

CULTURAL POLITICS AND  
THE POLITICS OF CULTURE  
IN PUERTO RICO AND CUBA

Recent Studies on Their Literature, Culture, and Society

*Guillermo B. Irizarry*

*University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

*HUMOR AND THE ECCENTRIC TEXT IN PUERTO RICAN LITERATURE.* By Israel Reyes. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005. Pp. xiv+190. \$59.95 cloth.)

*CUBA: UN SIGLO DE LITERATURA (1902–2002).* Edited by Anke Birkenmaier and Roberto González Echevarría. (Madrid: Colibrí, 2004. Pp. 437.)

*WRITING TO CUBA: FILIBUSTERING AND CUBAN EXILES IN THE UNITED STATES.* By Rodrigo Lazo. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Pp. x+252. \$49.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)

*THE MYTH OF JOSÉ MARTÍ: CONFLICTING NATIONALISMS IN EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CUBA.* By Lillian Guerra. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. Pp. xii+310. \$59.95 cloth, \$22.50 paper.)

Contemporary research on Caribbean literature, culture, and society cannot evade the impact of cultural and postcolonial studies and the impulse of hemispheric and transnational perspectives that has broadly influenced research in the humanities and social sciences. Unavoidable as well is the apparent tension—at times openly expressed—with more established critical work, nation-based research, and direct study of canonical works and writers, high culture, and “great” historical figures and moments. Recent critical trends within Caribbean scholarship have achieved higher visibility in part because of the support of various university and independent presses—such as the university presses of North Carolina and Florida and Editorial Callejón in Puerto Rico. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez’s “New Directions in Puerto Rican Studies” (University Press of Florida) and Louis A. Pérez Jr.’s “Envisioning Cuba” (University of North Carolina Press) are seminal series in this regard.

The books considered in this essay evince all of these frictions as they themselves aspire to understand the dynamics of canon formations, the mediation of politics in cultural production, and the burden of national (and nationalistic) thinking in contemporary critical inquiries. None of the volumes resolves the ambivalence that pervades the field, for neither do they fully dissolve the hardened epistemological borders of the nation nor radically discard the persistence of hegemonic subjects, ideologies, values, and cultural commodities in their research. They do, however, offer a critique of how cultural products and political discourse reproduce nationalistic ideals of a specific sort, in a discreet historical context and a broad geopolitical framework. Israel Reyes's *Humor and the Eccentric Text in Puerto Rican Literatures* examines a limited grouping of literary texts that negotiate hegemonic values in Puerto Rican society (mostly within the island) and point to the cultural politics that erect a hierarchy of texts and authors. At the core of the edited volume *Cuba: Un siglo de literatura (1902–2002)* lies an examination of Cuban cultural politics, mostly through literature, at various key transitional moments. Rodrigo Lazo's *Writing to Cuba* delves into the print culture of Cuban exiles in the United States, coinciding with expatriate revolutionary activities during the nineteenth century and the transnational circuits of communication that they employed. *The Myth of José Martí*, by historian Lillian Guerra, discusses the conflicting symbolic labors of three political camps (pro-imperialist, revolutionary, and popular nationalist) and the articulation of contending national discourses. In all cases, the authors highlight the problematics of hardened national programs (patriarchal values in the Puerto Rican twentieth-century literary production; patrician and anti-abolitionist thinking in nineteenth-century Cuban separatists; and pro-imperialists and liberals in the Cuban early Republic).

The authors (mostly Guerra and Lazo) are aware of hemispheric circuits of power and frequently underscore the transnational and translocal dynamics at play in the cultural and historical spheres. They nevertheless retain the value of the nation as an indisputable epistemological coordinate, refrain from passing on to the post-national moment of critical thinking, and end up reproducing the nation as a trans-historical category. The books for the most part disregard recent works, produced by Caribbean intellectuals, that support a more resolute transnational perspective (e.g., Jorge Duany's *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, Yolanda Martínez San Miguel's *Caribe Two Ways*) and outright post-national scholarship (e.g., Carlos Pabón's *Nación postmortem* and Arturo Torrecilla's *La ansiedad de ser puertorriqueño*).

