post-narrative conventions, Condé consciously imitates, manipulates, and revises these tropes (Barnes 1999: 196). Barnes goes on to discuss the description of Tituba's conception as an attack on the trope of the slave narrative which includes 'a first sentence beginning 'I was born…,' in other words, the tracing of Tituba's conception back to the act of rape on a vessel moving across the Atlantic situates her as the quintessential Diasporic subject, whose "circumstances surrounding [her] birth become more prominent than the birth itself" (Barnes 1999: 196).

Later in the text after Tituba is accused of witchcraft and jailed, Condé allows Hester Prynne, the victimized figure of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, to enter into the novel. Hester and Tituba share a cell, providing commentary on the effects Puritanical values have on free-thinking women. In Conde's version of Hester's life she commits suicide after Tituba's testimony but remains a significant force in her life through the foresight of Mama Yaya or Yao, her spiritual protectors throughout the novel. While the act of placing a figure like Prynne in the novel can be read as a testament to shared experiences among women or an affront to colonial patriarchy,

according to Condé, Hester's appearance in the novel is a reaction to the contemporary moment. In response to an interview question about Prynne's presence she states: "Writing *Tituba* was an opportunity to express my feelings about present-day America. I wanted to imply that in terms of narrow-mindedness, hypocrisy, and racism, little has changes since the days of the Puritans" (Scarboro 1992: 203). This revelation moves the reader away from the symbolism existing within the text (racial and gendered unity), instead using women's lives to emphasize the progressive failures of the country. Also, there are several layers of pastiche present in this scene. For example, the black author (Condé) lends *her* voice to Prynne, an ostracized white woman, unwed and a mother, originally created by a white male author. Prynne's capture and bondage in the prison cell of her novel (*I, Tituba*) ultimately gives Condé, not Hawthorne, control over who holds the key.

In similar moments, Hester Prynne appears long enough to teach Tituba *how* to tell a true story that will allow her to survive and to introduce her to the future teachings of feminism. She also becomes a major part of Tituba's "text of silenced history" when she structures Tituba's testimony (Dukats 1995: 54) and instructs Tituba to "make them scared" and "give them their money's worth!", suggesting that her words and actions become the spectacle (Condé 1992: 99). After Hester's advice, Condé inserts the official deposition, giving validity to the scene, but also questioning the "truth" the world has accepted about Tituba. Including Hester's advice in the novel can also be read as an attempt to answer why, outside of the fiction that structures the novel, the factual deposition reads as if Tituba is actually coerced into saying what her accusers wanted to hear.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) Fanon asserts, "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other". Following this sentiment in relation to the historical Tituba's court deposition, the act of speaking and the words she mimics create for the court a level of truth to the accusations of witchery, whether they are her truth or not. Her accusers pay close attention to her phrasing and extract meaning in order to build their case, but ironically, the testimony Tituba gives is puzzling as it is extremely contradictory and illogical. Likewise, the line of questioning is confusing and indirect. For example, the beginning of the original deposition reads as follows (note: the original spelling, punctuation, and terminology have not been altered):

(H) Titibe what evil spirit have you familiarity with
(T) none
(H) why do you hurt these children
(T) I do not hurt them
(H) who is it then
(T) the devil for ought I know
(H) did you never see the devil.
(T) the devil came to me and bid me serve him
(H) who have you seen
(T) 4 women sometimes hurt the children
(H) who were they?
(T) goode Osburn and Sarah good and I doe not know who the other were Sarah good and Osburne would have me hurt the children but I would not shee furder saith there was a tale man of Boston that shee did see
(H) when did you see them
(T) Last night at Boston
(H) what did they say to you they said hurt the children
(H) and did you hurt them
(T) no there is 4 women and one man they hurt the children and then lay all upon me and they tell me if I will not hurt the children they will hurt me
(H) but did you not hurt them
(T) yes, but I will hurt them no more… (Games 2010: 176-77)[7].

In the larger document, Tituba vacillates between knowing and not knowing an "evil spirit", being told by humans and then animals to "hurt the children", and later hurting the children, not ever hurting the children, and/or refusing to hurt them again. Condé recognizes how the multiple circumstances surrounding the deposition, including the atmosphere outside the courtroom leaves the interpretation of Tituba's inconsistencies wide open. In response, she depicts Tituba as a cunning individual who spins the testimony in several directions for dramatic effect, thus doing as Hester suggests and "giving them what they want". Toward the end of the deposition the fictional Tituba adds, "I confess I wasn't a good actress", revealing a "truth" about her role in the alleged incidents that caused the hysteria (Condé 1992: 106). By including the term 'actress' which suggests an invented persona, Condé consciously calls into question the innocence of the most sympathetic characters in the novel and humorously responds to the awkward nature of the testimony and her own use of satirical forms.

In other ironic moments, the fictional Tituba is depicted as an herbalist who uses her mystical power and knowledge of garden herbs to heal. The irony exists in the fact that her ability to use this natural craft is the premise behind the Salem hysteria. Tituba is first introduced to what the Puritans call "witchcraft" and what she deems education about herbs, by Mama Yaya, her surrogate mother. Though this is her first experience,

[7] Condé's text preserves much of the original with only a slight deviation in her creative choice to modernize the language and provide excerpts rather than the full draft of the deposition.

her mother has the ability to “conjure up all the forces of nature” when she is pregnant with Tituba (Condé 1992: 4). Mama Yaya teaches Tituba the art of conjure in order to ensure Tituba’s survival and to pass on a legacy that will be lost when she dies. Because of her knowledge, Tituba is revered by the slaves on the plantation in Barbados and news of her powers spreads across the island. Condé admits that this rendering of Mama Yaya is a part of *Tituba*’s existence as a “mock-epic” novel. In the aforementioned interview, Condé is nonchalant in her response to the spiritual and empowering read of the novel. With regard to the omniscience of Mama Yaya, Tituba’s spiritual guide, Condé states:

> The question of grandmothers telling stories and thus teaching their granddaughters how to become writers is one of the biggest clichés of black female writing. I repeat that the element of parody is very important if you wish to fully comprehend Tituba…If one misses the parody in *Tituba*, one will not understand, for example, why she meets Hester Prynne in jail and why they discuss feminism in modern terms. Similarly, the presence of the invisible (the conversations with the mother and with Mama Yaya) is deliberately overdrawn (Scarboro 1992: 212).

In addition to spiritual power, Condé gives space and command to Tituba’s burgeoning sexuality. She uses this power to resist the domination associated with slavery and combats her subjugation by loving freely in an environment where sexual satisfaction is condemned. Her subsequent relationship with John Indian highlights her inability to “do without men”. In order to satisfy her “uncontrollable desire” she does the unthinkable and willingly subjects herself to a life of slavery (Condé 1992: 19). Condé’s portrayal of Tituba as a candidly sexual being writes Tituba into a femininity that transcends the boundaries created by her European female counterparts. For it is during her jailhouse conversation with Hester Prynne that she is told she cannot be regarded as a Feminist because of her overtly sexual image; a statement that recalls racist claims of licentiousness and bestiality among African women beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Condé 1992: 101). Additionally, the link Prynne makes between Tituba’s sexual desire and resulting inability to be a true feminist cleverly addressed the stereotype of an asexual or lesbian feminist whose love of herself or other women restricts her ability to love men (because, as it is thought, heterosexual love is counterrevolutionary).

After her infamous testimony, Tituba remains in jail until she is “rescued” by the Jewish merchant Benjamin Cohen d’Azevedo. Her release into his custody was a release not only from the walls of the jail cell but also from the walls of institutional racism in

which she resided for many years. In her relationship with Benjamin, Tituba allows her sexual desire to transcend race and transforms a typical master-slave act of physical domination into one in which she is reborn and in full control of her body. Instead of being "another master, another bondage" (Condé 1992: 120), Benjamin allows Tituba into his family and treats her as a person rather than a slave. It is important to note that Tituba is his property and unable to "walk away" from any sexual advances that he makes towards her, but she makes no attempt to end the relationship and looks forward to their nights together. Tituba reclaims the body that is so easily sold into bondage by enjoying the sexual relationship she has with Benjamin. Tituba's text signifies on that of slave women who when faced with the demand to render their bodies chose to take any possible control over the situation.

In *Reconstructing Womanhood*, Hazel V. Carby examines the reconstruction of "traditional" roles and identity as they relate to the slave narrative of Harriet Jacobs. In her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Jacobs uses her body in order to save the lives of her future children. She becomes a willing participant in a sexual relationship with a white man she does not love so that she may arrange for their continued safety. In a plea to the reader, she expresses the sentiment that "a slave girl ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (Jacobs 1987: 386). Though Tituba's act is not a desperate plea for a child born "free" in an environment of slavery, she embodies the desperation set forth by Jacobs.

As Tituba matures and is released from Benjamin, she returns to Barbados and finds herself in a situation where Christopher, the leader of a maroon camp, attempts to strip her of self-esteem. It is significant that Condé chooses a Jewish merchant as the person able to free Tituba mentally as well as physically and then return her to her native land--while a Caribbean man subjugates her upon her return. Condé adeptly demonstrates the universality of patriarchal oppression. With Christopher, Tituba is demoralized when he calls her "a common negress" and professes that there is "no song for her". He refuses to divulge a plan of escape among the maroon's on the island and instructs that her only duty is to "make love". Tituba counters this sentiment by leaving Christopher and

joining with another (Iphingene[8]) as leader of a slave rebellion, for which she ultimately gives her life. She knows the revolt will not be successful and repeatedly refers to it as the "final act/attack". Tituba's involvement and willingness to die for the revolution purposefully positions her as the antithesis of the marginalized woman who is voiceless and denied access to the native struggle.

The question of primary loyalty to race or gender that activist women of color encounter surfaces in Tituba's relationships with Christopher and Iphingene. Tituba answers this question in her earlier decision to follow John Indian into servitude and continues the pattern until she joins the preparation for the revolt towards the end of the novel. In Salem, when she speaks back to liberal Anglo-American feminism and redefines the premise of the sexual master-slave relationship she presents other complicated responses to the place of black womanhood in the New World as well.

Again, it is only when she thinks of Hester's feminist standpoint and the restrictions it places on highly expressive acts of passion that Tituba wonders if something is wrong with her sentiments. She remembers Hester's proclamation telling her that she is "too fond of love" and temporarily questions her feelings (Condé 1992: 170). In *The Tongue Snatchers*, Claudine Hermann also examines love and the feminist agenda. In terms of the historical silencing of women and their propensity to question the attributes that Hester repeatedly associates with feminist discourse, Hermann states that "Love... can not defend itself. Love's business isn't to prove. It has no use for being right" (Herrmann 1989: 56). Tituba seems to realize the triviality of using the dominant discourse to examine her actions. Returning to the interview, Condé admits she "wanted to turn Tituba into a sort of female hero, an epic heroine, like the legendary 'Nanny of the maroons (Scarboro 1992: 201)'" Therefore, it is important to question whether Condé is successful in providing Tituba *true* agency as an author of her own destiny — as opposed to an illusory invention of the writer's consciousness.

Leela Gandhi notes "liberal academic feminism is said to silence the 'native woman' in its pious attempts to represent or speak for her" (Gandhi 1998: 89). Is this silencing present in Condé's attempt to give Tituba a voice or is she successful in eliminating her

[8] Iphingene's name is likely an invented masculine version of "Iphigenia" the ancient Greek figure designed to be a sacrifice that would aid her father's (Agamemnon) defeat of Troy. This read would be appropriate given Iphingene's sacrificial act on behalf of the island slaves.

own presence and allowing Tituba to speak? Mudimbé-Boyi argues that Condé removes herself from the position of narrator and fully allows the spirit of Tituba to take control. Though Condé physically constructs the novel, Mudimbé-Boyi makes the distinction between Condé's voice and Tituba's voice. By giving Tituba a voice, Condé allows a voice to "emerge from elsewhere than from an 'authority' or from the social location of the writer" (Mudimbé-Boyi 1993: 753). The importance is that Condé has "created a territory for her in history and literature, allowing her to survive as a black female literary character, if not a historical figure" (Mudimbé-Boyi 1993: 755).

Despite the serious subject matter, Condé admits to hesitating "between irony and a desire to be serious" instead reaching a middle-ground that is the novel's current form (Scarboro 1992: 201). Her references to contemporary novels, gender theory, and popular culture remind the reader of her satirical hand. She introduces the term "feminist" in the late seventeenth century as opposed to having it reside in its actual birthplace of the nineteenth century. The same is also true with references to "strange fruit" the poem and later song made famous by Billie Holiday that laments bodies of lynched African Americans hanging from southern oak trees. These insertions prove that Condé chooses not to surrender all of her creative agency in telling Tituba's story and decides to incorporate satire as an act of rebellion.

Since the publication of the novel, scholars have gone back and questioned the true import of pivotal scenes like the one where Yao names Tituba (thought to be a scene gleaned from Alex Haley's *Roots)* or the reoccurring themes of feminism, racial identity, literacy, and sexuality (Scarboro 1992: 222, Barnes 1999: 197-201). Several have heeded Condé's words and not taken Tituba or the novel 'too seriously,' instead choosing to focus on the reasons the author subverts convention and/or parodies traditional forms. Likewise, the question of whether Tituba or Condé has the authority of speech should be considered in the continued analysis of Tituba's character along with the question of whether Condé is an appropriate spokesperson for the bondswoman.

IV. CONCLUSION

For writers like Condé the act of giving a voice is similar to that of giving life. She is able to fill "the silence and voids with voice and presence" (*I, Tituba* xii) and occupy a space that has been closed off in the pages of history. Though many work to fill in the gap, there remains a deafening silence in relation to the representation and agency that is "allowed" the formerly colonized individual. This silence is the result of a continued dominance in the public sector, including institutions of higher education and the media. The privilege of re-creation afforded Reed and Condé supposes a nuanced revision history. For the Diasporic author who takes it upon herself to retell the "truth" one of the main purposes of rewriting history is to heal stories and souls damaged by marginalization and suppression.

However, I note that when *satire* is used in the text a clever "messiness" is created that often places artistic license at odds with national and/or cultural memory. Likewise, the authors' writing style and language use can create wholly unsympathetic characters whose presence causes the reader to question the role of the historical narrative. The examples of "fresh readings" and "acts of collective healing" allows for reconsiderations of history, memory, and truth. Therefore, it is imperative that one reads satire within the neo-slave narrative as an evolution in the presentation and discussion of complicated themes, rather than the reinforcement of dominant discourse.

When examining the ways interdisciplinary studies impacts discussions of progress on a global scale one must consider the pedagogical, political, and personal contributions scholars within the discipline make to modern notions of gender and identity. While it is true that significant sites of divergence within the histories and lives of African-descended people, for example, complicate attempts to claim racial solidarity; throughout the decades important connections have been made in recovery projects that further examine the ways language and rhetoric respond to theory. Sociological and historical examinations of multicultural literature must continue to interrogate linguistic power, with contemporary research providing a space for the confluence of ideas and reimagining.

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Jacqueline Woodson's narrative style in *The Other Side*: An African American picture book for children

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ABSTRACT

The Other Side (2001) is a children's story with multicultural characters and themes that can be regarded as an aesthetic exploration of the human experience in the process of the acquisition of knowledge. Following the Black Arts Movement, Jacqueline Woodson's work portrays many of the issues that are present in the real world but seldom appear in children's literature, such as racial division or interracial relationships. Using the metaphor of a fence, this African American author reveals issues of loneliness and friendship, inclusion and exclusion, and the overcoming of prejudice and segregation through the wisdom of Clover and Annie, an African American and a white girl, who become friends. The story is told from the point of view of Clover who is both the protagonist and the first person narrator. The reader, thus, gets to see and understand the world through her eyes.

Keywords: African American, Jacqueline Woodson, Picture book, Children, Segregation

"The content of a story and how it is told are inseparable"
Henry James

Writers who make powerful statements in their stories communicate their ideas through the artistic and skillful use of language. While there is considerable controversy among literary theorists and critics as to how to define literature, there is common agreement regarding the crucial role that language plays in it. As Gillian Lazar's puts it, literature can be understood as "those novels, short stories, plays and poems which are fictional and convey their message by paying considerable attention to language which is rich and multi-layered" (1993: 5). It is through language that literature provides relevant source material for identifying and examining human motives; readers can see into the mind of the character or even into the subconscious that the very same character does not know. Through the writer's careful choice of language we come to see the current environment, the details from the past and the imaginary world of the character, in other words, the character's motivation for action. Literature thus, through language, gives

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form to the experience of the ongoing cycle of life; it explores the nature of human beings and their particular circumstances. What happens then when the nature and the circumstances of some cultural minorities differ from those consistently represented in mainstream literature? How does literature represent the voices of the so-called cultural minorities, their values and perspectives? The aim of this article is to study how the African American writer Jacqueline Woodson makes use of her narrative style to represent in children's terms the experience of a black girl growing up in the United States and coming to terms with the racial reality. In her book *The Other Side* (2001), she reorients children's literature, raising racial concerns and eliciting strong emotional responses in the reader.

Woodson's work includes many of the issues that are present in the real world but seldom appear in children's literature, such as racial division, child abuse or interracial relationships. Like many other Black American authors, she shares the experience of being a member of a society in which race matters a great deal. In this sense, her writing for children is clearly rooted in an African American and American social and literary history that can be traced all the way back to the 19th Century. Since then, as Rudine Sims Bishop argues, "the racist [and] stereotypical books about Blacks, created by benighted White writers and artists, made it imperative to create an African American literature to contradict and counteract such imagery" (2007: xiv). African American children's literature developed thus as a literature of social action. It emerges from the very oral culture (songs, stories, rhymes, etc) created by enslaved Africans to form and pass on a set of moral and spiritual values, to instruct each other, to build community and to entertain themselves. As Bishop puts it,

> African American children's literature has roots in African American's determination to maintain a sense of themselves as fully human in the face of their legal status as property and to maintain some control over their own lives. Where literacy was forbidden and denied to African Americans, story and song flourished and served to entertain, to discipline, to provide information, to subvert slaveholders' intentions, and to transmit to children the values and attitudes that the community deemed necessary for its survival. (2007: 4)

Gradually, as the number of African Americans that had access to freedom and literacy increased throughout the 19th century, some newspapers and periodicals launched by black religious people appeared as vehicles for self-definition, self-determination and self-expression. Some of them such as *The Recorder* (1852) included readings for children. These publications, along with others created towards the end of the century in

which the participation of black women became highly significant such as *Our Women and Children Magazine* (1888), shared a similar goal, making evident their concern for children's literary and education, and most importantly, like Woodson does in *The Other Side*, establishing their determination to create and display their own African American perspective.

This interest in children's literature among African Americans would be cultivated and strengthened during the first half of the 20th Century with the emergence of intellectuals and writers such a W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary Effie Lee, Langston Hughes, and Arna Bontemps among others. While Du Bois created the renowned magazine for Black children, *The Brownies' Book* (1920-1921), and Lee and Hughes published in it their first poems, Bontemps became one of the most important authors that the Harlem Renaissance left to African American children's literature (Bishop 2007: 45). Over the course of his prolific forty-year career from the 1930s to the late 1960s, his work not only developed and refined some of the traditions that had begun with *The Brownies' Book* (a focus on fostering black children's education and see themselves as normal), but also took them a step further. As Bishop highlights,

> Bontemps interjected a Black perspective on Black subjects, Black themes, and Black traditions, many of which were carried over from adult African American literature into American children's literature, an arena in which such a perspective was sorely needed. (2007: 52).

This approach set up the basis for the growth and national recognition of other upcoming African American writers and picture book illustrators such as Jacob Lawrence's with *Harriet and the Promised Land* (1968), John Steptoe with *Stevie* (1969) or Jacqueline Woodson, who also instilled a black perspective in their work and their characters. In one interviewed in 1987, Steptoe observed: "What I try to create are all the things I didn´t have as a kid that I would have liked to read" (Natov and DeLuca 1987: 126). As we will see, these words coincide with Woodson's ideas and aims for herself as a writer. In this case, both authors agree on the need of more children's books through which African American young readers can relate to the protagonists. In words of Neal Lester, "all children need to see possibilities and to see themselves in all possibilities" (Smith 2008). Self-validation for them comes from seeing themselves and acknowledging difference in the pages of the books they read.

Certainly, one of the characteristics of Woodson's books is that her main characters are African American children, so we get to see and understand the world from their particular perspective. As Rose Casement points out, "in many books that include relationships across races, the white child is in a position of social power. That is not the case in many of Woodson's stories, where the black child is generally situated in the more powerful position within the relationship" (2003: 81). In an interview with the author, she commented: "Sometimes people are surprised that the relationships and situations aren't stereotypical. I wanted to write my side of the story. I grew up reading the white side, which surprisingly to some people, isn´t the only side" (Casement 2003: 81). Like many other black writers and critics such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Arna Bontemps, John Steptoe, Violet J. Harris, Patricia Hill Collins, bell hooks, Cornell West and Laretta Henderson among others, Jacqueline Woodson considers that literature and politics have always been linked for the African American community. In her essay "Fictions" she states "…as a woman who is African American, my whole world is political so of course my writing is. […] It become writing where a reader recognizes a part of themselves and because of this, knows that they are not alone in the world. Writing where the reader's life is legitimized and by extension, the reader is legitimized" (Woodson 2001b: 48). Woodson clearly labels her work political, yet not the kind of didactic political writing that discourages the reader from recognizing himself or herself. Her books for children enable many young African American readers to free their minds of the idea that they are not alone. She articulates the stance that literature can be uplifting and heal the individual. In the past, despite the effort of many African American intellectuals to change it, numerous white authors created novels that contributed to institutionalize the image of blacks as infantile, unintelligent, comical, and ugly (Bishop 2007, Harris 2007, hooks 2003, Manuel 2009, Tolson 2008). Many black children found themselves thus surrounded by children's literature dominated by white representation in books written and illustrated by white authors and illustrators. For Woodson, that must change and there is still much work to be done. Like her African American predecessors, she believes that literature for young black readers should uplift and elevate rather than degrade. That is why her books portray values that promote acceptance of oneself, acceptance of others, pride, moderation, and commitment to family and community.

According to Laretta Henderson, children's literature written by African Americans should follow the critical discourse and canon created by the Black Art Movement that focuses its attention on the black community as the audience of black art (2005: 301). Although a final ideology is always a compendium of different voices, this movement, which arose in the late 1960s, "moves toward educating the African American community to its collective and differing histories; reflects the community and its culture and concerns; and addresses their social, spiritual and physical needs" (Henderson 2005: 301). Jacqueline Woodson's, in this way, aligns herself with the African American literary tradition and follows the combination of political orientation, audience, content, literary elements and style that defines the black aesthetic. However, she does not fall in the controversial issue of Afrocentrism placing African and African American culture at the center of knowledge. As Patricia Collins, Cornel West and bell hooks criticize, afroncentricity sometimes may lead to essentialize blackness and engage as a result in reverse racism. Woodson does not do this. As it will be shown, in *The Other Side*, she embraces W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of double consciousness highlighting throughout the story the importance for black children of being aware of both their African ancestry and their purely American identity. Moreover, she pursues the maxim expressed by Du Bois when he conceived *The Brownies' Book* by which he called for a literature that would be "adapted to colored children, and indeed to all children who live in a world of varied races" (Cited in Bishop 2007: 35).

The Other Side is a picture book in which Woodson shows the many discoveries that children can make through literature. It is a story made real through the inclusion of universal complexities within the specific cultural experiences that impact young readers. Using the metaphor of a fence, she reveals issues of loneliness and friendship, inclusion and exclusion, and the overcoming of prejudice and segregation through the wisdom of Clover and Annie, an African American and a white girl, who become friends. The author raises simple questions such as: What is the purpose of a fence? What are people like? Why are they like that? What make white and black people do what they do? Can you be friends with a person of a different race? A glimpse of answers to these questions are made visible through Woodson's poetic language and narrative style by the elements of plot, character, point of view, setting, and tone of an

imaginative work. The other question remaining to be discussed is who is the target audience of this book? Is *The Other Side* a reading only intended for black children?

As many of the picture storybooks written for younger readers, *The Other Side* depicts children facing situations and problems that are common to all young children. In spite of its brevity, only twenty-nine pages, Woodson manages to create an engaging plot, to develop Clover's full character, and to show with words and pictures an integral setting in which a number of relevant themes are revealed such as children's curiosity, friendship, family, race and prejudice. The other important aspect to be considered is that the story is told from the point of view of a young African American girl: Clover. She is both the protagonist and the first person narrator. The reader, thus, gets to see and understand the world through her eyes. This is important not only because as a black girl she represents the figure of the "Self" and not the "Other", but also because as we will see, she breaks old stereotypes regarding the traditional portrayal of African American characters.