In regard to a direct or indirect critique of hegemonic values in cultural production, all of the books discussed tease out the contradictions inherent in dominant critical discourse. Reyes, Lazo, and the contributors

of *Cuba: Un siglo de literatura* propose counter-readings of canonical texts and alternative modes of approaching literary studies. Several valuable sections in each volume visualize literature within the context of a broader “print culture” (Lazo is more insistent in this perspective), problematize literature as a cultural product synchronous with national thinking (which necessarily reproduces a hierarchy of values and circulates primordially within the territorial limits of the nation), and deal with writers and works that have been neglected by critical studies. Significant examples are: Reyes’s discussion of Nemesio Canales’s humorous essays; Lazo’s examination of the nineteenth-century transnational novel *El negro mártir* and various Cuban newspapers printed in the United States; Josefina Ludmer’s cunning reflection on the end of national culture industries in *Cuba: Un siglo de literatura*; and Guerra’s commentary on the *faux* biographical novel *Martí: Novela histórica por un patriota* (1905). In this regard, the works make superb additions to the scholarship on Caribbean culture and society.

Reyes’s *Humor and the Eccentric Text* looks at the “protean forms of the comic and humor” (xi) in order to uncover the manners in which Puerto Rico’s cultural and intellectual production toils with the “incongruity [that] lies at the heart of humor and Puerto Rican national identity” (xii). In dialogue with Arcadio Díaz Quiñones’s by now unavoidable conceptualization of “el arte de bregar” (the ability to deal with or make do), Reyes delves into selected literary works by Nemesio Canales (1878–1923), Luis Rafael Sánchez (b. 1936), Ana Lydia Vega (b. 1946), and Pedro Pietri (1944–2004). This dissimilar group of redoubtable authors allows the critic to propose an alternative canon that situates counter-pedagogical intentionalities within the literary history of the island and its diasporic community. For Reyes, it is not enough to underscore the aesthetic value of a selection of texts, their discursive dimension, or their allegorical significance regarding national and geopolitical matters; he aims at disclosing the complex affective ordering of an epistemological subject (the Puerto Rican) through humor and the counter-canonical thrust of the “eccentric text” that inscribes this artistic mode.

The selection of texts, of different genres, periods, and ideological and social positions, is justified by their eccentric status. For Reyes, “the eccentric text stands outside the center of traditional literary discourse on national identity and refuses to resolve its own incongruities, thus allowing Puerto Rican literature to remain an oppositional discourse while it sustains ambiguity and contradiction” (7). He recognizes that ambivalence and ambiguity are core values of an alternative constellation of writings that oppose a paternalistic and cultural nationalist canon, which had been the hegemonic ordering force of the island’s cultural discourse ever since the *generación del treinta*. *Humor and the*

*Eccentric Text* is in line with a contemporary strain of cultural analysis that has deeply affected Puerto Rican studies.<sup>1</sup>

Reyes's study is elegantly phrased, meticulously researched, sound in its theoretical scaffolding, and firmly rooted in Spanish-Caribbean and Iberian literary history. Although Reyes assails Puerto Rico's patriarchal literary canon and the intellectual and symbolic program that organizes it, the author is apprehensive about unleashing the full potential of his critical apparatus. His critical work glows when it discusses texts by Canales, Sánchez, Vega, and Pietri, analyzes minutiae regarding the production and consumption of eccentric pieces in their period, and suggests associations with grander schemes of cultural production in the Spanish Caribbean.

The chapter "Nemesio Canales and the Politics of Humor" brings into focus a journalist, humorist, playwright, lawyer, and politician neglected by contemporary literary studies. In this review of the transition from nineteenth-century Spanish colonial rule to twentieth-century U.S. colonialism, Reyes shines light upon the cultural politics of this period, underscores the cultural and political significance of diverse periodicals of the early twentieth century, such as *El Día* (where Canales published satirical essays, later compiled as *Paliques*), Canales's own *Cuasimodo* (1919), and *Idearium*, and scrutinizes the lawyer's anti-nationalistic stance, socialist leanings, and spirited critique of dominant gender ideology.

Chapter 2 discusses *La guaracha del macho Camacho* (1976) and *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos* (1988) in order to analyze Sánchez's *poética de lo soez* (poetics of the vulgar) as a discourse that breaks with rigid notions of intellectual authority, national identity, and cultural orthodoxy. Chapter 3 studies how three short stories by Vega—"Pollito Chicken," "Puerto Príncipe abajo," and "Pasión de historia,"—employ a brand of humor that carps island "machismo, racism, and class conflict" (77). The book closes with an insightful analysis of the work of recently deceased Pedro Pietri, a key literary figure of the Nuyorican community and, as a diasporic subject, frequently marked as an outsider. By proposing that Pietri's eccentric "articulations of an absurd 'nowhere' act as antidotes to the telluric discourse of Puerto Rican national identity" (114), this chapter puts across the sharpest questioning of the island's unyielding power over the community's cultural

1. Perhaps the inaugurating book in this critical shift may be identified as *Divided Borders* (Juan Flores, 1993), but a close second should be granted to the edited volume of *Puerto Rican Jam* (Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel, eds.). Among an extended series of books that fall within the purview of a new dominant wave of Puerto Rican critical studies are *Lecturas desde el fragmento* (García Calderón) and *Ciudadano insano* (Duchesne Winter).

discourse. Comparing Pietri to canonical René Marqués, Reyes illuminates the former's counter-pedagogical project. He perspicaciously examines "Puerto Rican Obituary" (poem), *Traffic Violations* (1983 collection of poetry), *The Livingroom* (play), *The Masses Are Asses* (play), *A Play for the Page and Not the Stage* (play), and "Lost in the Museum of National History" (short story) in order to highlight how the Nuyorican author cancels out "the notion of an immanent identity" through his absurdist aesthetic project.

Humor and the eccentric texts authorize Reyes's problematization of the politics of Puerto Rican literature and criticism. While the critic recognizes counter-canonical values in the studied texts, he hesitates to follow through on "demystify[ing] the ideological paradigms that enslave the Puerto Rican community" (121), halts before crossing the ontological limit of nationhood, and avoids the post-national turn that his inquiry seems to anticipate.

In line with critical considerations of insular Spanish-Caribbean literatures and with the cultural politics of said corpora is the collection of essays *Cuba: Un siglo de literatura (1902–2002)*. This book compiles twenty-two essays, most of which were delivered in a colloquium at Yale University (Oct. 4–5, 2002) and includes significant entries by scholars who were unable to attend the meeting (some of them residents of Cuba). Although *Un siglo de literatura* imposes in its structure and selection a notable emphasis on more canonical figures and texts (and, at that, a corpus preferred in U.S. academia), there is great merit and critical forcefulness in the volume as a whole.

González Echevarría's opening essay appears as a spirited reiteration of normative critical projects in an epoch that is bent on dissolving canon formations, obliterating national thinking, and considering marginal cultural products. This essay should become a touchstone to reflect upon the cultural politics of Cuban literary studies, the U.S./Cuba divide, and the ostensible tensions of cultural versus literary studies. Of interest as well are perceptive interrogations of canonical figures and texts such as Kutzinski's discussion of Nicolás Guillén (in relation to Langston Hughes), Birkenmaier's consideration of revolutionary art in Alejo Carpentier and Wilfredo Lam, García Carranza's review of Carpentier's early writings (by one of the *Biblioteca José Martí's* principal librarians), Bloom's exultation of "El genio de Carpentier," Adorno's subtle inquiry on the colonial past in texts by Arenas and Carpentier, Sklodowska's sharp reconsideration of Haiti's significance in Antonio Benítez Rojo's work, and Masotta's analysis of Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* (in correlation with the Italian *Paradiso*).

Luis's article on the notorious film *P.M.* (censored by the Comisión de Estudio y Clasificación de Películas del Instituto de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos [ICAIC]), the seminal literary supplement *Lunes de*

*revolución*, and *Tres tristes tigres* looks carefully at an important episode in the Revolution's early cultural scene and proposes an astute point of entry to study Cabrera Infante's memorable novel and his role in this transitional period. "Orígenes ante el cincuentenario de la República," by Salgado, explores how this key literary group came to enjoy the national spotlight as the Republic celebrated its fiftieth anniversary (1952) and the 1940s' constitutional experiment imploded. The lot of literary figures akin to Lezama Lima, Vitier, and Rodríguez Feo would be dramatically affected by a sharp transformation in the country's cultural politics, what Salgado calls a "coincidencia descensional" (167). "La república del deseo: *Canción de Rachel*, de Miguel Barnet y la nueva novela sentimental," by González Pérez, proposes that this 1969 *novela-testimonio* (which the critic labels as the earliest text of Latin American new sentimental narrative) represents "the theme of postrevolutionary fatigue and disenchantment" (252), which coincides with (and symbolically labors) a period of state intervention in literary and intellectual matters (after 1962) and broad repression of homosexuality (1964 and 1966).