To begin with the analysis of the narrative style, let us examine the plot and how the author's choice of words introduces the reader in the story and the character's reality. The plot revolves around the presence of the fence that separates the town where Clover lives. Woodson portrays Clover's growing awareness of the world that surrounds her and how she gradually becomes more observant. The opening line of the book is: "That summer the fence that stretched through our town seemed bigger" (Woodson 2001a: 2). By using the demonstrative pronoun "that" at the beginning of the sentence, emotional meaning and attention are draw to the fact that that particular summer was a crucial one in her childhood. The structure pattern of starting a phrase with the words "that summer" is repeated later throughout the story adding significance and impact to the term. It was that summer, we can then interpret, when Clover discovered, and experienced for the first time, that there was racial tension between black and white people and that they were expected to occupy different spaces in society.

In the same way, within the very first page the reader has also access to the setting as well as the initial conflict of the story: Clover is a young African American girl between the ages of eight and ten who lives with her family on one side of that fence; on the other side lives a white family. To create tension, we hear Clover's mom saying: "Don´t

climb over that fence when you play" (Woodson 2001a: 2). But to Clover, the reason for this is not so clear. We can imagine her young mind wondering why if there are white people on that other side, she cannot go there. Her mom does tell her that it is not safe, but this (the unknown) only spurs more intrigue and perplexity. Why is it not safe? This is the question that any young reader may ask himself or herself when reading the beginning of this book.

As the story line progresses, the conflict and the tension increases when Clover sees a young white girl sitting on that fence. The latter even shows interest in playing with her and her African American friends, but to them this white girl, who lives on the other side of the fence, only represents a mysterious threat so they feel afraid of her. They have been taught to keep a distance from that world on that other side so they continue to do so. Clover, however, feels more and more intrigued. Woodson's style holds the reader's interest by creating suspense regarding the action that will arouse the subsequent characters' reactions. If in literary terms the conflict is defined as the struggle against opposing forces, it is significant that in this case those opposed forces embody black children against white children. Is it possible for them to be friends? The conflict as a result is twofold: On the one hand, we find Clover's own internal conflict about overcoming her fears and talking to the white girl. On the other, there is the conflict of person-against-society: Can Clover defy social and racial historical conventions? Can she climb over that fence and overlook the barriers between black and white people? In fact, what Clover and Annie eventually do by becoming friends is to disregard the old beliefs and take a first step towards putting an end to that fence that keep people apart.

In *The Other Side* we find that conflict is mainly caused by social and racial issues, but also by the natural growth of a young girl. Clover is a full developed character with the complexities of an African American child maturing in the United States some time presumably in the 1960s or 1970s. These decades are characterized by tension and despair among African Americans. Although the 1950s had been a decade marked by historic progress in the campaign for racial justice, in much of the country, as Walter R. Allen and Reynolds Farley indicate, "blacks could not attend the same schools, eat at the same restaurants, or stay at the same hotels as whites. Black Americans were also

denied opportunities in education and employment and, in Southern states, their voting rights" (1986: 278). Thus, the struggle to build a society free of persecutions and discrimination against blacks was far from finished and it would carry on into the 1960s. Thanks to the emergence and the influence of prominent leaders such as President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the African Americans' demands for equality and change came to be recognized as the nation's pre-eminent challenge (Rosenberg 2006: 212). However, both leaders were murdered and by then, Malcolm X was proclaiming that a more militant approach could be used to gain civil rights. Soon after, the Civil Rights Movements took place and in the 1970s students' protest and the Black Power movement expanded.

While Woodson does not explicitly portray any social or political issue, she makes Clover's traits and experiences believable and as the story goes by, we come to know her well through the words she says, her thoughts and her actions. Woodson relies on imagery, appealing to the reader's senses, to give us different impressions of the protagonist's personality. Based on her tone and her choice of details, she stirs the reader's imagination. In this way, we can sense Clover's growth throughout the story. Whereas at the beginning we infer her young mind through her observations, her childish use of the language and her way of recalling her mom's warnings; at the end of the book her actions and comments demonstrate her development as a character.

To illustrate these points, we see how Clover at first expresses her thoughts through sentence structure that reflect her young age. She says, for instance:

> She never sat on that fence with anybody,
> that girl didn't. (Woodson 2001a: 4)

or

> She looked sad sometimes,
> that girl did. (Woodson 2001a: 8)

Through these statements not only is she articulating her thoughts in order to reaffirm herself, but also revealing her concern about that unknown white girl who seems lonely and blue. Furthermore, this same concern brings to light Clover's warm heart, inner curiosity and feeling of uncertainty on how to act. This is evident again when she recalls the time when they were jumping rope and Annie asked if she could play:

> And my friend Sandra said no
> without even asking the rest of us.

> I don't know what I would have said.
> Maybe yes. Maybe no. (Woodson 2001a: 6)

Clover's words invite the reader to reflect with her about her dilemma. She is having a hard time understanding the whole racial issue. Some of the questions she might want to answer could be: Would you play with a person from the other side of the fence? Or rather, why would you not play with a person who has a different skin color? And why is there such a distance between black and white people? The fact that Clover feels bothered by her friend Sandra's reply reveals that she does not necessarily agree with the group's decision and she is an independent thinker.

Clover's initial way to sort out her problem is to ask her mom. Woodson again portrays a typical reaction in any given child, not just an African American one. And it is here when the writer makes an explicit critique of the history of segregation in America through the mother's response to her daughter: "…that's the way things have always been" (Woodson 2001a: 8), she says. This simple statement can be subject to different interpretations. As a child, Clover might infer that this is one of those complicated matters about which grown-ups avoid talking. However, as the curious girl that she is, there is another question that it is still pending even though she does not utter it: Why? Why have things always been that way? One of Woodson's achievements is her ability to trigger questions in the young reader's mind regardless of his or her cultural background or skin color. Another achievement is her subtle way of pointing out the past of injustice and discrimination that many African Americans suffered. In fact, she does this without even mentioning it. This is something that the adults know and what we are more likely to interpret out of the mother's statement. Certainly, we understand that the mother's first reaction is to protect her daughter. She does not want to tell her, at least not yet, that there is distance between blacks and whites because in the past blacks were taken as slaves by whites; there is distance because blacks were disregarded as human beings and considered inferior. Ultimately, there is distance because there are old wounds that still have not healed and possibly too because blacks themselves now choose to have that distance as a way to feel safe. Again, this is a significant reflection for every reader to make, not just an African American one.

But Woodson's story goes further than that. It is not her intention to instigate hatred or accuse anybody. On the contrary, the message in her picture book is one of optimism.

As Cindy Giorgis and Nancy Johnson indicate, the author's "hopeful child's voice [and the illustrator] E.B. Lewis' watercolors capture the powerful mood of the story, the longing for friendship revealed by the girls' body language" (2001a: 310). As already mentioned, Woodson's message echoes Du Bois' philosophy that considers that "the history of the American Negro is the history of his strife. […] He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (1903: 5). There is no doubt that among the themes of the book are attempts to support the ongoing struggle for equality, racial pride, strength and self-definition, but also interracial relationships, the role of the family and the community in the shaping of identity, and the role of education for both black and white children. For Du Bois, African American people are gifted with a second-sight. They can develop a double consciousness that allow them to be proud of their heritage while at the same time be American; that means living in the United States together with everybody else no matter the racial designation.

For Clover, Annie is like an enigma that she wants to decipher but does not know how to start. The important thing is that she is willing to try. She narrates how that summer

> (o)n rainy days that girl sat on the fence in a raincoat.
> She let herself get all wet and acted like she didn't even care.
> Sometimes I saw her dancing around in puddles,
> splashing and laughing. (Woodson 2001a: 9)

Clover is puzzled about how someone who lives so close can feel so distant and foreign to her. Here the author portrays a contrast between the two girls, and how Clover is in the process of developing that double consciousness that would let her figure out the white girl. It is significant that Annie is portrayed as the other, that is, the different one. On the contrary, Clover, as the self, appears inside her house looking out through the window. The watercolor illustrations are also crucial at this point. They set a tone of warmth, happiness and love. E.B. Lewis gives the reader a glimpse of Clover's home paying attention to details such as the four-tray shelf full of books, the book on the ottoman next to the armchair as if someone is currently reading it, the xylophone on the floor, and the picture frames. They symbolize knowledge, dignity, creativity, self-esteem, and most importantly, they break old stereotypes about black people related to

their lack of interest in reading and learning or their poor living conditions. In *The Other Side*, home is a comfort zone.

On the other hand, it is necessary to pay attention to Clover's words on this page. As Nancy D. Tolson puts it, "a good picture book for children consists of illustrations that validate the words and vice versa, creating a much fuller understanding for the child" (2008: 38). Clover says:

> Mama wouldn't let me go out in the rain.
> "That's why I bought you rainy-day toys",
> my mama said.
> "You stay inside here – where it's warm and
> safe and dry".
> But every time it rained, I looked for that girl.
> And I always found her.
> Somewhere near the fence. (Woodson 2001a: 12)

The author's use of language here illustrates the previous ideas about Clover's mom taking good care of her but also the child's restless mind and desire to go outside. The use of "but" at the beginning of the fourth sentence reveals Clover' slight rebellious attitude. Her mom's words do not comfort her at this moment. It seems as if there is something else in her head, as if she could not stop thinking about that girl on the other side of the fence. The rain is both outside and in her own thoughts. Woodson's language style in this excerpt can be related to Henry Louis Gates, Jr's theory of Signifyin(g), a uniquely black rhetorical concept, entirely textual or linguistic, rooted in the black vernacular tradition by which a second statement or figure repeats, or tropes, or reverses the first (Gates 1987: 49). In black vernacular, Signifying is verbal play. It is a rhetorical strategy, a sign that words cannot be trusted, that even the most literal utterance allows room for interpretation. In other words, what is said by a person must be understood in terms of context and other factors, rather than in and of itself. In this case, the fence stands up as a barrier that separates people but further than that, as an obstacle that also impedes access to knowledge. Clover becomes aware of her lack of understanding and every time she is confused (every time it rains), she tries to find an answer (she looks for that girl), and that answer is always near the fence. As a result, she realizes that the fence is the key and therefore, she has a strong desire to overcome it. Rising above the fence means defeating separation and inequality but over all, defeating ignorance.

Similarly, a double reading can also be done on the following page of the book when Clover narrates:

> Someplace in the middle of the summer, the rain stopped.
> When I walked outside, the grass was damp
> and the sun was already high up in the sky.
> And I stood there with my hands up in the air.
> I felt brave that day. I felt free.

Following Gates' theory of Signifying, the fact that the rain stopped and the sun began to shine can be read as the end of Clover's conflict. She has made up her mind. Now she feels free to do what she wants to do. For that reason, it is not without significance, that on the next page the climax of the story takes place: Clover gathers her courage, approaches the fence and talks to Annie for the first time.

As the story progresses, in the last part of the book, Clover shows her growth and mental development. She becomes friends with Annie, sits on the fence with her, dares to disregard Sandra and her other African American friends and even succeeds eventually in integrating Annie to the group by playing all together. In the very end, what was originally a barrier becomes a link between the two sides. The author leaves a final hopeful message for the reader through Annie and Clover's words:

> "Someday somebody's going to come along
> and knock this old fence down". Annie said.
> And I nodded. "Yeah", I said. "Someday". (Woodson 2001a: 29)

From a literary point of view, when the reader is assured that all is well and will continue to be, we can say that the denouement is closed, or that the plot has a closed ending. In this case, the tying of the loose ends is thoroughly optimistic. There is no anxiety for black or white children on the last page of the story. It ends with Clover and Annie imagining a fenceless world. Both of them agree on the idea of knocking the fence down, assuming that it is old, from a different era and not from their own. Likewise, it is important that it is Annie the one who stated the idea first and not Clover showing thus a similarity between the viewpoints of the two girls.

Along this line of argument, we see how the first conflict in the story has been solved. Clover has come to terms with the racial reality in which she lives, she has acquired a new outlook on life –she has been brave to become friends with Annie and sit on the fence; all that means new knowledge. By contrast, the second conflict, the social and racial issues are still pending. The idea of sitting on the fence symbolizes the girls

coming to terms with the fact that racism exists. Knocking the fence down would symbolize the end of it. The pictures here show us that Clover and Annie are not alone. There are four more girls sitting on the fence or playing around it. This issue is one that affects them too. As Clover and Annie talk, their friends listen to them. They all hope for the fence to be demolished some day.

To sum up, it is evident that Woodson's narrative style aligns with the Black Arts Movements and aesthetic. While as Violet J. Harris points out "a single Black aesthetic does not exist [and] rather, some core tenets can be found in the philosophies espoused by individuals" (2007: 1018); in *The Other Side* it is evident how the author's political views lead her to the literary objective of enveloping black children in a sense of respect, pride and love throughout the story. In consequence, Woodson's story not only is grounded in the African American experience but also attempts to deconstruct and reconstruct what it means to be a black person in a white society. In addition, the plot, representation of characters, point of view, setting, and tone aim to encourage and agitate positive thoughts and actions into black children's lives. As we have seen, *The Other Side* portrays the initiation of a child's racial reality in the United States. It presents a story that is necessary in order for black children to receive a more realistic view of the world that surrounds them. In this way, Woodson's book educates African American children who in the past often "felt ignored, mentally abused and confused from exposure to books that are invisible to their child's identity" (Tolson 2008: 2). The next question then that needs to be addressed is why it should be implied that the target audience of *The Other Side* is only African American young readers. Why should not European and American white children read it? This book is a tool of reflection and enrichment that demonstrates racial and cultural understanding for all children. It portrays themes that affect all human beings no matter the racial designation. By reading a book written from the perspective of an African American girl in children's terms, young white readers also could gain an understanding of how all children have similar concerns as they grow up. European and American white children could thus begin to reflect on the past of oppression and discrimination that black Americans endured. Clove and Annie represent a new generation of children who are brave to disregard the skin color historical differences and forge a friendship. *The Other Side* is thus a book with multicultural characters and themes that can be regarded as an

aesthetic exploration of the human experience in the process of the acquisition of knowledge. That is what makes it universal.

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Anzaldúa and 'the new mestiza': A Chicana dives into collective identity

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ABSTRACT

In this article I analyze how Gloria Anzaldúa's seventh essay in *Borderlands/La Frontera:The New Mestiza*, titled "*La conciencia de la mestiza*: Towards a New Consciousness", condenses and portrays a development towards the *mestiza* consciousness presented in the first six essays in the book. This is a well-structured as well as fluid process in which each step guides us in a complex identity-building awareness. This process is an inner journey as well as an evolution in the public scene where the "new *mestiza*" has to revise and reinvent herself in several ways in order to acquire "the *mestiza* consciousness". This essay is also a clear example in which Anzaldúa represents three voices: the "I", the "we" and the "she". These voices are one of Anzaldúa's strategies for diving into what she understands as her collective identity as a Chicana and as a "new *mestiza*". As will be shown in this article, the author moves among these voices for various purposes of identity-construction.

Keywords: identity, awareness, mestiza, voices, Anzaldúa, Chicana

"With terror as my companion, I dip
into my life and begin work on myself"
Gloria Anzaldúa

The image of diving into collective identity featured in the title of this essay comes from my perception that Gloria Anzaldúa does not stay on the surface of reality. She immerses herself in the sea of strengths, weaknesses, limitations and joys that experimenting with the construction of one's own identity creates. The autobiographical experience is fundamental for Anzaldúa as she constantly refers to it in her work. But she does not forget the multiple connections she maintains with other women, queer or heterosexual, with the land, with her family, with her personal past and the deep past of her people (reaching far back to the time of the Aztecs). It is a process of holding her breath before her complex personal reality and the varied realities around her and then exhaling the reflections and the learned lessons gained throughout this metaphorical swimming. I only met her once and she was able to understand my cultural and personal

borderlands as a woman from the Canary Islands (Spain) who is frequently not identified as a Spaniard because of my Canarian accent and who identifies with many aspects of South American and Cuban culture. Anzaldúa could dive under and see through the basic information she had about me to connect with my own borderlands. I am no exception. Her masterpiece, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, is proof that her analysis goes beyond mere facts about the Chicano/a world to achieve powerful critical knowledge about its painful history, gender struggles, and mythical figures.

In this article I analyze how the seventh essay in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, titled "*La conciencia de la mestiza*: Towards a New Consciousness", condenses and portrays a development towards the *mestiza* consciousness presented in the first six essays in the book. This is a well-structured as well as fluid process in which each step guides us in a complex identity-building awareness. I see this process as an inner journey as well as an evolution in the public scene where the "new *mestiza*" has to revise and reinvent herself in several ways in order to acquire the *mestiza* consciousness. The seventh essay is also a clear example in which Anzaldúa represents three voices, the "I", the "we" and the "she". These voices are one of Anzaldúa's strategies for diving into what she understands as her collective identity as a Chicana and as a "new *mestiza"*. As will be shown here, the author moves among these voices for various purposes of identity-construction.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa verbalizes several Chicana realities, including that of her Indigenous ancestors, her mother's Mexican heritage, and the undocumented status of women in the U.S. In addition, she traces the linguistic frustrations experienced by Chicana academics. The Chicana/o realities she represents are the result both of various encounters in her own life as well as the experiences of others that she has gathered into herself. Anzaldúa voices a theoretical Chicana/o positionality in her paradigm of the "new *mestiza*" who "has a plural personality and who operates in a pluralistic mode" (1987: 79). Anzaldúa theorizes the Chicana identity conflict within a feminist, personal, collective, cultural and racial context. Because of multicultural and multiracial influences, the new *mestiza* expresses herself with behaviors, words, and attitudes that are sometimes contradictory. She learns to tolerate the fact that her racial and cultural identity is not clear to Anglo-Americans or Mexicans, and she adapts her behavior to

each situation. In other words, "she learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view" (1987: 79).

Anzaldúa herself identifies primarily with her Indigenous roots and she often questions her Hispanic as well as Anglo-Saxon heritage. She resists accommodating the identifying labels that patriarchal society, with its absolute terms, compels her to do. Likewise, she rejects choosing between her racial and historical influences or positioning herself as either a Mexican or North American. She rejects "the dual personality"[1] that catalogues her as a Mexican-American and welcomes the new "*mestiza*'s" plural personality that embraces all the different parts of which she is made. The cultural mixture and the personal evolution meet in the "new *mestiza*" who presents herself as subject of her own changes.

Through her image of the "new *mestiza",* Anzaldúa encourages Chicanas to break alienating dichotomies of thought. According to critic María C. González "for Anzaldúa dual thinking has split the individual into an unhealthy creature. This dualism has continued to reproduce itself to become the dominant system of thought" (1996: 29). To resist the dual thinking of Western culture, Anzaldúa suggests that we must first unlearn "the *puta/virgen* dichotomy" (1987: 84). Rejecting the Virgin/whore construct means annulling sexist prejudices that classify women according to their sexual and social behavior. To start dissolving this dichotomy the "new *mestiza*" has to break the patriarchal socially-established roles and behaviors believed to be correct for their gender. According to Anzaldúa then, "La *mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations" (1987: 79).

In addition, the "new *mestiza*" is a powerful image of the Chicana's appropriation of her independence. Her potent self-definition begins after she has faced and tolerated the conflicts generated by her hybrid identity. According to Rebolledo, "Anzaldúa also clearly defined the historical oppression that made women feel they couldn't cross the borders, and the empowerment that occurred when they realized that it was their choice" (1995: 103). Anzaldúa states it thusly: "My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian

[1] Maria Lugones' term to define the personality, of Anglo-Saxon creation, where one dash separates the author's cultural group from American nationality, as it is in Mexican-American. As Lugones says: "According to this concept, there is no hybrid cultural self. It is part of the Anglo imagination that we can keep our culture and assimilate, a position that would be contradictory if both cultures were understood as informing the 'real' fabric of everyday life" (1992: 35).

woman's history of resistance. […] So *mama, Raza,* how wonderful, *no tener que rendir cuentas a nadie*. I feel perfectly free to rebel against my culture" (1987: 21). When addressing the "Raza", Anzaldúa refers to the historical, racial and cultural forces of her people that have oppressed her and which she has trespassed in her search for liberation as a Chicana lesbian. As Anzaldúa sees it, resistance begins individually but must also expand to the Chicana collectivity.

I. THE PATH TOWARDS A MESTIZA CONSCIOUSNESS: SPACES FOR CULTURAL AND PERSONAL EVOLUTION

I suggest that the seventh essay of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa rewrites her personal experiences and analyzes the evolution of her life trajectory towards "the *mestiza*'s consciousness". She describes thusly: "Though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (1987: 80). The pain caused by this new consciousness is rooted in the rupture of paradigms from which her identity has been constructed and the rebellion against any ideology or behavior that would suppress "the new *mestiza"*. As much as her destiny, "El camino de la mestiza" (the *mestiza*'s way) includes places of change and spaces of transition towards a new way of thinking and feeling. A shared characteristic of what is referred to here is the permanent evolution of movement, its adaptability to external circumstances and personal conditions. The new *mestiza*'s consciousness is not a static condition but a beingness that is constantly redefined. According to Chéla Sandoval: "*La conciencia de la mestiza* is born of life lived in the 'crossroads' between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures: It is a developed subjectivity capable of transformation and relocation […]" (1998: 359). In Anzaldúa's words it is defined as an attempt "to work out a synthesis" in which "the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts" (1987: 79-80). This new consciousness emerges as a space of redefinition of what has been achieved as much as the creation of new ideas and images: "By creating a new mythos--that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave--la *mestiza* creates a new consciousness " (1987: 80).

The seventh essay brilliantly coalesces the six essays that precede it. In "El camino de la mestiza*",* which is one of the sections in the seventh essay, there is an echo of the issues

that Anzaldúa has tackled in the previous six essays. Initially she defends the construction of a new consciousness that implies a critical attitude toward her historical past. In order to understand the oppression suffered by the new *mestiza*, it is necessary to analyze it from its cultural and temporal origins. This is the task carried out by Anzaldúa, who, in her first essay, dedicated to "The Homeland, Aztlán/El Otro Mexico", re-writes the story of the Chicano people from her contemporary Chicana perspective. It is Anzaldúa's understanding that for the *mestiza* to initiate the road towards the constitution of the collective consciousness one has to look first at the individual and collective past in order to analyze the racial and cultural origins: "Her first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja*. Just what did she inherit from her ancestors? This weight on her back –which is the baggage from the Indian mother, which the baggage from the Spanish father, and which the baggage from the Anglo?" (1987: 82).

In the second essay, "Movimientos de rebeldía y culturas que traicionan", Anzaldúa tries to differentiate among "lo heredado, lo adquirido y lo impuesto" (1987: 82) (what has been inherited, acquired and imposed), which is another step in the *mestiza*'s journey. In this essay, she analyzes and accepts her rebelliousness, criticizing the influence of the Anglo-Saxon patriarchal culture while claiming her indigenous identity because it is "a new political stance as a fully racialized feminist Chicana" (Saldívar-Hull 1999: 5). In "Entering the serpent", the third essay in *Borderlands*, the narrator explores "lo heredado" (what has been inherited) from the former indigenous cultures: here she revises the patriarchal articulation of the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Llorona within culture and history. As Sonia Saldívar-Hull affirms, "By rewriting the stories of Malinali, La Llorona and the Virgin of Guadalupe, Anzaldúa is strategically reclaiming a ground for female historical presence" (1999: 6).

Anzaldúa re-invents these two myths from the Chicana feminist perspective of the "new *mestiza*", and this lays the groundwork for the next essay in which she incorporates Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess. In "La herencia de Coatlicue / The Coatlicue State", Anzaldúa analyzes in depth the nature of this change embodied in the figure of Coatlicue. Once she accepts this figure as the image of transformative strength, Anzaldúa breaks down emotionally due to the contradictions of her identity: "I locked the door, kept the world out; I vegetated, hibernated, remained in stasis, idled. No

telephone, no television, no radio. Alone with the presence in the room. Who? Me, my psyche, the Shadow Beast?" (1987: 44). Part of the process and progression of acknowledging difference in this breakdown, Anzaldúa realizes that "there are many defense strategies that the self uses to escape the agony of inadequacy and I have used all of them. I have split from and disowned those parts of myself that others rejected" (1987: 45). She realizes this is a collective crisis, for many Chicanos have felt like her: "As a person, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. […] we suspect that there is something 'wrong' with us, something fundamentally 'wrong'" (1987: 45). According to Anzaldúa many people (not only Chicanos) who find themselves in this situation keep busy doing mundane things in order to avoid "seeing" this painful inner reality, and thus "awareness does not happen" (1987: 45). This is the moment to see "the face of fear in the mirror" so that "it registers in our consciousness" (1987: 45). Because of this risk of being paralized by the fear of not overcoming this feeling of being inferior, "the *Coatlicue* State can be a way station or it can be a way of life" as this goddess is "the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche" (1987: 46), those we would rather not recognize.