Several articles focus on writers whose marginality within the Cuban canon evinces some tensions with dominant national values. Pérez Firmat's "Balance del bilingüismo en Calvert Casey" explores the controversial value within the nation's literary history of this bilingual, homosexual, and exiled writer. The critic lucidly sorts out the complex relation of authors with dominant values regarding an entanglement of aesthetics, language, identity, and sexuality. "Antiéstética y disidencia de los *Cuentos fríos* de Virgilio Piñera," by Ruiz Barrionuevo, deals with the short fiction of one of Cuba's tragic literary figures, whose work has enjoyed a secretive and cultish following among a small coterie of island writers and critics. "Presencia en la ausencia," by Araújo, natively reviews the production of Dulce María Loynaz, one of Cuba's most prominent poets, and hones in on her complicated reality, after she opted to remain in the island post-1959, despite her opposition to the new political project. Tinajero's "¡Pagar por oír hablar, pagar por oír leer!" examines the centrality of the "lector de tabaquería" both as an ethnographic subject and as a literary topic in *The Agüero Sisters*, by Cristina García.

A cluster of remarkable articles on recent literary production completes the collection and sorts out the impact of globalization and a transfiguration of the cultural scene loosely corresponding with the 1990s "Special Period." Prieto affirms the importance of ontological lubricity in a post-USSR context by studying the work of French resident Zoé Valdés and Centro Havana neighbor Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. Prieto scrutinizes the libidinal economy of contemporary erotic literature, which has become a prime cultural commodity for global circulation and a poignant international stand-in for the island's socio-cultural



ethos. Whitfield puts across an eloquent inquiry on the reification of Cuban economic complexities in the island's 1990s narrative. Her "Narrando el dólar en los años noventa" reflects upon the broad social impact of *dollarization* and the influence of market forces in the cultural arena. "Ficciones cubanas de los últimos años: El problema de la literatura política," by Ludmer, examines works by Antonio José Ponte, Atilio Caballero, and Gutiérrez in order to read the "intrusion of a 'state of nature' in the human and social spheres," as experienced in a post-political global context (359). The Argentine cultural theorist asserts that literary criticism must come to terms with the disintegration of Latin American national culture industries, and the paradoxical insertion of a diasporic logic regarding "territories and subjects . . . and modes of distribution and reading" (357).

Though *Cuba: Un siglo de literatura* is an outstanding volume on an extensive constellation of writers and texts, it substantially emphasizes masculine, canonical authors and prose fiction. Playwrights such as Abilio Estevez, Anton Arrufat, and José Triana, and theatrical troupe Escambray, for example, have achieved great national and international recognition but are absent from the book's scope. Also missing are various poets, such as Fowler and Morejón, whose careers have been of note in intricate circumstances (albeit in quite different ways). It would have behooved the project to include articles on the island's science fiction (Yoss appears as a key figure in this genre), or on the sizeable and vigorous Cuban literature in the United States (e.g., Montes Huidobro, Hijuelos, Kozler, Hospital), or on non-fiction prose (e.g., Marinello, Fernández Retamar). Though these lacunae do not eliminate the merits of the collection, they point to aesthetic and epistemological concerns that regulate the critical scope.

*Un siglo de literatura* is an arrangement of great consequence to gaze at the cultural politics of the island's literary and intellectual production. Through its primary concern with literature, it articulates a critique of cultural politics in diverse settings and forms. From the study of the *origenistas* in the prerevolutionary, Batista years, to the period beyond Castro's "Palabras a los intelectuales" (1962), state-supported cultural programs are unveiled and scrutinized (Salgado, González Pérez, Birkenmaier, Luis, Ruiz Barrionuevo). Political struggles regarding race, gender and sexual orientation, language, and territoriality reveal a hegemonic intentionality in the cultural terrain, and underscore resistance, subversion, and allegorical modes of artistic expression (Kutzinski, Sklodowska, Pérez Firmat, Prieto). Essays by Ludmer and Whitfield engage global cultural politics and the circuits of production and consumption where Cuban literary commodities find their market, outside the rigid administrative limits of the state. Curiously, the collection itself becomes a valuable scene to study the status of Cuban

literary studies, by dint of the hierarchy of values it supports and the aesthetic and epistemological program it fosters, and even its own capacity to disturb in its closing gestures (especially through Ludmer's and Whitfield's essays) the collection's original proposal.

Rodrigo Lazo's fascinating investigation of Cuban print culture in the mid-nineteenth century sheds light on zones of knowledge outside of *Cien años de literatura's* scope. *Writing to Cuba* avoids literary studies' content-based primary focus, to ponder more intently the socio-historical conditions and geopolitical factors that mediated diverse publishing endeavors. Primarily concerned with Cuban political culture (less with cultural politics or with literature as high culture), Lazo takes a hemispheric perspective at once availing himself of American Studies' broad cultural project, and criticizing its English-dominant and U.S.-centric spirit. He targets an epoch that staged "a geopolitical battle between the declining Spanish empire and the expanding U.S. empire" (4). In this regard, he brings to the fore transnational dynamics relevant to the Spanish-American nineteenth century, nation-building studies, inquiries on U.S. hegemony (from the Monroe Doctrine to the Spanish-Cuban-American War), and early Latina/o studies.

Lazo writes against the grain of more established scholarly studies that unproblematically appraise early Cuban exiles as defenders of nationalist and anti-imperial separatist projects. He reminds readers that Heredia (1803–1839), Varela (1788–1853), Villaverde (1812–1894), and Martí (1853–1895) all resided in the United States for extended periods, that their work was an iteration of transnational circuits of power, and that they were agents of interest in early Latino culture. Furthermore, Lazo uncovers the problematic nature of Cuban nationalist ideology, as writers struggled with an array of diverse strategies to advance the cause of the nation's separation from the floundering Spanish empire. Even though liberation from Spain was unreservedly espoused by exiles, intellectuals speculated if the United States should intervene to incorporate a Cuban state to the union (by purchase or military intervention), and if abolitionist ideals should be advocated as part of a broad liberation agenda.

Lazo focuses on the polysemous value of the *filibustero* as an agent of nineteenth-century U.S. expansion, a "criminal adventurer" of sorts and an odd embodiment of "the romantic spirit of an age" (6). This point of view allows the critic to think of the *filibustero* as a "metaphor for framing the literary history of writers whose status . . . is one of dislocation" (23). For him, "The filibuster's condition . . . is akin to the deterritorialized condition of transnational writing" (23). From this perspective, *Writing to Cuba* reviews the print culture of the epoch and considers the specific importance of various newspapers published primarily in New York, a variety of pamphlets (commonly edited by



figures involved in Cuban exile organizations and newspapers), collections of poetry, and some prose fiction.

Chapter 1 examines how *El Filibustero*, a New York, Cuban newspaper lionized the *filibustero* figure in an effort to advance a separatist program. This newspaper zealously celebrated General Narciso López (1789–1851), who led two failed military incursions into Cuba (1848 and 1851) and was eventually executed by Spanish forces. The periodical adamantly rejected Spanish colonial rule and supported armed upheaval in the island through numerous columns and poetic compositions. Lazo examines the “communication circuits” of poetry by Heredia, Juan Clemente Zenea (1832–1871), and others published in *El Filibustero*, and the collection of poetry *El laúd del desterrado* (1858) as a model of “transnational writing” (54). Chapter 2 analyzes the ideological stripes of other periodicals, uncovering the “interconnections of Cuba’s literary culture, repression on the island, and the growth of newspaper publishing by Cubans in the United States” (63). Among the publications the chapter mentions are: *El Guao* (New York, 1853), *La Verdad* (New York, 1848–1860), *El Pueblo* (New York, 1855), *El Mulato* (New York, 1854), *El Independiente* (New Orleans, 1854), and *El Papagayo* (New York, 1855). There are incisive reflections on ties between Freemasonry and various *filibustero* periodicals (e.g., *La Verdad*, *El Mulato*, and *El Cubano*), the financial backing received by some papers, and the relations between publications and key intellectual figures (e.g., Villaverde’s *El Independiente*, poet Santacilia’s *El Guao*, and Tolón’s *El Horizonte*). Writing in this context is simultaneously considered a revolutionary activity and a transnational exchange, since newspapers supported the separatist cause in Cuba, while island separatists read and financially supported the seditious publications in the United States.