In the fifth essay, "How to tame a wild tongue", Anzaldúa powerfully revises and interprets the multilingual Chicana identity; she describes her linguistic experience as a Chicana woman living in Texas, while she rejects the self-marginalization practiced by many Chicanas and resists the social contempt aroused by her use of both Spanish and English. Anzaldúa advocates for a variety of Chicana languages while she vindicates Chicano Spanish as a language that synthesizes both the Spanish and the Anglo-American influences, enabling the development of new terms in both. Yet this is not the only language that represents Chicanos, as "there is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience" (1987: 58). The linguistic aspect goes hand in hand with the individual and collective Chicana awareness, for as Anzaldúa says, "I am my language" (1987: 59) and "if a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me" (1987: 58). Hers is a language claim that invokes her sexual, gender, and writerly identities. Indeed, there are so many culturally-specific taboos that are collectively given no representational space in it, she must assert, "I will overcome the tradition of silence" (1987: 59). The numerous uses of

language and what these mean to the rich construction of culture become a political and personal issue where her rebellion as a Chicana woman writer is also manifest.

Moving closer to a *mestiza* consciousness, in the seventh essay, in the section "El camino de la mestiza", the author does not establish a strict procedure for transformation. Each part of the process described is linked to what comes before and after but she also suggests that there are moments of change in which many elements of transformation occur simultaneously and non-linearly. During this journey, Anzaldúa revisions and reinvents the past as a lesbian Chicana feminist through the different modes in which this past manifests itself. These modes include mythology, historical facts, language, and the Aztec cultural heritage. Anzaldúa articulates this cultural recapitulation, and as a result her identity as a changing subject becomes more evident. Likewise, the "new *mestiza*"' also emerges as a feminine model of strength and openness to the progressive inner and fluid transformation required by this new consciousness.

The construction of the *mestiza*'s new consciousness is in itself a journey that the Chicana has to make all by herself. In this process, Anzaldúa positions herself before her own conflicts and addresses certain social groups. From the section "Que no se nos olviden los hombres" both Anzaldúa and the new *mestiza*'s attention are directed to the external world. She starts out quoting a poem in which she despises Chicana women: "Tú no sirves pa'nada- /you're good for nothing./Eres pura vieja" (1987: 83). Anzaldúa includes this type of colloquy frequently heard in the streets or any place where the Chicana's womanhood is not valued. While Anzaldúa's point of departure is the chauvinistic male complaint about the Chicana, she also questions where these men fit in her new consciousness. She confronts Chicano and Anglo-American men, asking them for their "individual we" to take a position and to acknowledge their role as oppressors: "we demand the admission/ acknowledgement/ disclosure/testimony that they wound us, violate us, are afraid of us and of our power" (1987: 84). Then Anzaldúa demands of the new masculine consciousness that men should discover their tenderness and not be afraid of it as "a sign of vulnerability" (1987: 84). As she recognizes, males and females are the victims of roles marked by the rigidity of the patriarchal system, which defines what it means to be a man. Hence, many heterosexual men are afraid of anything that could be considered feminine because "they are confused, and entangled

with sexist behaviors that they have not been able to eradicate" (1987: 84). Thus the transformation process Anzaldúa requires has a public and a private dimension.

In this same essay, in the section "Somos una gente" the "new *mestiza*" observes the Anglo-American white society from her cultural, racial, and gendered perspective. From the empowered position that the "new *mestiza*" has achieved, Anzaldúa addresses the *mestiza*'s collective needs, verbalizing their vindications. She asks nothing less than that white North Americans pay attention to such claims:"We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negotiation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect" (1987: 85). This is another step in the transformation towards a *mestiza* consciousness, the moment of collective self-acknowledgement before the Anglo-Saxon, North American society.

Anzaldúa asks for historical acknowledgement not only of the Chicanos' presence in American history but also of the abuses they suffered due to social difference, racism, and linguistic and cultural contempt. Her stance is one of conciliation with white society, for as she says: "I, for one, choose to use some of my energy to serve as mediator" (1987: 85). Although Anzaldúa does not give up her fight, she believes in the possibility of finding common ground instead of separating one from the other. For example, she proclaims,

> I think we need to allow whites to be our allies. Through our literature, art, *corridos*, and folk-tales we must share our history with them so when they set up committees to help Big Mountain Navajos or the Chicano farmworkers or los Nicaragüenses they won't turn people away because of their racial fears and ignorances (1987: 85)

Lack of knowledge of the Chicana culture increases cultural stereotypes that many people alien to the community believe. In contrast, Anzaldúa cherishes all those aspects which constitute Chicana culture, including *corridos*, art, history and she asserts that this culture should be better known and appreciated for its cultural richness. After asking for an acknowledgement of Chicana's culture and history, Anzaldúa ends the section opening a door to dialogue with white society: "And finally tell us what you need from us" (1987: 86). Anzaldúa's deeply considered emotional and psychic progression through a fluid experience of a range of issues to attain a *mestiza* consciousness is necessary. Confronting and naming the abuses perpetrated by white

society against Chicanos makes it possible for Anzaldúa to achieve an attitude in willing to find a way out to old and latent conflicts.

In the section titled "El día de la Chicana", Anzaldúa emphasizes her identity as a "new *mestiza*", considering herself part of that Chicana collectivity. She describes the ritual that takes place in her house every December the second, "when my sun goes into my first house" (1987: 88); this is a time when the influence of religion, astrology, and cultural beliefs converge. From her individual identity, she reaffirms the new *mestiza*'s collective identity to which she belongs: "On that day I affirm who we are" (1987: 88). She accepts all the parts of the group identity to which she belongs saying, "On that day I gather the splintered and disowned parts of *la gente mexicana* and hold them in my arms. *Todas las partes de nosotros valen*" (1987: 88). In this section there is a strong connection between the "I" and the "we" as differentiated identities that are linked by common needs and experiences. Thus this celebration day is a culmination of the process leading to *mestiza* consciousness.

Acknowledging the culture's collective weaknesses and longings, Anzaldúa celebrates a culturally and spiritually compelling ritual for the Chicana/o collectivity. As she describes it, "On that day I say, Yes, all you people wound us when you reject us. Rejection strips us of self-worth; our vulnerability exposes us to shame". She continues by accepting the responsibility of overcoming pain as a means to a rebirth of the Chicana way, saying, "We can longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the pathological parts, the queer parts, the vulnerable parts. Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic. Let's try it our way, the mestiza way, the Chicana way, the woman way" (1987: 88). This individual celebration of the collective holds in it all the painful processes of past experience described in the previous six essays, the difficult understandings of her own contradictions, and the daring new beginnings of being a "new *mestiza*".

The "new *mestiza*" is a survivor; she has overcome the rupture with cultural patriarchal patterns and the limitations of gender. She has confronted her most obscure side, or her "Shadow Beast", her fears and shame. Thus declares the right to decide for herself who she wants to be. As Anzaldúa writes: "*se hace moldeadora de su alma*" (1987: 83). After having been away from her home in Texas, Anzaldúa returns to her origins and to

her geographical birthplace, a borderland of survivors of poverty. She returns to the first years of her life in "El retorno", the last section in the seventh essay, where there is plenty of autobiographical information. Returning to the past through her memories, she recovers tastes and images of herself and her brothers and sisters working the land. Anzaldúa returns to her land with an irrecoverable image of the land she left.

Associated with her memories of the Valley, there are cultural elements which came to be part of her memories such as the Mexican cemeteries "blooming with artificial flowers" (1987: 89), the local TV programs which she missed "where hosts speak in half and half, and where awards are given in the category of Tex-Mex music" (1987: 89). She also missed meals "*el sabor de los tamales de rez y venado*" (1987: 89). She realizes that the Valley has changed; likewise, she is not the same woman who left. Instead, she returns as the "new *mestiza*", convinced that there is no going back from her new consciousness, though aware that she will always be part of that landscape in her memories. Anzaldúa mixes images of old memories together with the new ones she finds when she returns and emphasizes what links her with some people of the mythic past: "Like the ancients I worship the rain god and the maize goddess" (1987: 90). Further, she points out what differentiates her when she comes back: "unlike my father I have recovered their names" (1987: 90). In doing so she reminds us that she has trespassed the cultural limits of the Valley in order to recover her Indigenous legacy.

In conclusion, the consciousness of the "new *mestiza*" proposed by Anzaldúa is a structural process of change in which the acceptance of cultural and personal problems, the meeting and intermixing of different groups with which Anzaldúa identifies, and the possibility of reconciliation with the white society conflate in a linear and non-linear fashion. It is a diving that arises from personal experience and expands to the external world, to the *mestiza*'s social environment that rejects the macho's role and questions the concept of masculinity in the Chicana community to finally return to the author's origins in Texas. By coming back to her homeland, Anzaldúa has carried out a transformation that has an influence in the new *mestiza*'s perspective. She is not the same woman who had left the Valley; while looking at her previous reality with new eyes, she has become more critical, knowing what it means to live there. Her memories link her with a space that only exists in her mind, though she also rescues her sense of the connection with the land, smells, and tastes of her historical past.

II. THE NEW MESTIZA'S INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Defining "the new *mestiza*" as at a racial, cultural, social and sexual crossroads, Anzaldúa does not refer to her as "*mestiza*" because she is the result of the mixing of two races but because she receives the cultures and races of various worlds, including the Mexican, the indigenous, the Spanish, and the Anglo-Saxon. The word "*mestiza*" is politically positioned at a multiracial, and multicultural meeting point. In an interview given in 1991, Anzaldúa defines the "new *mestiza*" as "kind of border woman who is able to negotiate between different cultures and cross over from one to the other and therefore has a perspective of all those different worlds that someone who is monocultural cannot have" (Blanco 1991: 4). This perspective of "the new *mestiza*" generates inner conflicts because she has difficulties positioning herself culturally, but it also allows her to discover her capacity to differentiate between what she wants and what she rejects in her identity. The *mestiza* perspective helps her to increase her tolerance and to amplify her vision of the world: "she is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking" (1987: 82). The use of the adjective "new" for the word "*mestiza*" and "conscience" announces an identity that is innovative and unknown previous to the publication of *Borderlands*.

Anzaldúa's individual identity, which recognizes itself as a "new *mestiza",* builds bridges with the collectivity, these being other *mestizas*, the homosexual Chicano or Anglo community and the Chicano world as a whole. As as a *mestiza*, Anzaldúa belongs to all of these group identities because as a "new *mestiza*" she accepts her multiple alliances. When uniting with these different groups from her spoken position as "we", she puts into words the collective claims of each of the different groups. From the first person voice, she claims her right to transcend dualities, she clarifies that her identity is not the sum of the Chicana/Mexicana and the Anglo-American self and that these are mixed with a "third element" or the "*mestiza* consciousness". From her stance as an "I" she accepts and welcomes all the identities that form her "plural personality". The "new *mestiza*" learns to tolerate living with her different cultural and racial elements to turn them into something new and complex. Anzaldúa adopts these three voices or cases, making the most of each perspective to identify with different groups of people and aspects of herself.

Being a Chicana, Anzaldúa recognizes herself in the experience of "the new *mestiza*" and includes herself in the collective identity of "the new *mestizas"*. To talk about "the new *mestiza",* Anzaldúa makes use of the third person singular as well as the first person singular and plural, moving among them as equivalents. Each grammatical case is an "ideological I" which "face[s] the ideologies of the gendered subordination of women and heteronormativity" (Smith and Watson 2001: 63). I suggest that Anzaldúa makes use of these multiple selected subject positions in order to contest and revise inherited gender and cultural roles and behaviors.

When she speaks from the first person singular, she connects herself with her most intimate and personal identity. For example, as a lesbian *mestiza* she acknowledges her nationality and race as universal: "As a *mestiza* I have no country […] yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)" (1987: 80).

Using the "I" she also defines her feminism and her new culture as a "new *mestiza*": "I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanic and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture" (1987: 80-81). In this definition, she positions herself at the crossroads of the dualities in any of her attitudes, and she decides to be simultaneously both. In this way, she puts into practice her proposal that "the new *mestiza*" must show "in her work how duality is transcended" (1987: 80) and be "on both shores at once" (1987: 78), the "shores" representing the poles or extremes (of behavior, values, etc) among which the Chicana has traditionally had to choose. Even when Anzaldúa's statements are contradictory, the "new *mestiza*" transcends them as she lives with both. Accepting her new hybrid identity, she writes, "Soy un amasamiento, I am act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings" (1987: 81). Anzaldúa uses the image of the dough or "el amasamiento", in which various ingredients mix to give something new as a result, something that has a direct relationship with its components as it comes from them but which has its own texture and weight. In the same manner, the "new *mestiza*'s" own identity is marked by her origins but she transcends them to

become a critical being who rejects any cultural or gender assimilation that could overshadow her.

In contrast, when Anzaldúa refers to "the new *mestiza*", she chooses to use "she", the third person singular. When using this case, Anzaldúa gains a certain distance from her own personal "I", but she appropriates objectivity by observing the "she" as a complex constructed reality. The female third person singular adopted by Anzaldúa for "the new *mestiza*" is the chosen subject to carry out change. In other words, this is a change that cannot happen if it does not begin from a personal starting point, though it must move as well to the "she" position where activism occurs. The "new *mestiza*" learns to adapt to the worlds she belongs to and develops open strategies for this purpose, "She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. […] Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche" (1987: 79). She also carries out this process "by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (1987: 79). This is a "she" voice that decides to position herself as an active subject of her own changes, "La *mestiza* has gone from being the sacrificial goat to becoming the officiating priestess at the crossroads" (1987: 80).

The "she" for the "new *mestiza*" is also a potential "we" as it invites the Chicana collectivity (as well as other identities) to join in the transformative process of creating a new and powerful identity. Anzaldúa uses a very significant image, that of corn to define the shared qualities of the *mestiza* with many Chicanas when she says, "Indigenous like corn, like corn, the *mestiza* is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions" (1987: 81). Anzaldúa continues, "she holds tight to the earth-she will survive the crossroads" (1987: 81).

Yet this "she" voice also includes Anzaldúa's "I", for the author's personal decisions and her life experience push her to envision and write the "new *mestiza*". As she states, "As a mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover" (1987: 80).

When the narrator speaks from the "we" position, it is normally to include herself in the collectivity of Chicana women, to represent, together with other *mestizas*, those values that unite them and identify them as a group. The image of the stone captures this identity: "We are the coarse rock" (1987: 81). Even when the rock can stand as an

image of impenetrability, the permeability or openness to other external influences is clear: "We are the porous rock in the stone metate" (1987: 81). It is this combination of the resistance of the rock and its porous nature that describes the common characteristic of Chicanas who often protect themselves as well as open up to a multicultural experience. Although it may appear to be a contradiction because the rock is both porous and resistant, at the same time Anzaldúa is creating a culturally-specific image of amplified female power. Anzaldúa also expresses the "mestizaje" in the widest sense of the word when she says "Somos el amasijo" (1987: 81) (we are the dough). Anzaldúa uses the image of the elaboration of tortillas as a cultural metaphor for the formation of the cultural and gender identity of "the new *mestiza*". Anzaldúa describes the process of making "tortillas de masa" as a synonym of how "new *mestizas*" go through different parts of themselves. Anzaldúa creates what I call a collective and cultural self-definition as she mixes the personal with meaningful shared cultural elements. She identifies with the tortillas and with the specific utensils which are necessary to make them: *el metate*, *el comal*, and *el molcajete*. She includes the strong-flavored ingredients such as cumin, garlic, pepper, and red chile. The elements to make these tortillas are varied and culturally-specific, a metaphor for the complexity of her Chicana/Mexicana lesbian identity. The identification happens with the ingredients, the process, and the result.

The communal "we" sometimes turns into an individual "we" as in "Que no se nos olviden los hombres". Although the reality she tackles in this section may be shared by many Chicanas, she makes a direct reference to her experience with her father as a man, and her sense of how his masculinity was perceived in her family. It is the individual "we" that includes her as well as her siblings, a smaller unique community experience of the father figure. Analyzing the meaning of "macho" for her father, Anzaldúa writes that it has connotations of "being strong enough to protect and support [us], yet being able to show love". The more well-known negative use of macho, she insists, "is actually an Anglo invention" (1987: 83). She then makes the more individual "we" stand for the whole male Chicano culture as she also tries to understand why men abuse women saying: "Though we understand the root of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it" (1987: 83). In this use of "we", Anzaldúa assumes the collective dignity and the self-respect that are necessary to face abuse. Through this "we"

Anzaldúa represents the "new *mestizas*" as strong and resistant to violence so typical of their history.

Later on in the same section, "we" includes homosexual men of all races and nationalities together with lesbians: "We come from all colors, all classes, all races, all time periods" (1987: 84). This form of "we" indicates solidarity with transnational homosexual identities. Anzaldúa claims the importance of the contributions made by minorities in the homosexual community. "Colored homosexuals", she writes, "have always been at the forefront […] of all liberation struggles in this country; have suffered more injustices and have survived them despite all odds" (1987: 85). As somebody who is affected by the marginality suffered by this group, the author claims collective acknowledgement in Chicano society for the creative work, asserting that "Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer. People, listen to what your jotería is saying" (1987: 85).

In "By your true faces we will know you", in the seventh part of the seventh essay, the "we" includes all Chicanos (men and women) in a situation of disadvantage and discrimination because of white oppression: "The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with it ignorance […] we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves" (1987: 86). Anzaldúa's "narrating I" mixes with the "narrated I"[2] through the use of the "we". She is her people as she has also suffered discrimination in various forms and is conscious of the struggle that the Chicana/o collectivity has and is still going through to gain recognition. She is able to look at the situation from outside as a writer and critic and also as a long-marginalized subject. Anzaldúa includes herself within the Chicano collectivity as the subject who writes and the object (as part of the group) of her writing. The plural subject unifies Anzaldúa's many hurt selves with the discriminated people she writes about.

The "new *mestiza*" analyzes, culls, and reconstitutes her identity within an individual and group frame, but there is not a border between her "I" and her "we" as subject. When analyzing her personal experience, Anzaldúa creates a space of identification and representation for other Chicanas. When speaking from the plural subject position, she has previously had to identify with a reality shared with others, either Chicanas/os in

[2] The "narrated I" and "the narrating I" are terms coined by critics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001) to refer to the writing subject and the narrated object of narration.

general or the homosexual community. The process of recreating identity that Anzaldúa proposes, whether that identity is individual or collective, is non-linear and progressive, fluid and concrete. We learn the complexity of her identity as she positions herself in the different voices. Recognizing the historical and cultural information, analysis, and different positioning as well as the claims of each one of them, it is clear that this text "provide[s] witness for other, create[s] a community of affirmation, and encourage[s] social transformation" (Hall 2001: 104). In other words, *Borderlands* itself through its stages of transformation and the many identities it re-presents and becomes (I, she, we) is a real representation of the collectivity.

Borderlands has marked a before and an after within the construction of the Chicana identity. Verbalizing the concept of "borderland" was a point of departure for Anzaldúa. Like many other Chicanas, she felt the pressure to choose among the different cultures and ideologies from which she came. In *Borderlands* Anzaldúa dares to reveal silenced and repressed feelings within the Chicanas' literary panorama. She exposes rage and frustration and takes a stance through her vindication of a multicultural social and sexual identity. Resisting the Anglo-American dominant system's literary and political assimilation, she creates a body of work which represents lesbian Chicanas, and Chicanas/os in general, who as a community share a cultural and historical memory of social discrimination.

Gloria Anzaldúa enjoys the privilege of being different. Through her work she vindicates her right to be Chicana, *mestiza*, Indian, lesbian, feminist, writer, and critic. *Borderlands* represents Anzaldúa's multicultural, racial, multilingual, and historical experience; likewise, it presents diverse realities that constitute Chicana's complex collective memory. Anzaldúa considers Chicanas' strength as a collectivity necessary to make social transformation possible. Her text aims to generate changes in the individual and collective thought. As I have shown, she establishes a bridge between herself and her reader, using various voices as a strategy. These multiple identities connect her with many different groups of women: Chicanas, Texans, lesbians, writers, and women of Mexican descent who in one way or another may see themselves reflected in her words. Anzaldúa speaks as a lesbian Chicana in the Mexican-American frontier, but she certainly does not exclude other cultural groups who could see themselves represented in her journey across personal and collective experience.

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Wordarrows: The performative power of language in N. Scott Momaday's non-fiction work

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on two non-fiction works by Native American author N. Scott Momaday: his 1969 historical memoir *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and his essay collection *The Man Made of Words* It specifically tackles performative conceptions of language in the Kiowa storytelling tradition, where words are experienced as speech acts that have the power to intervene in surrounding realities. Taking into account 20th century ethno-cultural and linguistic policies in the United States, the article also reflects on the role indigenous languages may play in contemporary Native American Literature, which has most often been written in English.

Keywords: N. Scott Momaday, Kiowa, indigenous languages and cultures, history of the United States, Native American Literature

> "We cannot exhaust the power of words; that power is intrinsic"
> N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*

> "A well-chosen word, like a well-made arrow, pierces the heart"
> Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Literary Renaissance*

I. INTRODUCTION

This article explores Native American author N. Scott Momaday's Kiowa-based theory of language and culture as sketched in his experimental historical piece *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and in some of his early essays[1]. Originally published in 1969, although based on an earlier text (his 1967 privately-printed edition entitled *The Journey of Tai-Me*), *The Way to Rainy Mountain* operates both as a history of the Kiowa people and as a familiar memoir filtered through personal reminiscences. It is considered, together with Momaday's Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *House Made of Dawn* (1968), one of the key inaugural texts of the Native American Renaissance – a

[1] Research for this article has been supported by the R+D project "La cultura como recurso de desarrollo. Prácticas, discursos y representaciones en procesos modernizadores contemporaneous", financed by the Spanish Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación.

rich literary movement that brought public visibility and recognition to First Nations authors from a wide variety of Native and mixed heritages[2].

Born in Lawton, Oklahoma, of Kiowa and Cherokee descent, Momaday spent his childhood and youth among the Tewa-speaking Native Pueblos of New Mexico, in the town of Jemez, where his father was a school principal. He continued to live in New Mexico during his college years and later in California, while completing his doctoral studies at Stanford University – always far from the Kiowa landscape he so vividly evokes in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (*WRM* henceforth). As he explains in his autobiography *The Names. A Memoir*, Jemez Pueblo "was my home from the time I was twelve until I ventured out to seek my fortune in the world" (Momaday 1976: 11).

Mirroring his personal spatial dislocations, Momaday's *WRM* is symbolically divided into three thematic blocks having to do with movement: "The Setting Out", "The Going On", and "The Closing In". These sections recall the nomadic journey of the Kiowa from their ancestral Northwestern territory through the Great Plains until they reached the upper Arkansas river region, where they finally settled before it became Indian Territory and then Oklahoma, a state of the new American nation[3]. Momaday's autobiographical journey within *WRM* also charts such a shift, imagining the author as he returns home to Rainy Mountain Creek to visit his grandmother's burial ground in the Kiowa reservation, where he spent significant periods of his early childhood[4]. This

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[2] In 1968 the American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in Minneapolis and a year later, as Native activists began the 20-month occupation of Alcatraz Island in protest for centuries of suppression of American Indian socio-political, territorial, cultural, and linguistic rights, Momaday's novel was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Together with *The Way to Rainy Mountain*'s coming to light, 1969 was also the year of publication of *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, a groundbreaking political and philosophical piece by Native American intellectual Vine Deloria. Fostered by such historical turning point, the first Native American Studies programs were launched at the University of California, Berkeley, and at the University of Minnesota at Twin Cities (Coulombe 2011:35). For a more detailed account of the origins of this literary movement and of Momaday's prominent position within it, see Kenneth Lincoln's 1983 *Native American Renaissance* and Jace Weaver's more recent "The mystery of language. N. Scott Momaday: An appreciation" (2008). Chad Allen (2005: 208) and Robert Warrior (2005: 154-6) further explore the links between Momaday's work and the late 1960s/early 1970s watershed context of Native American political and intellectual activism.