“Men of Action” (chapter 3) argues that a patriarchal ideology was imbricated in the literary culture of this period and that a gendered response to Spanish oppression was shored up by various publications. Controversial *filibustero* López became the ideal man of action to justify armed endeavors, defended mostly by *La Verdad*. Women, according to Lazo, were called upon to reproduce this gender ideology through their revolutionary labors. A segment on Cuban women’s revolutionary work is of great significance in acknowledging women’s importance in early Cuban and Latina presence in the United States (especially a longer section on the heroics of Emilia Casanova, married to writer and patriot Cirilo Villaverde).

Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the racial dimension of the separatist program and comment upon the abolitionist question in this setting. Lazo proposes that *El Mulato* newspaper became the strongest challenge to the cohesion of anti-Spanish designs, which endeavored to find support for the island’s independence and possible annexation to the United

States as a slave-based economy in an epoch stirred by manifest destiny ideology. Chapter 4 contends that antebellum U.S. politics allowed for a coalition between Cuban elites in exile and a Southern planter class. Defending abolition as a necessary element in liberation struggles, some patriots suggested, would dismantle that base of support and create gratuitous friction with the Cuban elite's plans for a post-revolutionary economic bonanza. Lazo pays special attention to abolitionist struggles in Cuba (particularly the del Monte group in the city of Matanzas), to Afro-Cuban writers (including former slaves Plácido—executed in Cuba for seditious activities—and Juan Francisco Manzano), and to literature of an abolitionist bent (of special interest is a brief survey of an anonymous novel published in eight installments in *El Mulato*).

An analysis of Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (considered by many the paradigmatic anti-slavery novel) brings to bear the dramatic shift in the U.S. political arena and in geopolitical dynamics after the Civil War. Villaverde's emancipationist literary program is stripped by uncovering his anti-abolitionist, revolutionary position in the U.S. antebellum period (even inferring that Villaverde supported the Confederate program) and highlighting the author's political turn after the Ten Years War (1868–1878). Lazo points out that *Cecilia Valdés*'s 1882 edition is an extended rewriting of the original, 1832 printings and argues that, at best, it is a *costumbrista* literary recovery of a long-lost period in Cuban history.

*Writing to Cuba* is of utmost importance for understanding Cuba's nineteenth-century political culture, the U.S. mid-century political arena (with a special consideration of expansionist and emancipationist struggles), early Latino cultural production, and the hemispheric dimensions of geopolitical restructuring in this epoch. Lazo sharply points out transnational communication circuits and intelligently studies how print culture reified hemispheric predicaments. Although the book's transnational perspective is one of its strengths, a more aggressive translocal focus would have better exposed the socio-historical specificity of cities like New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, which, as per Lazo's research, enjoyed remarkable prominence as points of articulation in U.S.-Cuba relations. On the Cuba side, Lazo mentions Matanzas as a cauldron of revolutionary and emancipationist activities, but he does not thoroughly reveal why the city fostered such goings-on, or how and why it interacted customarily with certain U.S. cities. To insist on studying such translocal dynamics would have more forcefully unveiled the early history of hemispheric cities and the points of articulation of political, economic, and cultural power in the Americas.

At another level, Lazo bares the circuits that supported transnational intellectual exchange and reveals a plethora of publications that are not habitually noted in contemporary literary research. Aside from numerous newspapers, pamphlets, and collections of poetry, he points to a

substantial constellation of period writings that should yield fascinating critical literary studies. *El negro mártir* (serialized, anonymous novel on the 1844 La Escalera conspiracy), *To Cuba and Back: A Vacation Voyage* (Richard Henry Dana, 1859), and *A Trip to Cuba* (Julia Ward, 1860) stand out among many other texts of note that necessitate examination.

Critical inquiries with a cultural studies inclination have made great strides in questioning hardened hierarchies of knowledge within national communities. Works discussed above, mostly dealing with print endeavors, have examined directly or indirectly modes of reproducing political programs and national ideologies. Historian Lillian Guerra pursues this line of inquiry in revealing the mythologization of Cuban patriot José Martí. Employing the tools of an archival researcher (she notes having dedicated two or three years performing archival research in Cuba—mostly at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí—and in the United States), the theoretical acumen of a cultural anthropologist, and the analytical eye of a literary critic, Guerra decodes the manners in which various Cuban entities from 1895 to 1921 manufactured this national idol. *The Myth of José Martí*, though explicitly concerned with the construction of this icon, is a work focused on the creation of state power and social ordering in Cuba, leading to the country's full independence and its early republican period.