[3] The Kiowa reservation is currently located in southwestern Oklahoma, where the Kiowa had settled in the early nineteenth century. See Mooney (1979) and Kracht (2007) for further details.

[4] According to Edward Said, contemporary intellectual discourse is shifting from filiative to affiliative modes of relation. He describes filiation as "belong(ing) to the realms of nature and of 'life' whereas affiliation belongs exclusively to culture and society" (1983: 20). For a more detailed account of Momaday's af-filiative strategies in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and in his longer memoir *The Names* see Brígido-Corachán (2011).

memorial return of the author also builds a movement of *af-filiation* into tribal culture (Brígido-Corachán 2011: 114).

"The Setting Out", the opening section after Momaday's preface and introduction, describes the mythical emergence of the Kiowa into this world from a hollow log as well as their acquisition of cultural and religious traits as they met other tribes on their nomadic eastward journey. "The Going On" then includes various historical episodes from the period when the Kiowa were one of the most important warrior, buffalo-hunting societies on the Great Plains. Lastly, "The Closing In" turns to the last years of the Kiowa as an independent tribe at the close of the 19th century, prior to white dominance and reservation enclosure. These last historical reminiscences are based on direct eyewitness accounts preserved from family members and neighbors who lived through the experiences later to be translated by the author's Kiowa-speaking father, Al Momaday, a key figure in the chain of historical and linguistic transmission.

The work's three main sections are further divided into twenty-four short passages, which are visually and thematically organized in groups of three vignettes. Facing each other on the page, these vignettes weave creative interconnections between three dimensions: a mythical, a historical/ anthropological, and a familiar version of a story or reminiscence. These entwined dimensions are also reinforced, at times, by a fourth element, a series of drawings sketched by Momaday's father, Al. Momaday refers to these three juxtaposed textual discourses as voices whose narratives and personas move freely from the mythical to the personal or historical dimensions and vice versa, creating a "polyphonic version of Kiowa historiography that questions traditional divisions between fact and fiction, history and myth" (Brígido-Corachán 2011: 113-4). The first set of vignettes is organized around the idea of "coming out"; they describe the emergence of the Kiowa into the world and their symbolic first act of identity-construction through language: the self-naming of the tribe. The origin of the name "Kwuda", which means "coming out", is explained in both the mythical (the oral tradition) and the historical vignettes. Both dimensions are complemented by Momaday's personal reminiscence, as he "came out upon the Great Plain in the late spring" (1969/2001: 17), an encounter with his childhood landscape that will trigger the remembering act that is *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. In this manner, Momaday's first set of reflections specifically links the concepts of emergence and birth with language,

meaning and identity-making, as they are inscribed in the landscape and re-imagined through the linguistic act of memorial contemplation.

II. LANGUAGE, PERFORMATIVITY AND THE ORAL TRADITION

Symmetrically organized as a triptych between each facing page, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* lends equal weight to oral and written, visual, mythic, historical, and familiar sources as each is blended into a composite narrative form that is impossible to classify[5]. Elaine A. Jahner has described Momaday's historical and personal segments as a kind of "commentary" on the oral tradition, of which he himself is the audience. In this manner, the narrative process of this work becomes an imitation of a performative event. According to Jahner, "The perception of oneself as a member of a mythteller's audience – a member who is discovering one's own context of vital meaning (…) – is basic to understanding Momaday's role as the persona in his own work" (1983: 217). *The Way to Rainy Mountain* thus echoes the structural and aesthetic features that shape traditional Native storytelling and writing. They reproduce the oral story and also evoke what Daniel Mato denominates "extratextual acts" (1990: 16): an audience (as he dialogues with himself or listens to his grandmother's stories), a place (the homestead at Rainy Mountain Creek), a particular oral rhythm, and the conjuring up of voices from the past. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* recreates the performative aspects of the storytelling process within the text by summoning up its context of enunciation. According to Momaday, the writer and the storyteller are indivisible, as they are both "concerned to create himself and his audience in language" (in Coltelli 1990: 93). *WRM* thus functions as an act of creation where two types of reader, indigenous and non-Native, are invoked in different manners. Those readers not acquainted with Kiowa culture will necessarily have to learn how best to *listen* to the stories it tells; they will be given an entryway into Kiowa history which they will complement by contributing connections of their own to the triptych of loosely intertwined reminiscences. Drawing their own signifying trajectories, all Native and non-Native readers thus participate in the remembering process, generating varying reflections and responses while traveling

[5] It is interesting to point out that this triptych division was introduced by the book designer Bruce Gentry, as the original voices in Momaday's manuscript were actually consecutive. See Interview with Kay Bonetti, in Roemer (1988: 3).

to Rainy Mountain as well as to their own familiar landscapes. As Momaday expresses in the preface to his essay collection *The Man Made of Words*, the storyteller

> creates the storytelling experience and himself and his audience in the process (…). The storyteller creates himself in the sense that the mask he wears for the sake of telling the story is of his own making, and it is never the same. He creates the listener in the sense that he determines the listener's existence within, and in relation to, the story, and it is never the same (…) And this imagining is the burden of the story, and indeed it is the story. (1997: 3)

Like the storyteller shaping his listener in the telling, Momaday develops a sort of cartographic language in *WRM*. A map is laid out for the reader to follow, with the preface and the introduction serving as a guide through the various Kiowa scenes. The two framing poems, "Headwaters" and "Rainy Mountain Cemetery", give us a symbolic beginning and a poetic textual end. His textual format is thus not expansive and never explicitly ambitious, but rather intimate and inclusive of all voices. Meaning is ultimately created out of the active recombination and weaving of passages in the reader's mind, as such parallel structures encourage free association and the connection of ideas. Adding to this effect, Momaday's particular "storytelling experience" is characterized by the economy of his use of the English language, which, reduced to its bare essence, makes every word echo within countless subtexts[6]. In his essay "The Native Voice in American Literature", the Kiowa author explains that

> in the oral tradition one stands in a different relation to language. Words are rare and therefore dear. They are jealously preserved in the ear and in the mind. Words are spoken with great care, and they are heard. They matter and they must not be taken for granted; they must be taken seriously and they must be remembered (…) Words are intrinsically powerful. They are magical. By means of words can one bring about physical change in the universe. (1997: 15-6)

Most cultures embrace, in one way or another, the performative function of language. Many Native cultures, additionally, believe that storytelling is performative, that is, in the telling of a story the events it describes may materialize and happen[7]. The Kiowa respect the power of words that, as speech acts, may have an immediate or belated effect in the real world surrounding us. Momaday lyrically conveys this idea in section VIII of *WRM*, where he includes three reminiscences, one in each of the dimensions, all

[6] Together with his strong Kiowa storytelling roots, which he primarily inherited from his father and Kiowa grandparents, Momaday's prose is also permeated by Western poetic discourse. His doctoral dissertation focused on the poetry of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman (1963) and his mentor at Stanford University was the poet Yvor Winters. Moreover, his transculturated language philosophy is clearly inspired by the idealist approach of Wallace Stevens. Momaday, in fact, borrows the title of his book collection from a poetic line by Stevens: "men made out of words" (See Schubnell 1985: 45-6).

[7] See, for example, the power of Laguna Pueblo stories in Leslie Silko's novel *Ceremony* (1977), where the narrative and performative modes blend into one another (Hoilman 1979: 65).

illustrating the tangible effects of words in action. In one of the mythic tales about the sacred Kiowa Twins, he narrates how the intrepid children are able to escape a murderous giant who tries to suffocate them with smoke by chanting the magic Kiowa word *thain-mom* ("above my eyes") – a word that had been given to them by grandmother spider to confront evil and danger (*WRM* 1969/2001: 32)[8]. This story from the mythical dimension is paired with a familiar anecdote about Momaday's own grandmother, Aho, who also had a powerful word, *zei-dl-bei* ("frightful"), which she would say out loud when facing a difficult or harmful situation. As the author explains: "(I)t was not an exclamation so much, I think, as it was a warding off, an exertion of language upon ignorance and disorder" (*WRM* 1969/2001: 33).

Finally, in the historical commentary, Momaday describes the solemn Kiowa protocols that were linguistically displayed when referring to a dead person. Because words have the potential to release certain sacred energies, the Kiowa would avoid using the names of their dead, and would go as far as substituting them (often also quotidian referents) with new terms, while the old words became taboo for a whole generation and were thus forgotten. In a similar way, many words would leave the Kiowa world along with the people that symbolically owned them, to be later substituted by new ones[9].

> A word has power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms. A man's name is his own; he can keep it or give it away as he likes (…). The dead take their names with them out of the world. (*WRM* 1969/2001: 33)

Despite this continually transforming dynamism and the creative energies associated with the Kiowa language, it continues to be endangered, together with the remaining 200 indigenous languages that are still spoken in the United States. Native American languages are rich repositories of history, cultural knowledge and spiritual beliefs, yet endless socio-cultural impositions by the dominant society, compounded by decades of boarding school internment and urban relocation for Native American youth, away from

[8] In the Kiowa mythology, the Twin Brothers, sons of the Sun, are considered to be two halves of the same son – his only child. Maurice Boyd actually refers to them as "half-boys", which is more precise than the term twins. See Berner (1988: 60), Note 1.

[9] See Mooney's classic anthropological account (1979:152) and Momaday's own explanation in the historical fragment of section VIII, page 33, in *The Way to Rainy Mountain.*

their families, have eroded linguistic practice in Native households[10]. According to Gus Palmer Jr., Kiowa-speaking suffered a tremendous decline throughout the 20th century, and today only about 100 fluent speakers, most of whom are over 70 years old, can be found among the 11,000 registered tribal members, (2007: 16). In his preface to *The Man Made of Words*, Momaday explains that, as a very young child, he heard both English and Kiowa words at their homestead in Rainy Mountain Creek, although his father and mother (of Kiowa and Cherokee heritage respectively) used English as the common family language[11].

> From the time I was born my parents spoke to me in English, for that was my mother's Native tongue, and she could speak no other (…). The house and the arbor of the homestead on Rainy Mountain Creek in Oklahoma crackled and rang with Kiowa words, exclamations, and songs that even now I keep in my ear. But I would learn only a part of the whole, and I would never learn to converse easily in Kiowa. (…) My Kiowa family spoke to me in broken English, or their Kiowa words were translated into English for me by my father. Now when I hear Kiowa spoken – mostly by the older people who are passing away – it is very good. The meaning most often escapes me, but the sound is like a warm wind that arises from my childhood. It is the *music of memory*. (1997: 7. My emphasis)

For Native American authors using English as their primary vehicle of expression (in the great majority of cases, such as Momaday's, because *it is* their mother tongue), Native words in a text may indeed function as a "music of memory" accompanying the text (1997:7). And while this expression may sound nostalgic, we must remember that it is not the Native endangered language itself that is romanticized here, but Momaday's childhood, his linguistic self-discovery in the company of loved ones, that is lyrically evoked. Perhaps even more poignantly, these isolated words in the Kiowa language that Momaday is able to use, and even those he does not dare use for lack of fluency, become a powerful historical reminder that points to the legacy of linguistic impositions and colonial abuses still dominating white/Native relations in the continent[12]. And that a

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[10] According to Johansen, approximately 200 indigenous languages are currently spoken in the USA, although only 20 of them continue to be taught at home as a first language (*Praeger Handbook* 5, qtd by Coulombe 2011: 29).

[11] Between the age of 12 and 18 Momaday grew up surrounded by Jemez-speaking families, among the Pueblo of New Mexico. He actually used his knowledge of Navajo culture to contextualize his celebrated novel *House Made of Dawn.*

[12] Most contemporary Native writers in the United States are university-educated, mixed-blood authors writing in English, with very little command of the languages spoken by their ancestors, although there are a few exceptions primarily in the poetic field. Simon Ortiz and Ray Young Bear, for example, often use Native words from their mother tongues (Keresan and Mesquakie, respectively) in their poetic compositions, but generally write in English. This situation (the full presence of Native languages as literary vehicles) is quite different in the case of Latin American indigenous writers who are, for the most part, Native speakers of endangered indigenous languages, and publish their work in bilingual texts, although, unlike their US counterparts, the dissemination of these texts is rather limited.

historical and literary piece as moving as *WRM* could be built from what pieces remain, in the "enemy's language", may be Momaday's most powerful statement of all[13].

III. THE ARROWMAKER AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

The Way to Rainy Mountain moves the reader not merely because of its original structure or because of the effective combination of the four intertwined dimensions (mythic, historical, personal, and visual) but through its contagious forward motion – the intimate yet powerful, performative *wordarrows* (Vizenor 2003)[14] that, although using the English language as a vehicle, open up a new historical space for the Kiowas in the local/national imagination. For, in *WRM* there are many simultaneous approaches, "many landmarks, many journeys in the one" (*WRM* 1969/2001: 4). Momaday points out that there are many ways to organize all these memories and knowledges; and although his is just "one way in which these traditions are conceived, developed, and interfused in the human mind" (*ibid*) it is one rooted in Kiowa historiography and worldviews. Moreover, by using the English language as a tool, Momaday is actually engaging in an act of "anti-imperial translation" (Krupat 1996: 30) – an action that neutralizes the violence engrained within the first acts of translation that took place between Natives and Western colonizers, a vindicative action that, borrowing the words of Arnold Krupat, "conceptualiz(es) the tensions and differences between contemporary Native American fiction and 'the imperial center'" (*ibid*). Even if traditional oral stories are recalled using a language that is foreign to them, they are being rescued from the official national archive and reconfigured to suit the purposes of a contemporary Kiowa storyteller bringing to the fore the history of his people. Furthermore, this restored history is also built on direct eyewitness accounts and traditional narratives from his community, many of which were originally shared with the Momadays by relatives and neighbors in the Kiowa language. Part and parcel of all Native American writers' modern heritage, English also functions as a *lingua franca* that may disseminate the

[13] I borrow the expression from Joy Harjo's well-known anthology *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America* (1997).
[14] Gerald Vizenor's critical term, based on Momaday's story, "The Arrowmaker", which I discuss later in this article. See Vizenor's *Wordarrows: Native States of Literary Sovereignty* for a more detailed explanation.

message as widely as possible, among other Native communities and non-Native readers.

Some scholars have accused Momaday of relying excessively on modernist structures, nostalgia and for having an apolitical stance (Forbes 1987, Krupat 1989). *The Way to Rainy Mountain* indeed seems to nostalgically invoke a time that is gone but which pervades the oral stories even in their written reconfiguration. The power held and transmitted through these stories is, however, not mystified and is very much alive in the text. This power derives from the vitality and deep creativity of language in its "original state", a state associated by Momaday with the oral tradition (Momaday 2007). Orality has always been central to Kiowa historicity even in scriptural accounts, as the keepers of their historical calendars, which were picto-ideographic, always accompanied their visual elements with an explanatory oral account (Mooney 1979). In *WRM*, these oral *memorial* narratives are again re-activated by Momaday's "transfiguring tongue"[15]. The Kiowa language itself, a language in which the author cannot *easily converse* and that he describes as the "music of memory" (1997: 7), may at times acquire romanticized undertones but it certainly has a key empowering role in the narrative. The performative words chanted by his grandmother, Aho, contribute to build a historical mood that is grounded on Kiowa ways of conceptualizing language and of narrating history. They also act, as we have already mentioned, as a reminder of the colonial legacy of linguistic destitution still ongoing in the Americas.

The performative power of language is perhaps best explained in Momaday's seminal essay "The Man Made of Words", which was first written as a keynote lecture at the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars in March 1970, at Princeton University, and was later republished in his essay collection of the same title. According to Momaday "much of the power and magic and beauty of words consist not in meaning but in sound. Storytellers, actors, and children know this, too" (1997: 7). He later contradicts himself and demonstrates that the power of words lies not merely in their sound, but also in their meaning and in their recollection, as his famous tale of the arrowmaker illustrates. In this traditional oral story (the first tale Momaday ever heard

[15] In his famous poem "Robinson Crusoe", Caribbean poet Derek Walcott refers to the *transfigurative* power of the English language to describe new world realities when used by the American Native in a transculturated, anti-imperialistic manner. The Native is epitomized, in the poem, by Daniel Defoe's foundational character, Friday. See Walcott's *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (1986: 68).

as a child), as the arrowmaker is straightening an arrow with his teeth inside his teepee, he is able to identify and kill his hidden enemy, who is lurking in the shadows outside. It is the enemy's ignorance of the Kiowa language that prevents him from understanding the arrowmaker's warning (1997: 9-12):

> "I know that you are there on the outside, for I can feel your eyes upon me. If you are a Kiowa, you will understand what I am saying, and you will speak your name". But there was no answer, and the man went on in the same way, pointing the arrow all around. At last his aim fell upon the place where his enemy stood, and he let go of the string. The arrow went straight to the enemy's heart. (1997: 10)[16]

Speaking and understanding the Kiowa language work here as a symbol of recognition of one's own clan as well as a weapon to challenge one's enemy. The arrowmaker's pronouncement "is also a question and a plea" (Momaday 1997: 11), and an acknowledgement of Kiowa identity through language. The "arrowmaker ventures to speak because he must: language is the repository of his whole knowledge and experience, and it represents the only chance he has for survival" (*ibid*). Intellectual resourcefulness and survival are encoded in the arrowmaker's words, just as his teeth have left an oral imprint in his story-arrow. As Momaday explains: "The point of the story lies not so much in what the arrowmaker does, but in what he says – and, indeed, *that* he says it. The principal fact is that he speaks, and in so doing, he places his very life in the balance" (1997: 10). Momaday's arrowmaker thus establishes an intrinsic connection between language and literature and he is, as Robert Warrior points out, "a necessary stopping place in situating (Momaday's) relationship to language, literature, and the natural world" (2005: 171).

Many Kiowa of Momaday's generation have lost that ability to speak their ancestors' language but, still imbued in tribal culture, they have not forgotten the story which continues to be revitalized by other means. *The Way to Rainy Mountain*'s thorough recovery of oral history is lyrically mobilized through Momaday's English-shaped *transfiguring* wordarrows, and these evince a strong commitment to tribal heritage. Momaday is, above all, a cross-cultural American and as such he can effectively integrate Kiowa historiography with a textual literary template, product of his academic education and Western influences. Thus, although orality is fundamental to the recovery

[16] This story also appears as one of the mythical narratives in section XIII of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* (1969/2001: 46).

of Kiowa cultural and intellectual traditions, it is not, by any means, the only one. There are many ways to Rainy Mountain within *WRM*, and any further textual, physical or linguistic resource that may enable Kiowa heirs to reclaim tribal territories and autochthonous historical and intellectual traditions should be embraced and celebrated.

IV. CONCLUSION

> "language, that miracle of symbols and sounds that enable us to think, and therefore to define ourselves as human beings" (Momaday 1997: 1)

If, as Momaday suggests, language and thought are intrinsically intertwined, if "(l)anguage is a creator of reality"[17], how does his not speaking Kiowa, except for a handful of words, influence his worldview? As we have seen in this article, one may be tempted to think that the author fetishizes the oral tradition by setting it at the core of a memorial imagination that is nostalgic and artificial in nature, since it is expressed through the "enemy's language". However, his use of the colonial language as a vehicle serving Kiowa expression is the result of centuries of imperialistic impositions and linguistic aggression. Momaday's masterful use of English is able to challenge this legacy. As Jace Weaver points out, "Momaday is obsessed with words – their tone, their sonorousness, their rhythm, how they feel in the mouth" (2008: 81). In his works, he is clearly influenced by familiar linguistic rhythms passed on to him, together with the stories, by his Kiowa-speaking father. Momaday additionally bends English words at will so they may fit his own authorial designs: the making of a historical *Kiowascape* where the absence of the Kiowa language (the sacred names that each dead Kiowa took along to the other world) actually fills the empty spaces of each page, as his people are remembered and honored. Momaday's own personal memoir, *The Names*, further strengthens the memorial process by giving flesh and visual *protagonism* to each of his forefathers and foremothers speaking in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, whose names and stories thus continue to endure on the page.

Wordarrows, in any language, can serve as imaginative weapons to organize and channel one's anger and creative energies, to carve one's place in the world. Through

[17] "The Mystery of Language: Native American Oral Tradition" Charter Lecture delivered at the University of Georgia, Athens, October 20, 1994. Quoted by Jace Weaver (2008: 81).

words, Native authors can re-construct, activate, and protect textual, familiar, and cultural territories from the socio-economic plundering and intellectual dispossession they have withstood for centuries. Imagination "enables us to use language to its highest potential. It enables us to realize a reality beyond the ordinary, it enables us to create and to re-create ourselves in story and literature. It is the possible accomplishment of immortality" (Momaday 1997: 2). With the help of his Kiowa-speaking and memory-keeping family, Momaday, the arrowmaker, is able to decode his Native legacy and to render it in a language that, even if not fully Kiowa in appearance, proves to be an effective, moving, and empowering vehicle for the present cross-cultural generation in charge of projecting their tribal traditions into the future.

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Memory and language in Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms*

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ABSTRACT

Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994) highlights the difficulties encountered by Japanese when immigrating and living in Canada. This essay focuses on how Hiromi Goto uses linguistic codes to construct cultural identities and to stress the arbitrary nature of stereotypes. It analyzes the importance of memory and translation, which can be seen as both necessary and alienating. It also examines the importance of language and storytelling in the process of constructing one's identity.

Keywords: language, memory, Asian Canadian writing, identity, stereotypes, storytelling

I. INTRODUCTION

The remarkable literary activity in Canada since the Second World War has been recognized and celebrated by literary criticism throughout the world. The relationship between collective identity and the perception and representation of the Other constitutes an essential question of contemporary cultural and literary discourse. The literary representation of ethnic minorities is extremely important in order to understand current issues about multiculturalism, nationalism, integration. It is even more significant when considering the emergence of authors writing from within that cultural minority experience. Canadian history and its present situation are rewritten by these new voices that seek their place in the country. As Mari Sasano has pointed out, although the notion of multiculturalism implies the acknowledgement of different cultures, a distinction is generally made between "typical Canadian" and "multicultural", the latter consisting of "those minorities that are seen as additional to but outside of typical white middle-class majority" (Sasano 1998: 39). Through the analysis of Hiromi Goto's *Chorus of Mushrooms* (1994), this study aims to examine how Asian-Canadian minorities are representing themselves and how language is used in the construction of social and cultural identities.

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Hiromi Goto was born in Japan and immigrated to Canada with her family when she was three years old. After living on the West Coast for some time, her family moved to Nanton, Alberta. In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the author highlights the difficulties encountered by ethnic minorities when trying to find their own identity. It examines the intercultural experience of Japanese Canadians through the lives of three generations of women belonging to the same Japanese family living in Nanton. If the author draws on her own experience to write this narrative, the autobiographical dimension of the text is challenged by the subversion of realism and the destabilization of narrative unity, reliable point of view and coherent character presentation. As Linda Hutcheon has observed in contemporary Canadian novels:

> Postmodernism in Canada has suggested a rethinking of realism, and therefore we have a situation in which realism is both challenged and taken seriously. [...] Like fiction, history is viewed through frames, and those frames bring only certain pre-selected things into the foreground of the reader's attention. And this is true of both public and private history (Hutcheon 1988: 21).

In *Chorus of Mushrooms*, the metafictional dimension of the novel is made evident by the way the narrator refers to the creating process and by the structure of the text itself. The novel appears as a story which is being told by the narrator to her lover. The second personal pronoun, "you", is used to address the narratee. This interlocutor, who asks the narrator to tell him a "true story", sometimes interrupts the narrative to make comments or to give his opinion. A dialogue on the text itself is thus presented and it foretells some of the reactions Goto's readers may have. As Hutcheon has pointed out, postmodern novelists are very aware of "the twin processes involved in their production: their creation and their reception" (1988: 45). The dialogue between narrator and narratee highlights the interaction that can take place. Although the use of the second person invites the reader to identify with this narratee, the "you" can also be exclusionary, as Emma E. Smith has shown in her study on this novel. Indeed, the second person refers to a particular character, who can speak Japanese, and with whom the non-Japanese-speaking reader cannot assume identity (Smith, 2007: 251).

The different narrative layers used in the novel bring to light different perspectives and challenge any possible unity. Besides the dialogue between the controlling narrator (Murasaki) and her lover, the text intertwines the stories told by Muriel/Murasaki, and by her grandmother Naoe. These are centred on their experiences and recollections. Other stories, such as Japanese legends or journal articles, are embedded within their

narrations and introduce other voices in the text. The polyphonic nature of the novel, which is also announced in the title, suggests that the approaches to immigrant life in Canada are plural, and cannot be reduced to a sole discourse on immigration and identity.

Moreover, throughout the multi-levelled narrative, the stress is put on interaction. The different voices, fragments and stories that appear in the text complement one another and create an intertextual dialogue. Besides the conversations between the controlling narrator and the narratee, other dialogues take place between Naoe and her granddaughter Murasaki. Their dialogues, written in brackets, appear as telepathic conversations that can take place in spite of the spatial and temporal distance that separates the interlocutors. The metafictional aspect of the novel is further highlighted by the contents of these dialogues where the two narrators speak about the creative process:

> Murasaki: Obachan, everyone wants to hear stories. And I can't finish them. They scatter like sheep. Like dust.
>
> Naoe: No need to tie them up. There is always room for beginnings (Goto 1997: 63).

This lack of closure is also a procedure used by Goto in her novel. As the author has explained in an interview, in her fiction: "there is a resistance to the notion of closure for this is not the reality of women's lives. Closure to me is very artificial, contrived and prescriptive. [...] Life narratives are circular and ongoing" (Goto, *in* Morris 2008: 234).

Goto's novel is characterized by the lack of a time line. As the fictional interlocutor tells the narrator: "'You switch around in time a lot,' [...] 'I get all mixed up. I don't know in what order things really happened" (Goto 1997: 132)[1]. The answer provided by the narrator is extremely significant as it justifies the complex structure of the novel itself:

> There isn't a time line. It's not a linear equation. You start in the middle and unfold outward from here. It's not a flat surface that you walk back and forth on. It's like being inside a ball that isn't exactly a ball, but is really made up of thousands and thousands of small panels. And on each panel, there is a mirror, but each mirror reflects something different. And from where you crouch, if you turn your head up or around or down or sideways, you can see something new, something old, or something you've forgotten (132).

According to this definition, the story consists of as a series of mirroring images and of windows opened to different realities and different times. Again, the stress is put on

[1] From now on, the references to this edition will be made through the number of the page written in brackets.

plurality, but also on memory and on the capacities of the story to make others aware of what has been forgotten.

Hutcheon has observed that the postmodern writer is inevitably in a "marginal or 'ex-centric' position with regard to the central or dominant culture, because the paradox of underlining and undermining cultural 'universals' [...] challenges any notions of centrality" (1988: 3). This is even truer when the author is writing from the position of an ethnic minority community. The margin becomes a place of transgression, but also, as Hutcheon points out, the place of possibility (1988: 3). Through their texts, writers try "to trouble, to question, to make both problematic and provisional any [...] desire for order or truth through the powers of the human imagination" (Hutcheon 1988: 2).

The notion of truth is indeed problematic, as Goto's text points out. Truth may be confused with a system of belief specific to a particular culture and time. According to Hutcheon, "what any society calls universal 'truth' is really [...] socially, culturally, economically, and historically particular" (1988: 12). The multiple voices of Goto's novel and the different stories embedded highlight how truth, as identity, is something fluid. It changes with the telling and it also involves the interlocutor's trust and belief. *Chorus of Mushrooms* combines Japanese cultural references and Canadian ones. It stresses the importance of food and language when approaching a foreign culture and it shows how stories are both a way of getting to know the Other and of constructing one's history and one's identity.

II. THE MEMORIES OF IMMIGRATION

Chorus of Mushrooms describes the relationship between three generations of women and their attitudes towards their situation as Japanese immigrants living in Nanton. The grandmother, Naoe, tries to hold onto her roots. She refuses to forget her past and her Japanese culture. Although she can speak English, she refuses to use the English language that her family has adopted. On the contrary, her daughter, Keiko, has decided to assimilate into Canadian culture for the sake of her own daughter, Muriel. Keiko speaks only in English, eats Canadian food and tries to dress and behave like a 'white' Canadian woman. According to her mother, Keiko "has forsaken identity [...] Converted from rice and *daikon* to weiners and beans" (Goto 1997: 13). The different attitude

adopted by these two characters is highlighted by the different language they use and by the lack of communication between them: "I speak my words in Japanese and my daughter will not hear them. The words that come from our ears, our mouths, they collide in the space between us" (Goto 1997: 4).

Naoe tries to prevent the complete loss of her culture by continually speaking out loud in her tongue. She tells Japanese legends, speaks about her past, and gives her opinion about her life in Canada. Through her memories and the tales she narrates, Naoe constructs a sense of home inside of her. As she explains, "You cannot move to a foreign land and call that place home because you parrot the words around you. Find your home inside yourself first, I say. Let your home words grow out from the inside, not the inside in" (Goto 1997: 48).

Muriel, or Murasaki, as her grandmother calls her, is the only one of them who was actually born in Canada. In spite of this, she is still perceived as an outsider because of her physical complexion. She is alienated from a Canadian culture which considers her as foreign, but also from the Japanese background, as she cannot speak or read the language. It is only later, that she will decide to learn the Japanese tongue.

The three perspectives embodied by these characters are highlighted in an article, inserted in the text, and entitled "The Multicultural Voices of Alberta, Part 4: Japanese Canadians Today" (Goto 1997: 189). Keiko explains her decision of forgetting her Japanese identity in order to feel at home in her new country: "You can't be everything at once. It is too confusing for a child to juggle two cultures. Two sets of ideals. If you want a child to have a normal and accepted lifestyle, you have to live like everyone else" (Goto 1997: 189). However, Murasaki's account challenges her mother's perspective:

> Life is hard in Canada, once you come to an age when you find out that people think certain things of you just because your hair is black and they have watched 'Shogun, the Mini Series.' [...] I wasn't given the chance to choose. I feel a lot of bitterness about how I was raised, how I was taught to behave. I had a lot of questions about my heritage, but they were never answered. The place where we lived didn't foster cultural difference. It only had room for cultural integration. If you didn't abide by the unwritten rules of conduct, you were alienated as an other, subject to suspicion and mistrust (189).

She has been deprived of the possibility of getting to know her family's culture. What is more, her mother's insistence on rejecting her Japanese roots implied that there was something wrong with them. Thus, Murasaki avoided speaking with the Vietnamese

labourers who worked on her father's farm. She also avoided speaking with the Chinese boy that attended her school because "Oriental people in single doses were well enough, but any hint of a group and it was all over" (Goto 1997: 125).

Institutions in Canada only provide stereotypical images of the Other. When Muriel goes to Sunday school, she observes the pictures drawn on the song boards. There are pictures of "Indians with feathers", "black boys with curly hair wearing only shorts", "yellow people with skinny eyes", and a "blonde girl with long eyelashes with a normal dress on" (Goto 1997: 59). The teacher tells the pupils that "Everybody is the same [...] Jesus doesn't see any difference at all. He loves you all the same" (Goto 1997: 59). By not recognising any difference, cultural specificity is erased and the Other is apparently placed in a central position from which he is paradoxically banned. The use of stereotypes and the denial of cultural diversity are both unsatisfying discourses to approach alterity.

The narrator stresses the importance of acknowledging and respecting cultural difference. As Muriel points out: "I thought that Jesus must be pretty blind if he thought everybody was the same" (Goto 1997: 59). Through the different stories inserted in the novel, Goto tries to deconstruct cultural stereotypes and to present them as other stories, the truth of which can be questioned.

The novel highlights how representations of alterity always entail exotic details that make the Other interesting as well as alien. People ask Murasaki whether her grandmother had to bind her feet, although feet were never bound in Japan. Asian cultural distinctions are obliterated. Muriel is frequently considered Chinese or treated as an oriental woman because of her appearance. Even people of Japanese background use the depreciative terms and representations applied to them: "you're pretty cute for a Nip. He said. Most Nips are pretty damn ugly. All that inbreeding [...] And I felt really funny inside, him saying Nip and everything. Because he was one too" (Goto 1997: 53).

The will of many immigrants to assimilate into Canadian culture leads them not only to erase their roots, but also to become intolerant towards other immigrants. As Marc Colavincenzo has also highlighted, this novel shows how "behind a rhetoric of multicultural acceptance Canadian culture is shot through with racism, non-acceptance, and homogenizing or assimilationist tendencies" (2005: 224). Keiko and her husband

have given up their roots. Keiko pretends to be "as white as her neighbour" (Goto 1997: 29). Her insistence on becoming an Other, goes to the extent of washing her daughter's hands frantically when observing that they are yellow after having eaten some candies: "Yellow, she's tuningyellow she's turningyellow she's –" (Goto 1997: 92). When a schoolteacher tells her that Muriel should wear a blonde wig in order to perform the part of Alice in Wonderland in a school operetta, Keiko is more than willing to dye her daughter's hair: "That way, Muriel can really grow into her role as Alice. She can live and be Alice before opening night!" (Goto 1997: 177).

The façade she tries to create also implies changing names: her name is Keiko but she asks the others to call her Kay; her husband "Shinji" becomes "Sam"; and she gives her daughter an 'occidental' name, Muriel. Keiko also provides nicknames for the Vietnamese people who work on the farm because she thinks "their real names are too hard to pronounce and no one will be able to remember them" (Goto 1997: 34).

Names are essential in the novel and the characters change their names according to their shifting identities. Muriel prefers to be named Murasaki in order to acknowledge her Japanese background. Naoe becomes Purple at the end of the novel. According to Mari Sasano, the characters "adopt new names to suit their identities, creating a movement between what each is born with and what each eventually chooses to become" (1998: 40). The name is also at the origin of the situation of Naoe's family, as her father lost his fortune by stamping his name on a legal document. As Naoe states: "The name begins the story" (Goto 1997: 49).

The separation from the original culture is also stressed by the lack of a surname. Keiko and her husband forgot their real surname when they gave up their roots. The only Japanese word he could remember was the name of a meal, "Tonkatsu" which they adopted as their own surname in Canada. Murasaki's father explains that the word is not entirely Japanese: "*tonkatsu* isn't really a purely Japanese word. *Ton*, meaning pork, is Japanese, but *katsu* is adopted from 'cutled', and I don't know the origins of that word" (Goto 1997: 209). As Lisa Harris has also observed, "Goto seems to be suggesting that notions of authenticity tied to a particular place are always socially constructed and subject to change. They must therefore be understood as part of an ongoing process of negotiation" (Harris 2008: 26).

The third part of the novel consists of only a page, which represents everything that has been lost or forgotten: “Part three. Everything that is missing or lost or caught between memory and make believe or forgotten or hidden or sliced from the body like an unwanted tumour” (Goto 1997: 159). It represents the unnameable, the missing part in an immigrant story, the things that have been forgotten or retold in another way, everything that has been erased from memory in the transition of becoming an Other.

Keiko and her husband have chosen to forget and their personality has changed because of this decision. They become, as Pilar Cuder-Domínguez *et al.* have pointed out, “mere shadows of the full beings they could have been”, since their effort to be accepted and to assimilate into ‘white’ Canadian culture only results in silence and invisibility (2011: 106 and 111). Shinji used to speak a lot in his youth, and suddenly he feels he is “half a person” (Goto 1997: 207). As he explains: “I was ashamed. I felt a loss so fine it pierced my heart. Made it ache. So I stopped talking” (Goto 1997: 207). Similarly, Keiko ends up with a nervous breakdown when her mother leaves. Naoe was indeed the only person that tried to preserve her cultural background through stories and memories. When she leaves the house, Keiko stops talking and remains in bed. She only recovers from her depression after wearing Japanese night clothes and eating Japanese food. Her husband also feels better when reading Japanese books and eating salted seaweed paste. It is through memory, food and language that one’s culture and identity can be maintained. Throughout the first part of the novel, Naoe describes her youth and the atrocities of the war. The memory of these facts may be lost as her daughter refuses to hear and the younger generations cannot understand the language. Yet, Naoe keeps on talking: “Don’t come to me for answers, child, these are only words”, she says to Murasaki. However, the importance of the words she utters is constantly implied in the text: “The words of an old woman can change little in this world and nothing of the past [...] I only know I must” (Goto 1997: 21). According to Muna Shafiq, “Naoe’s incessant communication in Japanese symbolically (re)constructs and (re)asserts the collective voice of Japanese Canadians” (2006: 6).

The language of Naoe is a “language of memory, pain, desire” (Goto 1997: 129). Her words allow her to preserve a link with her culture and to depict her past. Her Japanese background is however not free from criticism and Naoe’s words do not hesitate to question the injustices she saw in her childhood and youth. She describes the social

injustices that existed in Japan and in China before the war. She also criticizes the sexist treatment of women in that country. Her constant discourse is also a way to make up for a silent past in which she didn't dare to question social injustices: "the pain of not having spoken, of not bothering to ask questions, still aches inside me now", she says (Goto 1997: 46). The words she utters as an old woman are the words of a wisdom acquired year after year:

> There are ages of silence and ages of roaring. When I was young and beautiful, my lips were an ornament upon my face. Now my face is crumpled with care and seams adorn my cheeks. My mouth bursts wide and the words rush out, a torrent of noise and scatters. An old woman on a wooden chair might not be much to look at, but step inside her circle of sound and fall into a tornado (24).

The same idea is repeated some pages later and stresses the importance of the character's discourse: "If an old woman sits in a chair and never gets out and talks and talks and talks, don't ignore her. She might be saying something that will change the colour of your eyes" (Goto 1997: 37).

Yet, nobody understands the language she speaks. As she says, "My words are only noises in this place I call a home" (Goto 1997: 11). However, these last words also highlight that, in spite of all, she does consider her house in Nanton "a home". In fact, it is interesting to observe the evolution of the character's attitude towards the Canadian wind. The beginning of the first part of the novel stresses Naoe's dislike for "this unrelenting, dust-driven, crack your fingers dry wind" (Goto 1997: 3). She tries to fight against the noise of the wind with the sound of her words. As the novel progresses, Naoe also remembers Japanese winds. First, she recalls a "non-wind" that characterized the summers of her childhood in Japan, which are described as "A breathless time of sucking air like water" (Goto 1997: 69). Later, she remembers another wind, called "*kama itachi*. An evil wind that moves with the speed of a weasel and cuts with the sting of a scythe" (Goto 1997: 75). Through her narrative, she acknowledges that Japanese winds can be as threatening as the Canadian prairie wind. When she leaves the house and accepts to move on, her opinion about the Canadian wind changes: "Funny how I hated the wind so, when I was sheltered from it. We are sisters, you and I, and your cool breath upon my cheeks will comfort me" (Goto 1997: 81).

It is only after remembering and narrating her memories that Naoe feels free to leave the house: "Useless to waste time on sentimental memory. I may be an old fool, but

stupidity is another matter. So important to remember, but say the words out loud. Don't wallow in pools of yesterday, I say. Don't drown in yesterday's tears" (Goto 1997: 74).

At the end of the novel, Naoe takes part in a rodeo, and rides a bull like a cowboy. Through this image, the text stresses the absurdity of stereotypes and highlights the character's transformation. As Mari Sasano has observed:

> [Naoe] has infiltrated the ranks. While furiously not white Canadian, she fully embraces and occupies aspects of that culture that please her. Entering in means that the centre is neither sealed nor exclusive. Membership changes, and as it does, the norm is altered. By challenging expectations and by living outside of the fear of being detected as abnormal, it is possible to carve out a new space of belonging while remaining truthful about the differences that do exist (1998: 51)

If Naoe's success as a bull rider may signify her appropriation of a male Western Canadian tradition, her success is nuanced by the fact that she is wearing a mask, as Eva Darias Beautell has argued (2003: 40). Nevertheless, Naoe progressively becomes closer to Canadian culture just as Keiko accepts the introduction of Japanese food in her house.

Food is essential in this novel, where one seems to be what he eats. As the shop assistant states: "Eating's a part of being after all" (Goto 1997: 138). According to Heather Latimer, "eating is a gendered and racialized act that constantly informs how the characters see themselves emotionally and psychologically" (2006: 1). Although there isn't any Japanese food in Keiko's kitchen, Naoe manages to get some sent by her brother and to hide it in her room. It is through food and language that she tries to preserve her culture. She shares the food with Murasaki, just as she tells her stories from Japan in a language the child cannot speak. The grandmother's bed becomes a "bed of feasts", a "bed of tales" (Goto 1997: 18). Lisa Harris has also observed how "Food unites Naoe and Murasaki". Murasaki "learns to use food and language as tools to shape her own version of a Canadian future" (Harris 2008: 24). She cannot speak Japanese nor hold her chopsticks properly: "I know. I don't hold my pen properly either. But I can still write. And I can still eat", she says (Goto 1997: 121). According to Murasaki, eating is an important way of getting to know a culture:

> There are people who say that eating is only a superficial means of understanding a different culture. That eating at exotic restaurants and oohing and aahing over the food is not even worth the bill paid. You haven't learned anything at all. I say that's a lie. What can be more basic than food itself? Food to begin to grow? [...] But don't stop there, my friend, don't stop there, because food is the point of departure. A place where growth begins" (Goto 1997: 201).

It is through language and tales that it continues. Words, like food, can nurture, and can be "swallow[ed]" (Goto 1997: 29). They become like the squid which "swells and softens": "I held my words inside my mouth until they swelled and softened" (Goto 1997: 18), says Murasaki. Listening to the sound of foreign words becomes a way to discover and imagine another cultural background.

III. LANGUAGE

Words appear in the novel as material elements which can "take form and live and breathe among us. Language is a living beast" (Goto 1997: 99). They seem to have a life of their own, one that the self cannot control. They can "change shape and size", "grow arms and legs", and weigh heavily, as the memory of the characters: "Words, words, words, WORDS. Ahh, words grow heavier every day, upon my bony back", says Naoe (Goto 1997: 21).

The text includes many words in Japanese and does not provide their translation into English. The reader is thus put in the position of an outcast, unable to have access to the content of the words. Our expectations of resolving difference into unity, or as Hutcheon would say, of trying to "absorb the margin into the centre" (1988: 11) are thus frustrated. As Murasaki listens to the words uttered by her grandmother without understanding them, the reader sees the signifiers and can only guess or imagine their meaning. Hiromi Goto has explained why she decided not to provide any translation:

> I wanted to highlight that difference exists, all cannot be understood, language could and can be a barrier. This is based on my assumption that most of my readers are English-speaking and do not understand Japanese. This is the audience the book is mainly speaking to [...] (Goto 1996: 112)

As Muna Shafiq has pointed out, "this strategy obliges the unilingual dominant language reader to seek meaning outside the dominant language" (2006: 8). Yet, the materiality and the sound of the words introduce the reader to the other culture, as a child learning some aspects of the language by immersion. Language appears as a constraint but also as a meaningful way of arousing interest towards what is unknown and foreign. Although Murasaki cannot understand the language used by Naoe, communication still takes place through body language:

> She cannot understand the words I speak, but she can read the lines on my brow, the creases beside my mouth. I could speak the other to her, but my lips refuse and my tongue

> swells in revolt. I want so much for someone to hear, yet it must be in my words (Goto 1997: 15).

The reader is encouraged to think about translation and about how different languages do not have exact equivalents for some concepts. When learning Japanese, Murasaki realizes there is no word to express love "except to a spouse or lover" (Goto 1997: 54). Naoe also sees that the English word "water" doesn't indicate whether the water is cold or warm, whereas the distinction is made clear by the Japanese words "Mizu" and "Oyu" (Goto 1997: 170). According to Murasaki, the good thing about speaking several languages is that it allows you to fill these gaps: "when there isn't one word in English, it will be there in Japanese and if there's something lacking in your tongue, I'll reach for it in English. So I say to you in English. I love you, Obachan" (Goto 1997: 54). As Mari Sasano has highlighted:

> Rather than being suspended half-in-half-out of two cultures, Murasaki actually has an edge over either: she slips between them as easily as a salamander inhabits water and land. [...] Contrary to Keiko's philosophy of childraising, Murasaki benefits from, instead of being confused by, the juggling of two cultures (1998: 42).

In her childhood, Murasaki couldn't speak nor understand the Japanese language. In spite of this, the Japanese words pronounced by her grandmother meant more to her than the conversations in English she had with her parents: "the things we talked about would never have the power to linger. 'How was school?' and, 'Pass the gravy boat,' were sad substitutes for my malnourished culture" (Goto 1997: 99). She imagined what her grandmother said in Japanese. A new kind of communication was created through her imagination: "I couldn't understand the words she spoke, but this is what I heard. *Mukashi, muhashi, omukashi*... Listen Murasaki, listen" (Goto 1997: 18).

It is interesting to see how the sound of the words itself becomes poetry and seems to have an incantatory value:

> I turned my head slowly in Obachan's lap, the fabric scratch and stiff. Inhaled dust and poetry. She stroked my forehead with her palm, and her words, they flowed fluid. I snuggled close and curled my legs and stopped pretending to understand. Only listened. And listened. And then my mouth opened on its own accord and words fell from my tongue like treasure [...] Obachan and I, our voices lingered, reverberated off hollow walls and stretched across the land with streamers of silken thread" (Goto 1997: 52 and 20)

The importance of language and of the two voices speaking together is stressed by the repetition of this same paragraph in the novel. Communication can still take place in spite of the language used and even if the interlocutors are not together, i.e. "over distance and time" (Goto 1997: 139). The characters can "hear" each other's "thoughts"

(Goto 1997: 114). The text defies normal realist logic. Language can be learnt or suddenly forgotten. Keiko's husband can read books in Japanese but he cannot speak the words out loud nor remember his name. Murasaki knows what some Japanese words "mean" but she doesn't know "what they are" (Goto 1997: 136). The narrator also plays with antiquated English words such as "league" or "fortnight". As Patricia L. Gantzert has observed, "They have no specific meaning for Naoe or Murasaki, emphasizing the indefiniteness of any word. 'Whatever that means' is a phrase Murasaki often uses in her questioning discourse" (1997: 32).

As the novel goes on, language is treated in a more surrealist way. Naoe leaves the house and starts speaking in English with a cowboy who has a strong English accent. She even starts speaking herself with this accent just as he loses his own: "Sher", she says (Goto 1997: 112). However the reader cannot be sure about the language or the accent that is being used, since the characters are not sure about it either. As Mari Sasano has observed, "Language becomes unconscious. [...] Naoe, when she has developed more of a rapport with Tengu, remarks that his cowboy accent is gone, but in fact he didn't have one to begin with; she has inserted the accent to fit with her preconceptions of him" (1998: 43).

At the beginning of the novel, the controlling-narrator states that she will tell the story in Japanese. Therefore, the English used in the text implies that one layer of translation has been introduced. However, the narrator herself thinks she has been speaking in English all the time. "Haven't we been talking Japanese all along?", her lover reminds her (Goto 1997: 196-197). The reader cannot be sure of the language that is actually being spoken nor of the identity of the different characters. Pilar Cuder-Domínguez *et al.* have observed how in this novel translation "becomes oddly unnecessary between people speaking different languages, thus intimating true communication beyond words, whereas at other times translation allows for metamorphosis, change, and progress, resulting in a fluid, unfixed subjectivity" (2011: 138-139).

The lives of Murasaki and Naoe seem to mingle. They both leave home and have a cowboy lover whom they abandon afterwards. This fusion is also encouraged by Naoe who says to Murasaki: "Why don't I talk sometimes and you just move your lips and it

will look like you're the one who's talking" (Goto 1997: 127). Naoe chooses to be called Purple, the English translation of Murasaki:

> 'So, who is Murasaki and who is Purple?'
> 'The words are different, but in translation, they come together.'
> 'So you're a translation of Murasaki and Murasaki is a translation of you?' [...]
> 'That's one reading of it' (Goto 1997: 174)

As Steve McCullough has observed, in the novel "proper names proliferate identities and problematize the notion of textual origins instead of simply positioning coherent selves in cultural-linguistic worlds" (2003: 160). The narrator plays with the notions of transition and translation to show that the characters' identities evolve throughout the novel, but also shift and merge according to linguistic and cultural factors. Muna Shafiq has also highlighted how Goto "constructs hybrid narrative identities that stand in opposition to and challenge notions of authenticity based on pure cultures" (2006: 8). There is not one identity, but several. Naoe thinks about a philosopher who dreamt he was a butterfly dreaming that he was a philosopher: "And when he woke up, he didn't know if he was a philosopher or a butterfly. What nonsense. This need to differentiate. Why, he was both, of course" (Goto 1997: 44). Naoe and Murasaki are characterized by different identities which coexist in a variety of degrees. As Pilar Cuder-Domínguez *et al.* have stated:

> Rather than being crippled by the memories of a traumatic past, [Naoe] is so empowered that she comes to symbolize a wealth of future possibilities [...] Naoe embodies the power of the tale and the storyteller to create new life and endow the current one with new meanings (2011: 99).

The novel contains different stories and legends which intertwine with the character's experiences. These appear as additional mirrors which echo the character's lives. As Muna Shafiq has observed, the characters "employ the oral tradition of telling stories to reinvent themselves as bicultural (Canadian and Japanese) women, celebrating their ethnic differences (2006: 5).

IV. THE IMPORTANCE OF STORYTELLING

As she did not understand what her grandmother said in Japanese, the controlling-narrator is imagining the stories told by Naoe. The narrator is not trustworthy. We know she lied to her friend Patricia and invented what her grandmother was saying. As she affirms, "*I'm making up the truth as I go along*" (Goto 1997: 12). She is not even sure

of the reliability of what she tells: "Did I just make that up or is it true? I don't even know anymore. Saying it out loud can make it so" (Goto 1997: 53). Sometimes she directly admits having lied: "That's a lie. One of many, I suppose" (Goto 1997: 98). However, as we have seen, the notion of truth is subverted in the novel. It appears as a concept which is always under construction and negotiation. The emphasis is put on the telling, and particularly on the re-telling. In the "Acknowledgements" of the novel, Goto states: "In the process of re-telling personal myth, I have taken tremendous liberties with my grandmother's history. This novel is a departure from historical 'fact' into the realms of contemporary folk legend. And should (almost) always be considered a work of fiction". She is "re-telling" the life of her family in the novel, just as Murasaki is "re-telling and re-creating" the story (Goto 1997: 185). As Goto has explained:

> Our worlds no longer exist in isolation. The arts are a place where cultures and stories can intersect, overlap. [...] I've rewritten Japanese traditional folk tales with a North American feminist sensibility. [...] I make sense of my world with the instruments of the cultures I've inhabited. I feel lucky in that I'm in a position to choose the best of both worlds (Goto, *in* Morris 2008: 235).

Julia Kristeva has observed that "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations, any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (1980: 66). Memories and legends entwine in Murasaki's account. As the character explains, "It's funny how you can sift your memories, braid them with other stories. Come up with a single strand and call it truth" (Goto 1997: 93).

The intertexts inserted in the novel present contrasting points and therefore insist on multiplicity. Many of the legends told echo the character's stories. The tale of an old woman that must be abandoned by her family recalls Naoe's position as an old woman who is going to be sent to an old people's home. The legend of a family that could not have children reminds that of Naoe's brother, who has not been able to have descendants. An encounter at an airport becomes "another airport story" (Goto 1997: 53). Myth, legend and reality are mixed. As Hutcheon has pointed out, novels "re-narrate and re-conceptualize the past, both literary and historical, and thereby re-formulate the possibilities of subjectivity narrated in them" (1988: 8-9).

Stories are constructed in a way that is similar to the technique used in a Japanese legend by two characters named Izanami and Izanagi. They create a new home just by pronouncing the words out loud: "'We are gods [...] We can create'[...] 'There are no

rules,' Izanami chanted, and saying it aloud made it so" (Goto 1997: 30). In this legend, in which the two children create Japan, one of them exclaims "Let there be light!" and is immediately reprimanded by his sister". Patricia L. Gantzert has observed how the narrator makes reference to Eastern and Western texts and beliefs: "Pokes at master narratives of Western society, such as those of Shakespeare (1997: 69, 175) and the Bible, shake up the assumptions often association with them or situate their 'truths' in new relations" (1997: 31).

When Naoe leaves, Murasaki realizes how people are looking forward to hearing exotic tales: "everybody, including me, was always looking for a story. That the story could be anything [...] the story can be anything, but there have to be details. People love details. The stranger, the more exotic the better" (Goto 1997: 89). Through the stories they hear, they construct their preconceived ideas about other cultures. As Murasaki points out, "people want to hear a story, and then, after they're done with it, they can stick the story back to wherever it came from" (Goto 1997: 1). However, the multiple perspectives provided by the narrative disrupt these expectations and make it impossible for the reader to draw a stereotypical conclusion from the text. The different points of view, the mixture of facts and legend, of reality and imagined or invented parts show how a story is not an establish set of notions: "Funny thing, Murasaki, how these stories keep changing", says Naoe (Goto 1997: 73). As this character points out: "this is not the story I learned, but it's the story I tell. It is the nature of words to change with the telling. They are changing in your mind even as I speak" (Goto 1997: 32) Thus, telling a story implies creation, but also re-creation, and the characters and facts change with the telling: "It can't really be you once I make it a story. It becomes someone else, you know?", says Murasaki (Goto 1997: 55).

Telling stories is also a way of creating human ties. As Naoe says:

> [...] stories are shared. [...] there is a partnership in the telling and listening, that it is of equal importance [...] If the positions become static, there can never be stories. Stories grow out of stories grow out of stories. Listening becomes telling, telling listening (Goto 1997: 172).

Whereas her mother "didn't tell tales at all", the stories told by Naoe fostered a deeper link between her and Murasaki, who wanted to "hear bedtime stories, hear lies and truth dissembled" (Goto 1997: 29). The importance of telling one's story is highlighted by

the way Murasaki imagines her mother's tales: "Her stories must be ugly things filled with bitterness and pain. The pain of never having told" (Goto 1997: 32).

It is interesting to see that Murasaki is named after an important Japanese writer, Murasaki Shikibu, who is considered to be the first person to write a novel and to "create the antihero" (Goto 1997: 165) in her work, *The Tale of Genji*. As Patricia Gantzert has pointed out, *The Tale of Genji* "offers an important model of courageous achievement in the face of restrictive conditions". This work may thus offer Murasaki a valid representation upon which to build a positive image of herself as a Japanese-Canadian woman (1997: 63).

By mixing different stories within the novel, *Chorus of Mushrooms* questions the established notions that surround immigration, and it tries to create a different kind of account. "An immigrant Story With a Happy Ending. [...] Nothing is impossible. Within reason, of course", says Murasaki (Goto 1997: 159). As Mari Sasano has affirmed, "Muriel/Murasaki ana Naoe are attempting, in their retelling of folktales, as well as in the living of their lives, to unlock themselves from the expected unhappy endings". Part Three, "An Immigrant Story With a Happy Ending" (Goto 1997: 159) is, as Sasano states, a "page-long non-story waiting to be written into existence" (1998: 46). Part Four shows how the experience of immigrants can be characterized by a happy ending. However, by introducing racist texts at the end of the novel, this perspective is attenuated, and recalls the tragic alternatives that may await them.

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The voice of the cypresses. Cyrus Cassells and the poetry of Salvador Espriu

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ABSTRACT

"To the cypress again and again" is Cyrus Cassells's poetic response to the work of Salvador Espriu, a poet whose reception has been limited by his belonging to a minority culture and his commitment to the Catalan language. In its first eight sections, the poem reads as a dramatic monologue: its author adopts Espriu's voice, successfully evoking his poetic world. In what could be considered the second part of the poem, a different poetic speaker — identifiable with Cassells — shares personal memories of Espriu: the man, his nation and his culture. At the end of the poem, the emblematic cypresses are identified with the Catalan people and their voice is heard. The poem is an example of *epistolary elegy*, a mode that allows Cassells to enter into dialogue with deceased personalities who have had artistic or historical relevance. In so doing, the American poet shows, like Espriu did, an acute sense of cultural tradition.

Keywords: "To the cypress again and again", Cyrus Cassells, Salvador Espriu, epistolary elegy, poetic voice, imagery

In its website, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages defines *regional* or *minority language* as one "traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population". As the president of the Association Internationale pour la Défense des Langues et Cultures Menacées, during the early 70s, the Catalan poet Salvador Espriu (1913-1985) fought for the survival of minority languages spoken all over the world. In an interview, he connected this responsibility with the history of his own language:

> Jo vaig reaccionar des del primer dia contra la intolerable arbitrarietat que suposa perseguir una llengua; va donar la casualitat que fos la meva, la catalana, però crec que hauria reaccionat de la mateixa manera contra la persecució de qualsevol altra llengua. ... [L]a meva reacció no va ser sentimental, sinó que va ser intel·lectual i ètica. (Reina 1995b: 94)

As a writer, Espriu produced a body of literature that can be considered — among other things — a vindication of his own language, persecuted and belittled during Franco's

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regime[1]. Despite Espriu's consistent and militant allegiance to the Catalan language, his work has been internationally received. In his acceptance speech for the Premi Catalunya, Harold Bloom (2002) referred to Espriu as a prominent figure in the Catalan canon and defined him as "a remarkable poet by any international standard".

His own liminal condition — an African American and gay man — has made the poet Cyrus Cassells (b. 1957) especially sensitive to the struggle of marginalized groups and minorities, to which he has given a poetic voice: "when you come from communities that have been oppressed [...] you just embody aspects of experience that might not have been articulated, because people's testimonies and expressions are disregarded or ignored for whatever reasons" (Jiménez 2009: 73). Surely it must have been this special sensitivity that led Cassells to read, study and translate Catalan poetry, since a decisive first encounter with Espriu's verse.

Cassells wrote "To the cypress again and again" as a tribute to Salvador Espriu[2]. The first version of the poem — about 160 lines long — is divided into thirteen sections of varying length and metre patterns, and different voices can be heard: mainly Espriu's, but also Cassells's and the voice of the cypresses which, as we will see, becomes a central and pervading presence. The poem contains five temporal references that could be ordered into a narrative sequence: Espriu's life prior to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1913-1936), Franco's regime, including the post-war (1939-1975), Franco's death (1975), Cassells' meeting with Espriu (1984) and Espriu's death (1985). These dates will be useful in structuring our analysis of the poem, which will be explored in its connections with Espriu's poetic production and will focus on such aspects as point of view, imagery and themes.

In his profile on the website of the *National Endowment for the Arts*, Casells tells of his stays in Barcelona, "to work on two projects, *Still Life With Children: Selected Poems of Francesc Parcerisas*, and *Rider on the Back of Silence: Tribute to Salvador Espriu*, a

[1] For a detailed description of the persecution of Catalan in the years following the Spanish Civil War, see Josep Benet's *Catalunya sota el règim franquista* (pp. 279-410).

[2] The poem was first published in the journal *Callaloo* (1986: 18-23) and later included in the collection *Soul Make a Path through Shouting* (1994). I choose to quote from the longer *Callaloo* version — composed shortly after Espriu's death — since it will allow us to explore intertextual connectionas in mo depth. The poem's title will be subsequently abbreviated to "To the cypress".

memoir (with translations) about the Catalan poet and Nobel candidate, whom I met shortly before his death in 1985”. In section IX of the poem, the encounter is recalled:

> Cassells?
> The name could be Mallorcan —
>
> How old are you?
> Twenty-seven.
> And you’ve never read *Don Quixote*! (Cassells 1986: 21)

The reader may assume that Espriu’s death causes Cassells to reminisce about the day they met, the year before. In the first eight sections of the poem, the latter adopts Espriu’s voice to compare his life before and after the war, declare his ambitions as a writer and evoke the scenery of his homeland. This imagined exercise in poetic sincerity has Espriu — essentially an impersonal poet — do what he rarely did in verse: communicate his own experience directly in a confessional tone. In fact, these sections resemble the dramatic monologue: a vivid impression of the speaker is conveyed and a sense of audience is implied (Furniss and Bath 1996: 175-176) — section IV begins with the question “Can you understand?”, section VI with the interjection “listen” and in XIII we find the vocative “Cyrus”.

I. BEFORE THE FIGHTING (1913-1936)

Maria Aurèlia Capmany, a close friend of Espriu, wrote about the poet’s experience of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Her words indicate the extent to which the conflict affected him. It rendered his ideal of harmony in political difference and cultural diversity in Spain dramatically impossible and, at a personal level, it brought an abrupt end to a student career pursued, until that point, with enthusiasm and marked success:

> He did not return to the university until after Franco’s death, when he was awarded an honorary degree. He earned his living by working in a notary public’s office. He flatly refused to engage in any public activity or to write in Spanish, the only language permitted at the time […] He had decided that his world had been destroyed by the war which had just begun. He deliberately sought out the kingdom of death, the negation of the life which lay before him. (Capmany 1992: 17)

“To the cypress” opens with Espriu’s statement that “the bloodshed buried my world” (Cassells 1986: 18), in an echo of the poem “Viatge d’hivern”: “sang que no he vessat |

m'ha destruït el món" (Espriu 2003: 89)[3]. The voice of the Catalan poet depicts the post-war panorama of hopelessness and subjugation in his "vanquished country", with a fleeting melancholy thought for the young man that he was before the cataclysm:

> Before the fighting, I was blessed,
> At twenty-three, a prodigy with five books.
> Salom, I called myself. (Cassells 1986: 18)

Espriu's choice to project himself in his own work as an allegorical character embodying peace — the name Salom evidently taken from the Hebrew word — shows how deeply the fratricidal fighting troubled him. The poems in his collection *Les hores* were grouped into three parts: part I was dedicated to a close friend and fellow poet ("recordant B. Rosselló-Pòrcel") and part II is linked to the memory of Espriu's mother ("recordant sempre la meva mare"). Espriu (2003: 57, 81) attaches, in parentheses, the exact dates of their demise: Bartomeu Rosselló-Pòrcel died in 1938 and Escolàstica Castelló in 1950. The dedication of part III ("recordant allunyadament Salom", 2003: 103) symbolically causes two events to coincide: the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, on July 18 1936, and the death of the poet's literary alter ego. In section I of "To the cypress", as in *Les Hores*, Espriu has a "distant memory" of the young Salom, who lived in a time when peace was still a possibility:

> But Salom died at the first shriek of the civil war:
> July 18, 1936 — (Cassells 1986: 18)

The war not only traumatised Espriu, depriving him of a progressive education in the best humanist tradition. It also caused his incipient and promising literary career to veer decisively. In 1936, Espriu was "a prodigy with five books", two novels and three short story collections: *El doctor Rip* (1931), *Laia* (1932), *Aspectes* (1934), *Ariadna al laberint grotesc* (1935), and *Miratge a Citerea* (1935). These works of fiction are characterised by stylistic experimentation and a point of view that is often ironic or satirical. After their publication, Espriu switched to verse, his choice of the poetic mode as expressive vehicle being directly related to the war that drew the dividing line between enthusiastic freedom and discouraging repression. Had the war never broken out and especially, had it not resulted in severe censorship and the persecution of Catalan culture, he would have probably continued to write the kind of fiction that he

[3] "Viatge d'hivern" is included in the collection *Les hores* which, despite containing some of Espriu's earliest verse, achieved its definitive form in 1963.

had published in the 30s. Poetry became a more suitable means of expression in the new political situation:

> He dicho que mi obra refleja la guerra civil, pero es más. Mi poesía es hija de la guerra. Antes me interesaba — y ahora también — la narrativa, pero la poesía me "surgió" como más radical. La eliminación pública del catalán hacía imposible el cultivo de la narrativa, mientras que el poema pudo surgir de un modo más íntimo y necesario. (Reina 1995a: 149)

The early thirties, the years preceding the war, when Espriu was an excellent student and a promising fiction writer, are idealised and identified with the vitality of Catalan culture, the richness of the language — metaphorically associated with natural imagery — and the nation's dynamism. In section V, Espriu addresses Cassells and the poem's readers to dwell on the years of the Second Spanish Republic:

> Listen, in that distant time, in those ardent days
> Of the Republic,
> My language filled me like a heady wine,
> Laced with the sweetness of figs, the tang of pine-nuts;
> Yes, my country was an almond tree in bloom.
> The Mediterranean was my garden — blue, voluminous — (Cassells 1986: 19)

The Mediterranean Sea, which washes the shore in Sinera, is an alternative to, an escape from confinement and political boundaries. In *Les cançons d'Ariadna*, Espriu included a poem with a Basque title, "Abesti bioztun bat entzun naiz" — which could be translated as "I heard a heartfelt song". The Basque Country is, like Catalonia / Sinera, a small nation that turns to the sea in order to avoid isolation:

> Clars solcs dibuixadíssims,
> terra petita en pau.
> Com que se sap petita,
> obre portes a mar. (Espriu 1990: 118)

This watery and seamless garden is part of Espriu's lost world. Pijoan i Picas has analysed the garden image in Espriu's poetics and she considers it an instance of the *refuge* archetype: "un espai delimitat, hiperprotector, que indueix a la vida plàcida perquè s'hi ha exorcitzat la mort, i, per tant, hi ha una manca d'antagonisme entre la vida i la mort" (1995: 82). The archetype in question comprises the notions of protection, peace and intellectual activity. Specifically in Espriu's imagination, it is objectified as a happy childhood in Arenys de Mar, "before the fighting", with its inherent unawareness of mortality and the sense that the future was full of possibility (Pijoan i Picas, 1995: 83). Poem IX of *Llibre de Sinera* is set in the "jardí dels cinc arbres", where the poet and his siblings used to spend many summer hours at play:

Claror de l'aigua, prima
molsa del safareig.
Varava fràgils barques,
en encalmar-se el vent. (Espriu 2006: 30)

The scene is evocative of "la infantesa, viscuda com una etapa paradisíaca d'atemporalitat, amb jocs i alegria" (Pijoan i Picas 1995: 60). Refuge can be sought in this space of the family house, but also in the more extensive setting of Sinera, its natural surroundings and "blue, voluminous" sea. The following lines are from poem II of *Cementiri de Sinera*:

Aquesta mar, Sinera,
turons de pins i vinya,
pols de rials. No estimo
res més, excepte l'ombra
viatgera d'un núvol. (Espriu 2003: 10)

In the lines from "To the cypress" quoted above, Espriu's love of his own language is expressed through gustative images unequivocally reminiscent of Sineran life and nature: the taste of "a heady wine", "the sweetness of figs", "the tang of pine-nuts". The sound of Catalan is also an integrating component of Espriu's archetypal garden and his poems communicate a painful nostalgia for its normalised use. "Advers al vent" (from *Mrs Death*) goes back to the old days of "Sineran lords", when the gardens withered in parallel with the banishment of words:

No preguntis si penso
encara en els vells dies
dels senyors, si recordo
com lentament morien
els jardins, les paraules. (Espriu 2003: 164)

Espriu's garden of paradise was lost as a result of the original sin of the Spanish Civil War — in his play *Primera història d'Esther*, the Altíssim, the blind man who runs the puppet show, warns the people of Sinera: "Eviteu el màxim crim, el pecat de la guerra entre germans" (Espriu 1981: 129). To the critical political situation that Espriu lived, one should add personal factors, such as the bereavement caused by the death of his father and his beloved friend Rosselló-Pòrcel:

> Simbòlicament restava tot cancel·lat: la mort de la República, de Rosselló i els seus somnis d'un món diferent; la mort del notari [Espriu's father's death in 1940] i, amb ell, de les aspiracions professionals del mateix Espriu. Una família al seu càrrec, una guerra mundial a l'aguait de la situació a Espanya. Tot plegat, un autèntic *lost paradise*. (Delor i Muns 1993: 150; author's emphasis)

II. THE PROMISE OF OBLIVION (1936-1975)

Espriu recalls the post-war atmosphere and his state of mind in the first eight sections of Cassells' poem, where those years are viewed by the old poet in retrospect. In the following lines, from section II, he compares himself with two heroes belonging to cultural sources that he knew very well, the Bible and classical mythology. He felt impotent like Samson after Delilah's treachery, lost like Theseus inside the labyrinth, without Ariadne's help:

> Suddenly I was powerless, like Samson.
> Who could have imagined it?
> No saviour, no Ariadne's thread,
> Just the promise of oblivion — (Cassells 1986: 18)

The erasure of its past prevents Sinera from having a present and a future. Espriu's task is a form of resistance against these barren prospects, a determined attempt to preserve the language and its culture. At the same time, it is also a lament over the deprivation suffered by Sinera. Hence, his poetry, singing of loss, is often labelled elegiac. In the poem "Perquè un dia torni la cançó a Sinera" (*Les Hores*), which contains interesting reflections about writing and the role of the poet, Espriu complains that

> Mai no ha entès ningú
> per què sempre parlo
> del meu món perdut. (Espriu 2003: 118)

In section VIII of "To the cypress", we find two verse lines that can connect with these. Cassells has Espriu declare "*I am no lover of the present*, | *But the past*" (Cassells 1986: 20; author's italics).

The Catalan poet's work is further characterised through his own voice in the poem. In section VII, he outlines his poetic plan after wondering what his motivations in writing might have been. The lines below, conversational and anaphoric, refer to Espriu's firm refusal to write in Spanish, to his fascination with the grotesque, to the themes of death, war and repression, to the frequent mythological allusions:

> Damn it, what was I reaching for?
> Something more than Cervantes' language.
> More than the brutal pantomime.
> More than the brunt of the black boot.
> More than sin or the minotaur.
> More, more than the fear of death — (Cassells 1986: 20)

Espriu's poetry consists of all the elements listed, and is more than simply each one of them. He knew "what he was reaching for": a meditation upon death "per veure-la d'una manera objectiva, serena i a partir de la qual es pot entendre el que realment interessa, que és la vida" (Batista 1985: 64).

Immediately after the lines quoted, however, Espriu's goal is defined not conceptually, but with emphasis on the imaginative dimension and on his sense of belonging to Sinera: he aspired to create "an alphabet of cypresses and sea-light" (Cassells 1986: 20). Some of the most frequent or evocative constituents of Espriu's "imaginal alphabet" are featured in the poem by Cassells: ash, cemetery, sea, song (I); stars, light and shadow, dolphins (IV); wind (V, VI, X); hills, vines, fennel, fields, hoes (VII); pines, boats (VIII); a bull's hide (IX); marble, vineyards (X)[4]. And of course the cypress tree which, given its relevance in the poem — signalled by the title — will be considered in more detail below.

The Spain of the 30s and 40s, turbulent and war-stricken, made Espriu's poetry what it is — gravely meditative, but also intensely lyrical. Even though Espriu's voice seems to diminish the importance of some of the more recognisable facets of his poetic world, the references to Ariadne's thread and the minotaur bring to mind a key image: the labyrinth, which could be related to the political situation in which the poet lived and, perhaps more importantly, to his Everyman's metaphysical quest[5]. According to Castellet, the labyrinth is "un símbol conceptual, més lligat al desorientat vagarejar dels homes per la vida [...] que a la mítica elaboració grega" (1984: 123).

As hinted at above, Espriu's poems contain frequent, more or less veiled allusions to the two fundamental strands of what could be called "universal culture" — a traditional concept no longer taken for granted, but one that is valid for a poet like Espriu. References to Biblical literature or classical mythology are an essential part of his work; identifying and examining them closely contributes to its deeper understanding. The interest of the curious poem "Rars ecos pels tombants" (*Les Cançons d'Ariadna*) lies in

[4] Several images are only listed once, although they recur through the sequence. Espriu's image of the "pell de brau" was taken from a book about Iberia by the Greek geographer and historian Strabo (63 BC – 19 AD), where the Iberian Peninsula is compared to a spread bull's hide. Espriu made that image a symbol of the coexistence, not always easy, of different peoples in Spain and Portugal.

[5] The Theseus myth is alluded to in the titles of several works by Espriu, in prose and verse: *Ariadna al laberint grotesc*, *Les cançons d'Ariadna*, *Final del laberint*. Additionally, the third part of *El Caminant i el Mur* bears the title "El Minotaure i Teseu".

its interconnected presentation of the two cultural traditions that furnished the poet's imagination from his early years. He recalls the biblical stories that his aunt Maria used to tell him:

> La tia Maria
> llegia sovint
> en llibres molt savis
> maleses i crims.
> […]
> Quan queia la pluja
> damunt llessamins,
> contava disbauxes
> del sant rei David. (Espriu 1990: 25)

As Espriu recalls in his prologue to *Primera història d'Esther*, Maria Castelló "dominava l'art, tan sinerenc, de vivificar el que contava" (1981: 86). Her Biblical narrations made it easier for the child to assimilate classical and Egyptian mythology, into which he delved later in life. The aunt's storytelling

> m'obria camins,
> enllà de l'escuma
> d'aquest mar antic.
> Petit, m'allunyava,
> a lloms de dofins,
> per freus neguitosos,
> anquines, perills.
> De cop m'acollien
> els braços del Nil,
> sentia mesclar-se
> mots grecs amb llatins. (Espriu 1990: 25)

As we have seen, Espriu's voice in Cassells' poem identifies his experiences with those lived by Theseus and Samson. The Catalan poet's life in the darkest years of the Spanish post-war — when everyday hardships combined with the struggle to pursue a literary career in a banned language, in an isolated country — is compared in "To the cypress" to the plight of other Biblical characters such as Joseph, sold by his brothers and captive in Egypt, or Job, the butt of God's seemingly unjustified rage and cruelty. The following lines are from section III:

> It was like the dream of Joseph in Egypt,
> The dream-in-the-dungeon, the black well,
> Or the plangent cry of Job,
> The fortunate man who wakes in hell,
> Tested by a fire from heaven — (Cassells 1986: 19)

Espriu's great interest in the book of Job is reflected in his poetry. The realistic portrayal of the beggars and the blind men that people Sinera is reminiscent of Job's

physical suffering and pitiful abandonment. In poem XL of *La pell de brau*, the lyrical speaker appeals to a tyrannical figure who has made him a leper and deserted him:

> Però tu te'n rius:
> [...]
> Em tornes mesell
> i em deixes podrint-me
> en aquest femer. (Espriu 2008: 376)[6]

But these poignant images inspired by the trials of Job do not apply only to the fate of Sinera and Sepharad[7]. Espriu thinks of the Biblical character as emblematic of the human condition, and this mythical transposition became more evident and meaningful for the poet as belligerance intensified during the first half of the twentieth century:

> La terrible violència bèl·lica del segle XX, que li va tocar de presenciar quasi en la seva totalitat […] li fornia la visió, per dir-ho amb termes bíblics, d'un món caigut en el pecat; és a dir, un món exiliat de Déu. Una època de damnació en què Déu estava més ocult que mai i l'home, tan desvalgut i angoixat com ho havia estat Job, abandonat a les arbitràries forces destructores de Satanàs (Delor 2005: 578-579)

Opposed to this world of sin and damnation is the "little homeland", Sinera, which is still the poet's solace even — or perhaps with more reason — in the face of adversity. As we saw, in section II of "To the cypress", already quoted from, we are offered a glimpse of paradise lost in which the beauty of the Sineran landscape and the poet's pride in his language are imaginatively linked. These two elements are also brought together when the remembered period is the post-war and not the Republic (VII). Mediterranean nature and the voices of the living and the dead comfort and inspire Espriu in troubled times:

> Sometimes I'd sit before the blank page — impoverished,
> Till the rising sun reclaimed
> The hills of vines and fennel, the hills,
> So unforgettable.
> And from the wide fields would come
> The voices of peasants,
> Mingling with the voices of my dead,
> The sound of hoes striking my heart — (Cassells 1986: 20)

Espriu is, according to Cassells, "a lover of the past", and the memory of those who ensured the continuity of his language and his culture ("the voices of my

[6] The poem that follows (XLI) completes the allusion. Other poems that contain more or less direct references to the book of Job are "Perquè un dia torni la cançó a Sinera" (*Les hores*), "El vent" (*Les cançons d'Ariadna*) and poem VII of *Llibre de Sinera*.

[7] In *La pell de brau* and other poems, Espriu refers to Spain as Sepharad, establishing a parallelism between the Israelites' wandering in the desert and Franco's dictatorship. Sephardi Jews were those native to Spain; they were expelled or forced to convert by the end of the 15th century.

dead") justifies and empowers him in his civil resistance and poetic mission. In section II, his idyllic youth is given the evanescent quality of a dream ("Did I dream it all?") and the old poet's reminiscing comes to a halt when a powerful image, alluding to one of the witches' prophecies in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, is conjured up: "And then the armies of the dead advancing | surrounding me like Birnam Wood" (Cassells 1986: 20)[8]. These ghosts, initially disturbing, become soothing presences when the Mediterranean sea is no longer a garden, but the setting of the struggle to "save the words". In section VIII, and in Espriu's own voice, persecuted Catalan is compared to boats against a stormy wind:

> And from the sumptuous balconies of pine,
> I could see the boats
> Feuding with the wind,
> Like the fierce and indrawn words
> We uttered in exile (Cassells 1986: 20)

The imagery of sailing and shipwreck has a special signifcance in several poems by Espriu[9]. In "Port de retorn" (*Les Hores*), the lyrical speaker is, as in Cassells' poem, watching the boats cleave the waves. Their sailing has something of a mystic journey, which transcends the local immediacy of Sinera and the poet's interior exile during the most sombre years of repression. Souls are compared to vessels heading for "the port of time", towards a marble shore:

> Perduts en la llunyana
> dificultat de l'aigua,
> passen velers que porten
> el senyal dels oratges
> soferts en la recerca
> del port del temps, on alça
> un vell poder vastíssim
> hostils fredors de marbre. (Espriu 2003: 90)

III. AT LONG LAST (1975-1985)

Section IX of "To the cypress" is especially important as it combines the voices of the two poets — Espriu and Cassells — in dialogic form and, at the same time, separates

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[8] Cf. "Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be | Until Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill | Shall come against him" (Shakespeare 2008: 174).

[9] Interesting examples are, besides from "Port de retorn", poem XXV of *Cementiri de Sinera*, "El passat i el pou, a trenc d'alba" (*Les cançons d'Ariadna*) or "Cançó del matí encalmat" (*El caminant i el mur*).

the sequences where each of these two voices is heard independently. In the part of the poem where the lyrical voice is clearly identifiable with his own (X-XII), Cassells draws on memories of Espriu, Catalan culture and Arenys de Mar. The association between language and natural imagery continues to be established. The metaphor THE WORDS OF CATALAN ARE BOATS AGAINST THE WIND, implicit in VIII, reappears in the lines below ("foundered language"), from section X. Another metaphor equates the language with seeds that will be hurled into the air, in a rebellious act of freedom:

> Your foundered language
> Blazing inside you like sweetly-guarded seeds.
>
> At any moment, you could have tossed them to the wind — (Cassells 1986: 21)

Cassells recalls his encounter with the Catalan poet (IX) and a visit to the village of Arenys de Mar, his mythical nation of Sinera (X). Again typically Sineran imagery is displayed:

> At long last, I reached your village:
> How the cemetery crowns Sinera!
> In ecstasy, I found the cloudlet pines, the upraised vineyards.
> And the wind ushered me to
> Your hall of vibrant cypresses. (Cassells 1986: 21)

As happens with other lines in the poem, the second here comes across as a calque of Espriu's language: cf. "Quina petita pàtria encercla el cementiri!" (poem II of *Cementiri de Sinera*, 2003: 10). In the following section, Cassells declares that, on his visit, he "married Sinera" and suitably, the little homeland is personified in terms that resemble the description of the wife in the Biblical Song of Songs: "Breasts of the greenest pines, | hips of sun-rife vines and fennel" (XI)[10].

The lyrical speaker has finally had a direct sensual experience of Espriu's world, and is especially impressed by the cypresses, true emblems of Sinera. In the dark years of repression, the Catalan poet was sheltered by "the cypress' anointing shadow" (Cassells 1986: 18), which prevented him — like Job's solid faith — from losing hope: "Beside the cypresses, for awhile I could believe | God was not dead" (Cassells 1986: 19). The irrepressible voice of these "testifying trees wailing" (Cassells 1986: 19) carries with it denunciation and a vindication of justice. Cassells asks these "wondrous trees that listen | and can answer back" (1986: 21) to pronounce Espriu's most cherished word:

[10] See chapter 4 of the Song of Solomon.

> Like gods, in green unison, the cypresses let go
> A luscent whisper:
>
> *Liberty*. (Cassells 1986: 22; author's emphasis)

The god-like trees can finally proclaim the people's freedom. Earlier in the poem, earlier in time, they could only echo the unsettling sounds of Sinera's stunted future. To accentuate the desperation in the italicised voice of the cypresses, in section V, Cassells had eliminated the punctuation in the sentences and run them together. "For many years" Espriu heard this "on the wind":

> Catalonia. Exile. Theft. Horror of Franco. Don't bark, speak
> The language of the empire.
>
> Catalonia exile theft horror of Franco don't bark speak
> the language of the empire.
>
> cataloniaexilethefthorroroffrancodon'tbarkspeakthelanguage
> oftheempirecataloniaexilethefthorroroffrancodon'tbarkspeak
> thelanguageoftheempirecataloniaexilethefthorroroffrancodon (Cassells 1986: 19)

The cypresses are central images in Espriu's first collection of poetry, *Cementiri de Sinera*, where their stately presence accompanies the solitary poet. Poem V ends as follows:

> M'esperen
> tan sols, per fer-me almoina,
> fidels xiprers verdíssims. (Espriu 2003: 16)

D. Gareth Walters interprets the cypress in *Cementiri* as "a constant companion to the poet", "accompanier of his defeat" and "a spur to movement", but specifies that there is "no recourse to pathetic fallacy" (2006: 40), which contrasts with the conclusion of "To the cypress".

The last section of Cassells's poem combines the voices of the two poets and those of the cypresses. Cassells desires Espriu to speak once more: "Tell me again, old poet" (1986: 21). The latter recalls the relieved excitement and hope that followed Franco's death and how he walked his way to the cemetery, the heart of Sinera, as so many times before. There, he communicated his joy to the cypresses, urging them to "see how we have grown like you — bold, indomitable" (Cassells 1986: 23).

The cypresses are identified with the Catalan people as the poem resolves. They speak its last words, quoting — as Espriu does in the last line of section I — the poem "Perquè un dia torni la cançó a Sinera" (*Les hores*). These echoing lines achieve their full

meaning when read in the light of the Biblical epigraph chosen by Espriu to open his seminal *Cementiri de Sinera*: “I les filles de cançó seran humiliades” (Ecclesiastes 12.4). The humilated “daughters of song” stand for the repressed language that, after the dictator’s death, can hope to regain its dignity. The trees celebrate the new freedom, the return of the song and the future:

> *Let the dead rivers begin to breathe.*
> *Let the scourged, once-taunted bell receive its tongue*
> *In pomp, in pure jubilee.*
> *For now the song has returned to Sinera.* (Cassells 1986: 23; author’s italics)

These lines have the cadence and rejoicing tone of a hymn or canticle and can compare with Espriu’s “Inici de càntic en el temple” (*Les Cançons d’Ariadna*), a poem that is exceptional in celebrating the advent of freedom and spring in Sinera. The generations that have endured and resisted, those who have kept the language alive through a symbolic wandering in the desert, offer it now onto the new generations, hoping that they will always remember their plight:

> Ara digueu: “La ginesta floreix,
> arreu als camps hi ha vermell de roselles.
> Amb nova falç comencem a segar
> el blat madur i, amb ell, les males herbes”.
> Ah, joves llavis desclosos després
> de la foscor, si sabíeu com l’alba
> ens ha trigat, com és llarg d’esperar
> un alçament de llum en la tenebra! (Espriu 1990: 146)

IV. YOUR LEGACY AND LIBERATION (CONCLUSION)

As has been exemplified, in the sections of “To the cypress again and again” where the voice can be assumed to be Cassells’s, the poet draws largely on memories related to Espriu and his culture. In XII, he takes the reader to Perpignan, the Catalan-speaking French *arrondissement*, where he first saw people dance the *sardana*. The American poet links the dance, an image of nationhood, to Espriu’s role as a preserver of Catalan culture:

> This was your legacy and liberation:
> A dawn of linked hands.
> A deep Mediterranean laughter. (Cassells 1986: 22)

The poet expresses his wish to “enter the dance”, which can be considered an objective correlative of his interest in Catalan culture.

Malin Pereira considers Cassells's work essentially cosmopolitan; the majority of poems in *Soul Make a Path through Shouting*, including the one he dedicates to Espriu,

> turn to art as a witness to horror, crossing cultures from Czechoslovakia and Spain to Russia, Poland, and El Salvador. The poet-speaker traverses these cultures at ease, employing the insights born from their historical and cultural particulars toward a vision of art as a universal tool of healing from 20th-century horror. (Pereira 2007: 717)

Among other poets, Espriu was a witness of this traumatic horror and used his art to exorcise it. Decades later, Cassells has shared that role and developed a particular way to acknowledge genius, achievement or courage. As "To the cypress" exemplifies, there is a tendency in his work to make the poem a setting for conversation with dead figures who have his sympathy and admiration; on the website of *Texas State University*, Amy Francisco writes: "You could say that spirits speak to Cyrus Cassells ... [h]e has a talent for channeling life experiences — his own and those of others — into lyrical language that evokes empathy and compassion". In an interview, Jeremy Halinen asks the poet about this genre of compositions, *epistolary elegies* "where you are aligning yourself with a historical figure *during* that figure's historical moment. Time is collapsed. Voices merge" (Halinen and Laurentiis 2012: 124). Cassells replies:

> I'm not sure I know why epistolary elegies keep coming up for me [...] In terms of unique effects and advantages in the direct address to the dead, there is perhaps more of an opportunity for emotional confrontation, for questioning and maybe even resolving the speaker's relationship or connection to the elegized. (Halinen and Laurentiis 2012: 130)

This "direct address to the dead" (Lorca, Montale, Van Gogh or Pavese, for instance) is of a similar nature as Espriu's homage to his deceased friend Rosselló-Pòrcel, which Delor i Muns relates to the belief, in Ancient Greece, that the dead chose a double in the world of the living to project their existence. Judging from Espriu's poetic production following Rosselló-Pòrcel's death, the latter must have chosen his friend to act as his double, so that his art continued to be expressed. Espriu's role as double is more obvious in the first part of *Les Hores*, where he naturally assimilates Rosselló-Pòrcel's style and characteristic imagery (Delor i Muns 1993: 155-163). It follows that Cassells did the same for Espriu in "To the cypress".

This instance of Greek myth is coherent with Cassells's poetic technique. Rickey Laurentiis refers to his use of "personae and the dramatic monologue" and points out "how you have insisted [...] that each 'I', each historical self you have written about or from, is legitimately one of your own various selves" (Halinen and Laurentiis 2012:

130). When it comes to literature, the American poet's sense of the past implies a veneration for tradition. The following lines are from Amy Francisco's online profile:

> Our cultural legacy is very, very important [...] When we think about the 19th century, we're not going to journalism. We're going to Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. And that's part of the bigger truth culturally. So what we're doing, what we're investing in, what we're putting our life energy into is part of a spiritual and social continuum in our culture.

Cassells "we" may well include Espriu, whose poetic purpose has been described in strikingly similar terms: "inserir la pròpia obra en la constel·lació de les grans creacions de la humanitat, sobre la base d'integrar tot el passat cultural en el present, de contribuir constructivament a la prolongació del continuum històric" (Castellet 1984: 90).

The analysis of "To the cypress again and again", in many ways representative of Cassells's work, also reveals an affinity to Espriu's vision of poetry and literary tradition. The poem that we have closely examined evinces a deep knowledge of Espriu's poetics and constitutes the kind of perceptive and admiring response that can only come from one poet to the work of another. Cassells's dialogue with Espriu objectifies how the creativity of writers is enhanced by their sense of history and their appreciation of the work of those who preceded them — no matter when, where or in what language they wrote.

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A POET SPEAKS ABOUT…

The use and abuse of language by a Chicano from Aztlán (both words unknown)

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> When the rich steal from the poor it is called business,
> when the poor protest it is called violence.
> When the natives follow their millennial migrations across America,
> they are called undocumented illegal aliens.
> When the Europeans, invade, commit genocide and steal America,
> they call themselves immigrants and pilgrims.
> The united Nations and the Red Cross are concerned
> and sometimes respond to atrocities throughout the world,
> never to atrocities in the United States of America
> and its borderland wall of death more than 1000 miles long,
> so long the boundaries can be seen from outer space!

Language is the most important tool of humankind, and by the act of genesis, of all life. After all, before we became human there was language, as it continues to be present in creation itself. We hear that dogs communicate or emit what could be language: “au au” in Brazil, “ham ham” in Albania, “wang wang” in China, “guau guau” in Mexico, and “bow wow” in the United States. A variant of their language is “Grrr…”

Metaphorically we say there is the language of music, poetry, art, science, mathematics, and that there is a family of languages. Academically this most complex human system of communication is broken down into philology, etymology, grammar, phonetics, diction, verbs, nouns, gerunds, adjectives, possessives, past, and present tenses. To delve into language minutiae gets extremely mind boggling, mysterious, and either headachy or rapturous depending on your love or hate for insights on language.

Leaving the origins, extensions, variants, dialects, specific language branches, and evolution of nationally collective forms of expression to scientists, poets and dreamers, I shall focus here on a very specific use and abuse of language: how language has

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identified, trapped, occupied and liberated a specific people in the world: the Chicano people of the nation of Aztlán.

The mere declaration of such a purpose and the use of the words "Chicano" and "Aztlán" is already a statement of mystery, ambiguity, an ipso facto truth of the unknown, of the destruction of knowledge, of an occupation, unknown elements (Chicanos, Aztlán) to be deleted. I refer to language here as a tool of occupation or liberation, of validation or elimination.

When I say that I am Chicano to people in China, they say, Chicago? I tell them that I am a person, not a town. And the question follows – what is Chicano? The irony is that the same question is echoed in the land of my own origins. Chicanos in my homeland do not know they are Chicanos. Those that do know find themselves in the minority. Aztlán? It is a millenial nation-land that still does not exist! Even fewer natives of Aztlán have even heard of an Aztlán ! By contrast and contradiction, both Chicanos and Aztlán bear an influence way out of proportion to their self-awareness and acknowledged numbers. Chicanos of Aztlán shake the roots of the most powerful nation in the world, the United States of America.

On the immediate surface one might think; this is politics, not language. Just as *thought* is action, all life interaction is transmitted and sieved through and with language. We are the collective result of what language permits us or binds us to be, in freedom, or bondage; autonomy, misery or joy.

Chicanos are Native Americans often referred to as Latinos, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, and a host of other internal denominations such as Mestizos, Cholos, and Raza. Chicanos are the descendants of the people that lived and continue to live in their homeland, Aztlán. Many of their ancestors left the place to migrate into and settle in the central valley of Mexico destined to become the Aztec Capital Tenocthitlan, today´s Mexico City. Chicanos are the people left in limbo while European nations warred with each other for control of the land, totally ignoring when they could, destroying when they met, the native people of the Americas. Chicanos are the original Mexica tribes that would give the name to Mexico – MeXicanos, while they themselves remained Xicanos written more popularly today as Chicanos. The native language of Chicanos is neither English nor Spanish, but was and is – Azteca Náhuatl. Today´s Chicanos speak all three

languages, with their native language so suppressed that they often are unaware they speak it.

The fact that we as Chicanos semi-exist is a direct result of the use and abuse of language. As extraordinary as it may seem, we are in the throes of surviving the last hurrahs of the days of an outdated but real Empire colonization. Through a series of well established government plans, the United States of America has pursued a policy of genocide, the total extermination of natives, especially those advocating for the de-occupation of their homelands, or at least, for the present, a negotiated co-existence planning for mutual autonomy. The most concentrated and focused use of language was placed in motion – a language that would justify, validate and install the ultimate masquerade to morality, democracy, fairness, freedom and justice. Among other examples of this, is the pivotal one called The Constitution of the United States, the bible of democracy, and freedom in America. It holds the most preposterous, outlandish and irreverent hyperboles, such as "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal". It then declared that black people were 3/5 human and natives were savages, the ownership of their land preempted and "extinguished" – actual language to rephrase "invasion" and "highway robbery". The language that replaced "colonization" was "democracy".

The greatest malefactor of the Great American theft is the bugled hero Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall (1801-1835) who declared that America had inherited ownership of the Americas from Great Britain. He also wrote of the rights of preemption (replace the word here with "theft") by virtue of the rights of discovery and conquest. This was to be the base of the masqueraded "rule of law" still flaunted to this day. To the Euro-illegals, to accidentally run into a populated civilized continent is "discovery". They immediately struck with the sword, the cross and the power of language by labeling the populations , "unchristian, heathen and savage". These were our ancestors, many with magnificent temple cities, paved walkways, balustrades, intrically carved statues and earthly placed buildings to reflect the heavens and the moving stars. John Marshall´s use of language to declare legal what was totally on prima facie evidence, illegal, became the basis for "American Constitutional Law", and made the supreme court a co-equal branch of government; that is, the government could not stand without its word-master thief to rubber stamp its government thefts.

Historical facts abound that this was and has always been our Homeland. Mayan ruins, from our other large half of our brethren have been discovered in Florida, while very recently, in the last few months of this year 2012, more Mayan pyramid ruins have been found in the state of Georgia, traditional base, like the state of Alabama, of racism of the deep south of the United States.

The abuse of language was instituted when the Mexican people (so confused and mixed, Natives with European Spanish) were seen as a blurred race to be despised and condemned, destroyed if possible. Referred to as greasers, wets, and dirty Messcans, they were shot on the range, haunted in their homes and hung on the nearest tree, as black slaves who stood up for their freedom, or who dared to look at a white woman. Such brutality would give rise to many a local hero such as Jacino Treviño, from southTexas, who became a legend in his own time, by defying all white attempts to kill him and foiled many a posse attempt to capture him including his running circles around the infamous Texas Rangers. He shot a local sheriff who murdered his brother over language confusion regarding a horse. The question was – do u have a horse ? A caballo repeated the sheriff. The true answer was no. Jacintos´s brother had a "llegua", (a mare). The sheriff called him a liar and shot him. Jacinto shot the sheriff. From then on Jacinto Treviño shot many a sheriff and many a Texas Ranger who came to hunt him down. There are songs and corridos about his "asañas" (exploits). Américo Paredes immortalized him in his book titled, *With a Pistol in his Hand*.

During the later part of the depression era 1929-1944, the government began massive deportations of Mexican people, estimated to be about 2 million; they were accused of taking American jobs. It is estimated that some 400,000 of them were U.S. citizens and/or legal residents. A recent article in the Los Angeles times, February 21, 2012, states that "families were forced to abandon their homes, or were defrauded of personal and real property, often sold by local authorities as 'payment' for the transportation expenses incurred in their removal". In February of the year 2012, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, born in Austria, signed a law to apologize for the inhumane deportation of such masses. A memorial has been placed in La Plaza on Main Street in the city of Los Angeles, California.

So real and so extreme is this established policy of extermination that a 50 page manual exists today issued by the Department of the Interior officially titled "Endgame" (remember the use and abuse of language?). The direct perversity of intent, said in a mocking terminology cannot be missed. Endgame. This manual details ways and means to find, arrest, and deport 10 million people of our kind, to be removed out of the United States of America, that is, from the heart of Aztlán, our ancient and native homeland. The genocide and removal of the native people, the destruction of their infrastructure and means of survival have been a Game from Hell to the invading Euro-American Illegals. In this very day, the daily Television news can break your heart to see the tears and anguish of families broken apart, children left alone to criminals who sometimes rape them, parents removed unable to defend them.

As if to drive the unwelcome fact home, the linguistic nails hammered on the cross of our Chicano Golgotha are various. The extreme xenophobia about our presence, and the memory of our belonging home, has driven the foreign Euro-Americans to dehumanize us in order to treat us as "others". The government has labeled many of us, that migrate back and forth in our homeland, as *illegals, undocumented,* and *aliens*. These 3 words are the language of the day, -- officially instituted in order to stop, abuse, harass, arrest, imprison, and deport many of our kind. It does not matter that families are broken up, that children are left without parents, wives without husbands and vice versa. It does not matter that this community is not breaking any laws but quite the contrary doing its best to uphold morality, humanity and the economy by being consumers and doing the most dangerous and difficult jobs. As if they were criminal offenders my community is arrested while doing its job. The prisons where they are incarcerated are called "Detention Centers".

In America, language is used to cloak, to deceive, to distract and to euphemize what has been a constant realpolitik of destruction meant to annihilate my people, community and ancestral memory. This has been going on for centuries where our communities are shuffled back and forth worse than cattle. Cattle are fed and taken care of – even if slaughtered. We are only slaughtered. In addition to the fact that our color and physical native appearance is enough reason to be suspect and detained for deportation, the worst damage is done to our minds – as with the death of our minds, so goes the extermination of our identity and presence as Native Americans. In the case of language, when a

language is erased, so are the tools of expression and maintenance of autonomous memory, and ancestral ways.

In Tucson, Arizona, as of this writing in the middle of the month of January in the year of our Lord, 2012, when, according to Maya prophecy, an era is to come to an end and a new more enlightened one begin, an auto da fé, has just been executed; the public burning of knowledge of our history by the U.S. government. An inquisition was instituted by a State of the Union. All that was needed was for the torch to be set to the burning of the books. Some fifty books were banned and physically confiscated from the successful program of Mexican American Studies (MAS). Not only was the program declared "unconstitutional", but the books that served that program were banned and physically removed, this action in front of the students who used them.

Some of the books banned and confiscated in this 21st Century inquisition are:

> *Critical Race Theory*, by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic
> *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures*, edited by Elizabeth Martinez
> *Message to Aztlán*, by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales
> *Chicano! The History of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement*, by F. Arturo Rosales
> *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, by Rodolfo Acuña
> *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by Paulo Freire
> *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*, by Bill Bigelow
> *Cantos al Sexto Sol, an Anthology of Aztlanahuac Writing*, edited by Cecilio García-Camarillo, Roberto Rodriguez, and Patrisia Gonzales

This last book banned and prohibited, *Cantos al Sexto Sol* (Songs to the Sixth Sun), is an *Anthology of Aztlanahuac Writings*, reflecting a great number of Chicano activists from the heyday of the 70´s and 80's. The poetry and words of my fellow Chicano authors are there, including some of my own.

As if to underline the perversity of control over our hearts and minds some of our own native people were instruments of this public *auto da fe*.

The Words of San Antonio, Texas, 1950´s organizer, Emma Tenayuca, ring true, "A people cannot be oppressed without the help of some of the oppressed". When students from Cholla High School walked out and marched a distance of 5 miles to Tucson

Unified School District, they were met by "burrocrats" including administrator Lupita García. She told the students that racism had nothing to do with the action and that Mexico should be taught in Mexico not in America.

An earlier bill passed in the state upon which she based her words was HB (House Bill) 2281 that suspended Mexican American Studies not Mexican Studies. When asked why European studies had not been banned, no one, including Lupita García, had a response. Those students that protested were directed to perform janitorial duties on the weekend without any kind of hearing regarding their actions.

This is all too reminiscent of the fact that "ethnic studies" did not exist until the Europeans came to invade and occupy our homelands. The apartheid fact also exists in that in Tucson more than half of the students are of native origin. It is a minority of white immigrant invaders that establish the rules of conduct and what will be taught and reflected in the colonial schools. The irony and abuse of language lies in the fact that "Ethnic Studies" bases itself on the "racialization" in the Americas. Its mission statement (of Ethnic Studies) is to focus on the histories, literatures and politics of minorities and how such impact upon the social, political, and cultural factors that shape these minorities. As long as this interdisciplinary verbiage does not declare openly that we are an occupied people, but rather fulfills the job of telling minorities how they should interact with their occupiers, ethnic studies is grudgingly accepted in some schools. Accept the fact and study how messed up we are. All this can go on in an academic classroom while the streets are haunted by bodies armed with the latest high tech equipment to terminate us.

All this is executed and put into effect by language. This is the tricky abuse and cunning of a perverse mentality to enforce an advantage of power, this through politics and warfare. Some intent to portray the politics as benign is so absurd that there is a billboard that runs across the internet. "ICE establishes toll-free hotline for detainees claiming U.S. Citizenship (855) 448-6903". Rather than absolve the armed force of wrong doing, it fully establishes that this wrong doing is so prevalent that those that claim allegiance to white pure blue blood but do not looks so are picked up for deportation and imprisonment daily. It also establishes that any hope of being freed is directly bound to a proclaimed allegiance and fealty to being occupied and invaded –

claim U.S. Citizenship. What is this ICE I have mentioned? It is the arm that triggers the guillotine: Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Immigration is the act of foreigners passing or coming into a country for the purpose of permanent residence. Customs is usage, frequency of same acts, habitual. We all know what enforcement is. What is ICE enforcing? The contradiction is real easy to see. The real immigrants are the white people that came from the old world of Europe.

ICE is either enforcing that the customs of the new European immigrants be the law of the land – or that the customs of the natives be extinguished, especially their insistence that they are AmerIndian natives. To deport native peoples from their homeland is more than ethnic cleansing, it is a war of termination. Only time and history can record the outcome and clash between natives and colonization. Language continues to be central to the on-going battle for control of how anyone will be classified as a member of the world community.

The fact that ICE exists is an Orwellian concept plucked from the pages of Huxley's Brave New World. It is a Vini Vidi Wiki, (I came I saw I conquered) Aryan supremacy mentality that still polices the world in a Tweedlee and Tweedledom society. The people that once came uninvited to trespass and steal America from the natives now refer to themselves as "Nativists". What are we to think of a people that impose a nation with the words, "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal", while invading and occupying people´s homelands, and dragging their slaves in chains? In present times the inhumanity of this is reflected in the young men and women sacrificed to be warriors; minorities to the war front in droves! Many who survive remain in shock forever as they learn that humanity is not meant to create carnage one upon the other.

Chicanos exist by the power of ancestral legacy. The denomination itself, the name, has floated in the misty past of myth and legend. The appellation itself, "Chicanos" has had its own uphill struggle to become itself, that is, to be established as an accepted denomination for a people. The Mexicans from Mexico said it sounded nasty, like chiquero (a pigsty), until they were reminded that part of their (our) tribes were called "Chichimecas". The Euro-illegal Americans said it was dirty and sounded like "chicanery" (deception, trickery, artifice). The native community was so confused that

in the beginning the word "Chicano" was used in hushed whispers and mostly in the backstreets and narrow alleys where Chicanos were surviving. The community itself was leery of those that used the word and community members were defensive about being called Chicanos themselves. In the beginning there was almost universal rejection of the use of the word Chicano.

In the early mist of time Chicanos and the Mexica tribes they come from, had their homeland named Aztlán. It was their ancestors, the Mexica tribe that gave them their name: Mexicanos to the south (Mexico) and Chicanos to the north (USA). Their world of language allowed them group communication, group survival, and with a certain surplus of confidence in sheltered safety, the time and space to transcend language applications. It was through language that Chicanos discovered a reflection of their identity, doubted it, questioned it, and sealed it in their customs, traditions and ways. Then came the inequity of invasion and colonial occupation that persists to this day just as the Moors remained holding Spain hostage for 800 years. Giuseppe Mazzini states: "Without a country you have neither name, token, voice, no right, no admission as brothers into the fellowship of the peoples".

Chicanos have no language of their own, no homeland of their own, no flag, no written statement of their identity or rights as a people, or as a nation. There is no one to advocate for, protect or guarantee the human rights of Chicanos as a people, as a nation or even as a conglomeration of tribes. Nonetheless, Chicanos have emerged in the 20th / 21st Centuries as living fossils that carry their own rebirths. There exists no weapon, nation, force, government or flag that can defeat or destroy such persistence of presence which translates into an indomitable sense of greatness.

In spite of all that Chicanos do not have, they have the most important element in their DNA, in their ancestral roots and in their memory of themselves; they have myth, they have legend and the knowledge that they descend from a people of awesome and mythic proportions.

That is why the United States government has burned its wits to withhold, contain and extinguish the flame of freedom and liberty that beats a great rhythm in every barrio across the length and width of America. Aztlán has grown and continues to grow day by day. It has neither diminished nor lessened. The land of the dead, Mictlán, has a greater

voice than the thunder of American weapons and arms. In the year 2012 the prophecy comes to pass. Aztlán is reborn with the splendor, wisdom and strength of all our generations past. The language and voice of Aztlán is reborn to liberate our colonized home. All the king´s horses and men can never pretend to be legal resident citizens of someone else´s stolen land – ever again.

Those Euro-illegals that have, in spite of their own government, acquired a sense of humanity are now occupying Wall Street, a movement that has spread throughout the world. Language is once more being applied toward the liberation of a humanity held hostage through the use and abuse of language.

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BOOK REVIEW

Living with Lynching. African American Lynching Plays, Performance, and Citizenship, 1890-1930
Koritha Mitchell
Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011. 272 pages. ISBN: 978-0-252-07880-4

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Embodied Practices of Black Belonging and Identity Formation in Lynching Drama of the Progressive Era: Koritha Mitchell's *Living with Lynching*

The volume authored by Koritha Mitchell is a remarkable contribution to the field of African American drama, as it explores the manifold uses of lynching plays during the Progressive era as crucial tools to ensure community conversation and debate about the difficulties and complexities involved in having to coexist with the terrible reality of lynching. Mitchell's groundbreaking study reassesses the significance of black theater as an archive and repertoire of embodied practices of black belonging and community-building in the face of constant exposure not only to lynching itself, but to the insidious exhibition of lynching photographs that perpetuated the myth of the black brute and rapist. The publication proposes an innovative critical reading that counteracts this racist practice by investigating the impact of lynching on both the black family and the black home, focusing on lynching dramas written by prominent writers and intellectuals from 1890 to 1930, such as Angelina Weld Grimké, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Mary Burrill, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Myrtle Smith Livingston, G. D. Lipscomb, and Joseph Mitchell. By analyzing the development of the genre itself, which was initiated by black women, Mitchell highlights how lynching drama helped to "read aright" the horrible

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practice of lynching as a profoundly unjust and unjustified manifestation of racial hatred resulting from the need to remind African Americans of their inferior status in a markedly segregated country. In so doing, her work succeeds in confirming black performance as a recurrent means conveniently used by African Americans to assert black citizenship and black identity.

Mitchell's excellent study is neatly divided into two sections that complement each other. Part I, "Making Lynching Drama and its Contributions Legible", sets the stage by introducing readers to the scenes and scenarios of actual lynchings, as well as the development of black-authored plays that effectively challenged the weighty legacy of minstrelsy and comedy. Part II, "Developing a Genre, Asserting Black Citizenship", offers a nuanced analysis of the recurrent figures in the lynching plays of the period: the black soldier, the black lawyer, the black mother/wife, and the pimp and the coward. Mitchell repeatedly shows her deep knowledge of the discourses and practices of the time through a highly perceptive account of its background that is both ideologically and historically grounded.

The first chapter is devoted to explaining the scenes and scenarios that were enacted during what Mitchell aptly claims to be the "theatrical production" of an actual lynching. She effectively sets the records straight by means of a reformulation of the mob enactment and of the photographic display that followed. One of the most compelling and disputed issues at stake in the enactment of lynching is intimately related to the justification of lynching itself as a corrective practice to ward off the "black brute", "the criminal", and allegedly ensure social and racial harmony. From this first chapter onwards Mitchell is able to deconstruct the notion of lynching as a "scenario of exorcism" by unmasking the white supremacist logic that supported the spectacle of brutalized black bodies. Quite consistently, Mitchell underlines the way in which the racist practice of lynching became ritualized murder effectively used to sustain white superiority while declaring the immorality and bestiality of blacks in general, and black men in particular. Thus, Mitchell argues that lynching became theatrical in the sense that it provided the opportunity to exorcize the "evil" that endangered (white) "civilization", according to the dominant view of the period.

On the other hand, lynching drama provided the ideal access to what Diana Taylor defined as “the archive and the repertoire of turn-of-the-century US culture” (cited in Mitchell 2011: 23), which are key concepts that prove quite productive in Mitchell’s analysis. In her insightful use of these two concepts Mitchell overturns Western scholarship’s investment in the archive in detriment of the repertoire, and demonstrates their complementarity. When examining the community practices that lynching drama fostered throughout the Progressive era, both archive and repertoire become essential in the text. What is also innovative in Mitchell’s apt reading of lynching is her shifting focus from the victimized black body to the equally victimized black family life and black home. She persuasively contends that lynching playwrights invested deeply in what may be referred to as a cult of domesticity[2], because they “understood the significance of showcasing – for themselves, not whites – black family life at a time when mainstream discourses and practices constantly asserted that African Americans had no interest, or moral capacity for, stable domesticity” (Mitchell 2011: 27). Through the scripts of these plays, these writers made useful embodied practices of black belonging available to both family and community, while bolstering their self-conceptions. Moreover, these scripts also incorporate necessary confirmation of their rightful belonging to the nation, thus problematizing configurations of both citizenship and nationhood.

The author’s committed stance becomes more evident in her theorization of lynching plays as artifacts/mediums to contest the mainstream “politics of representation”, exemplified by a rhetoric based on black barbarity and white righteousness. Indeed, Mitchell makes much of Stuart Hall’s notion, especially as she ties it to the need for racial self-affirmation and cultural expression, which were deemed priorities by black artists and intellectuals at that time. To allow for community mourning and survival, these playwrights redefined both what was theatrical and the theatrical form itself by valuing non-commercial and amateur work. In that line, these dramatists created

[2] Hazel Carby explains the significance of the cult of domesticity propitiated by the ideology known as the “cult of true womanhood” that emerged in the nineteenth century and its influence on black women writers in her classical work *Reconstructing Womanhood* (1987).

alternative public spaces that helped identity formation through "communal literacy"[3], thus encouraging the production of both self- and communal-affirming knowledge.

In the second chapter, the author engages in a thorough redefinition of "black theater" that emphasizes how the legacy of minstrelsy and comedy was effectively challenged by black-authored plays, paying special attention to the significant ways in which black writers responded to W.E.B. Du Bois' 1926 call for the emergence of a black theater, "about us, by us, for us and near us" (Mitchell 2011: 45)[4]. She brings to the forefront the interesting debate about black representation that was taking place in the twenties, and which can be traced back to the previous decade. Revisiting the history of black drama, she is tactful enough to remind readers of the legacy of black performers in both minstrelsy and musical comedy, especially successful all-black Broadway musicals. Mitchell thus provides an updated revision of the emergence of black-authored drama, addressing crucial topics such as representation, aesthetic choices, and black audience. She also manages to navigate the objections that were raised to black renditions of white-authored classics (such as Shakespeare) and Broadway hits. In the midst of Harlem success, there were different proposals about what kind of theater was actually intended, going from Locke's timely meditation of the "academic model as the most viable" (Mitchell 2011: 53) to more community-based approaches elaborated by Du Bois.

By means of an in-depth analysis of the thematic and formal devices in *Rachel*, Mitchell acknowledges the pioneering efforts on the part of Angelina Weld Grimké to respond to this new writer-centered conception of black theater. This play paved the way for later lynching drama in many ways: in its politics of representing African American identity as shaped by mob violence and trauma, in its indictment of hypocritical Christianity, and in its tracing the everlasting damaging effects on black households. On the other hand, the reaction to the play's formal staging – a full-length production with emphasis on plot and directed toward an integrated audience – also facilitated later writers' aesthetic choices. When fashioning a theory of black identity formation and citizenship,

[3] In *Forgotten Readers* the literary historian Elizabeth McHenry describes how African Americans exercized communal literacy via memorization thanks to reading aloud and dramatic readings (cited in Mitchell 2011: 40).

[4] In his famous essay "Criteria for Negro Art" published in *The Crisis* in 1926, Du Bois outlined the importance of art as propaganda for African Americans in order to achieve recognition for their contributions to American culture.

certain main patterns emerged and pervaded later plays: "virtuous womanhood, honorable manhood, and innocent childhood" in Mitchell's words (Mitchell 2011: 61). Questioning mainstream discourses about blacks' moral corruption, these plays would blatantly depict white immorality, and blacks' vulnerability to institutionalized physical and representational violence. She grounds this depiction on the enduring influence of the cult of true womanhood in the case of women, and on the need for inclusion in hegemonic models of manhood felt by black men back then. At this point she makes an interesting distinction between "manliness" and "masculinity", which would have needed further contextualization within the field of masculinity studies, and more specifically black masculinity studies[5]. Finally, she also discusses the concept of de-generation, spotlighting the resulting generational damage and the disruption of the structure of both family and community that lynching caused. In this way, she is able to call into question well-known sociological studies of the black family, such as the controversial 1965 report by Daniel Moynihan or the work of Franklin Frazier or Herbert Gutman, which overlooked and underestimated the role that mob violence and lynching played after Emancipation[6], according to Mitchell.

In the chapters to follow Mitchell pays homage to the playwrights that started the genre from scratch, as it were, especially the women writers that initiated it. Following the lead of Ida B. Wells, Mitchell meditates on the enormous contributions that these women made to the development of black drama, and documents the unprecedented effort to revise mainstream discourses and practices that they undertake in their plays. Her impressive reading of the plays under study asserts the richness of lynching drama, as well as its heterogeneity and plurality.

Chapter 3 evolves around the figure of the black soldier, as portrayed in Alice Dunbar-Nelson's *Mine Eyes Have Seen* (1918) and Mary Burrill's *Aftermath* (1919). This chapter is very illustrative of the book's scope, since it chronicles the empowering practices these plays fostered as they were published in progressive periodicals such as *Crisis* and *The Liberator*. Indeed, as Mitchell proves, this representative figure enabled

[5] Mitchell cites one or two critics, especially Bederman, but her analysis would have benefited from other critical perspectives, such as *We Real Cool* by bell hooks, *Black Sexual Politics* by Patricia Hill Collins, or *Progressive Black Masculinities* by Athena Mutua, to name but a few.

[6] Frazier's report was published in 1939 and Gutman's in 1976. With different intensity, the three studies coincided in the explanatory causes of the deterioration of the black family, namely its lack of adherence to patriarchal patterns due to black women's role as matriarchs in the absence of black men.

positive articulation of black self-affirmation. Undermining the deep anxiety that affected blacks regarding their attitude to their country's contradictions and patriotic rhetoric, both plays epitomize the so-called "perpetual dilemma" (Mitchell 2011: 85)[7], in which black men found themselves torn between their duty to their country and the doubts about the legitimacy of that duty. In her thought-provoking discussion of both plays, Mitchell unearths those searing contradictions by equating military and mob tactics, and underscoring the challenges that black men faced in the midst of dehumanizing practices and unresolved tensions, I would contend, both within the military and within the terrain of the black home. Featuring the intense debate in the private sphere of the black family, these two writers stage characters who intelligently engage in negotiations that complicate blind acceptance of the national rhetoric, and call for their rightful claim on full black citizenship ignited by an increasing notion of black militancy in the New Negro era. These plays also serve the purpose of showcasing "additional evidence of the intellectual diversity found in African American communities" (Mitchell 2011: 98), as they account for divergent opinions on these highly complex issues. Moreover, these scripts also articulate their authors' awareness of other influential discourses of the time, such as the religious or the democratic one, in their contributions to the contemporary debate on dignified black manhood.

Chapter 4 centers on the black lawyer as a figure that was instrumental in preserving community testimony. The author consistently argues for the centrality of the black attorney in Georgia Douglass Johnson's *A Sunday Morning in the South* (1925) and Myrtle Smith Livingston's *For Unborn Children* (1926) "as a figure who embodies the race's faith in truth and justice" (Mitchell 2011: 115) – against all odds, I would add. She discusses the transition from the black soldier to the black lawyer, contextualizing the ignominious real-life indignities that led to the defeat of the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill and the race riots that erupted in many cities in the so-called Red Summer of 1919. All these events sparked these playwrights' interest in depicting the unjust ways in which black testimony was rejected and silenced, and consequently black citizenship was denied. Mitchell's close reading of these two plays maps out that rejection of black testimony, together with a revaluation of the importance of community acknowledgement and bonding, especially of the nurturing role of the black church.

[7] Springing from Du Bois's editorial of the same title that appeared in the April issue of *Crisis*.

Using Bakhtin's notion of "contested discourse", she captures the characters' deep belief in the justice system and reveals the devastating effects of that belief in the face of white barbarism. By reversing the racist logic, she undoubtedly affirms moral black manliness and brute white masculinity. Livingston's play adds further layers of meaning when dealing with interracial coupling and black men's dilemma between manliness and masculinity. In the context of the play, interracial coupling does not respond to honorable codes of black manhood; on the contrary, it disrupts black citizenship by failing to comply with the need to build respectable and strong black families. She delves into the complex notion of consensual relationships with whites, and the debate that ensued between personal freedom and community responsibility. Mitchell's most suggestive passages come at the end of the chapter, when she offers a lucid reinterpretation of the New Negro era, allegedly optimistic and confident, but which also evidences the ambivalent – indeed precarious – position that black lawyers, and by extension all black men, had to come to terms with in their daily lives. She also exposes the "justified anxiety" (Mitchell 2011: 143), in Mitchell's words, that the denial of black citizenship engendered in the black community.

In Chapter 5 Mitchell deciphers the crucial role black women played in lynching drama, especially prominent in three later plays authored by Georgia Douglass Johnson, *Blue Blood* (1926), *Safe* (1929), and *Blue-Eyed Black Boy* (1930**).** Asserting the importance of black women in order to substantiate black claims to private space and respectable marriages and families, she enunciates their investment in the "politics of respectability" (Mitchell 2011: 149), inspired by the lingering influence of the cult of true womanhood and domesticity. The author convincingly argues that the figure of the black mother/wife facilitates the difficult negotiation with trauma and terror, as she embodies "what it means to live with lynching" (Mitchell 2011: 151). Despite the patent vulnerability of the black family to white "homefront violence"[8] and its sadistic practices, Mitchell builds a coherent defense of the devices employed in these lynching plays to highlight how black women actively (and successfully) sustained both romantic and parental bonds. In some cases, this involved quite difficult decisions such as silence

[8] Anne Rices uses this concept to refer to the strategies of racial terror deployed in the race riots that took place in 1917 and 1919 (cited in Mitchell 2011: 149), but Mitchell deems it a very useful term to apply to the enactment of lynching in general, as it unashamedly took violence inside the black household to tear it apart, both literally and metaphorically.

about rape, a sexual encounter with a white man, or even infanticide. Bearing witness to the dehumanizing and deeply disturbing psychological price that these women had to pay to signify upon normative definitions of black women's immorality, Mitchell unmistakably discloses the complex "plight" of black women, also caught up in the inevitable dilemma between securing domestic fulfillment and claiming their rights to agency and consent. The most extreme example of this perpetual dilemma is embodied by the protagonist of *Safe*, who after having witnessed a lynching mob pursuing a black man, decides to kill her newborn baby to safeguard him. Illuminating productive discussions of infanticide, not as blacks' inner savagery (according to the racist rationale), but as a means to exercise responsible parenthood and parental rights, Mitchell once more contradicts mainstream discourses by placing the blame where it belongs: on the white society that "makes the world dangerous for black children" (Mitchell 2011: 165). Mitchell thus disregards the justification of black women's exploitation in the national rhetoric of the time by making readers aware of their fundamental role in the stability of both family and community.

The last chapter rounds off Mitchell's stimulating study by centering on lynching plays authored by black male playwrights, namely G. D. Limpscomb's *Frances* (1925) and Joseph Mitchell's *Son-Boy* (1928), both of them featuring the ambivalent figures of the pimp and the coward. The chapter takes as its premise Mitchell's stance that allegedly questions the "logic of hierarchical approaches" (Mitchell 2011: 175), by which she does not want to describe these black men's contributions as secondary or less important. While sharing Mitchell's view about the vernacular, especially useful in the call/response pattern, and valuing – as she does – the greater variety that these plays add to the genre, I would nevertheless reassess at this point the previous women playwrights' groundbreaking work that allowed for the establishment and further evolution of the genre. Having said this, though, Mitchell's incisive analysis of these plays confers meaning to the ongoing debate about the traumatic effects of lynching on black men, especially those who eventually refuse to be heads of household because of the risk of losing their lives and jeopardizing their black homes. These plays textualize the intensity of the emasculation of black men whose behavior does not correspond to the concept of dignified black manhood mentioned above, but which is also incorporated into community conversation in order to enable nuanced interpretations of

the link between economic power, black success, and black manhood. Resisting the strategy of masculine normalization, the fact that the pimp's and the coward's perspectives are not dismissed further indicates the multifaceted practice of community debate that was essential to the Progressive era.

Probing into documenting black performance in her conclusion, Mitchell's book drives her final point home by stressing once more – and rather reiteratively I would add – the importance of performance for the black community. Her penetrating comments actually support the crucial role of lynching drama in the community's embodied practices of belonging and identity formation, while favoring a comprehensive and rigorous reinterpretation of the archive and repertoire of the New Negro era. Therefore, the volume discussed here undoubtedly contributes to the study of African American drama, as it prompts new and fresh insights into an impressive range of theatrical texts and their multiple strategies. It is thus a welcome addition to the reassessment of the black drama produced in the Progressive era, while it also enriches and deepens our understanding of American drama in general.

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