Guerra delves into Martí's political maneuverings, as the founder of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC) negotiated tensions between "pro-imperialist," "revolutionary," and "popular" factions of the separatist movement. She argues that Martí was able to construct an image of social unity, despite conservatives' preoccupations with popular and black power within the revolutionary army and fears from the popular and revolutionary spheres of racist and authoritarian designs within the pro-imperialist camp. *The Myth of José Martí* studies the intricate political environment that existed after the Ten Years War, the 1895–1898 revolution, and the complicated geopolitical scene that followed the U.S. Civil War and the Reconstruction period. Race, class, and geopolitics are at the core of the historian's inquiry into numerous political agents such as the PRC (umbrella organization for numerous exiled groups, led by Martí and later by Estrada Palma), the Alianza Antillana (literary circle for Black Cubans and Puerto Ricans), the Directorate of the Societies of Color (a Cuban front that fought for equality after the 1886 abolition of slavery), and Separatist or Radical Party (radical emigré revolutionary club in Jamaica).

The first two chapters narrate how the revolutionary army, led by generals Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo, attempted to articulate, through military strategies and disciplinary practices, a gentleman's war, carried out by popular elements, themselves deeply committed to social justice and full racial equality. Guerra cogently argues that after

Martí left New York to join the battlefield, pro-imperialist Estrada Palma introduced in the PRC a conservative program intent on securing U.S. support for the independence cause and committed to advancing a broad modernizing agenda and fostering a plantation-based economy. Martí's sudden death precipitated the dismantling of a fragile union between pro-imperialist, revolutionary, and popular nationalists, allowed U.S. intervention in the war, and provoked major inequities that affected the 1898–1902 transition to the Republic.

"Cuba Libre in Crisis" (chapter 3) reviews the turmoil that followed the conclusion of the war and the political status quo, which granted the United States sovereignty over the island, empowered pro-imperialist's designs, and marginalized the popular sectors. This chapter includes sections on the role of women in the transitional period, on racial dynamics under military occupation, and on an unusual pedagogical project implemented by Alexis Everett Frye, superintendent of public schools under the occupation (who was later removed from his position for his progressive views). "From Revolution to Involution" (chapter 4) focuses on the first three years of the Republic and examines how pro-nationalist, emigré factions manipulated a discourse on social unity and played on fears of popular upheavals to take control of the state apparatus. Guerra looks intently at the manner in which President Estrada Palma "repressed civil liberties, marginalized popular-class interests, and consolidated the plantation system as the basis for a foreign-dominated capitalist economy" (122). She examines how the administration generated discontent from the black and mulatto sectors, provoked a general strike in 1902, and eventually eroded Estrada Palma's base of support. The chapter concludes by considering racial politics as seen through a bill aimed at increasing white immigration, sponsored by the Moderate Party.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus on five critical years of the early Republic in which pro-imperialists, mostly supported by the Republican and Moderate parties, carried out a civilizing program that pursued control over the state's legislative bodies and submission of revolutionary and popular elements. Under Estrada Palma, the Gabinete de Combate, and the Partida de la Porra, state repression turned violent, especially in placating the Constitutional Army, which intended to redress electoral fraud and correct authoritarian policies. Guerra keenly unravels the complicated political scenario of 1904 to 1906 which precipitated the Constitutional Revolution and the second U.S. occupation of Cuba. She discusses electoral maneuvering of Moderates and Liberals and vividly uncovers individual tragedies (such as the gruesome political assassination of black General Quintín Banderas). Chapter 5 examines the complicated ideological position of popular sectors under U.S.-appointed president Charles Magoon.

Guerra wraps up with a lucid examination of Cuban politics after Magoon's incumbency and the token recognition of popular nationalists' demands. José Miguel Gómez's liberal presidency (1909–1912) was followed by Mario Menocal's conservative rule (1913–1921). This tense period saw several significant protests and violent acts of state repression (especially the criminal aggression on blacks affiliated with the Partido Independiente de Color). Guerra analyzes the conflicting ideologies that clashed irreparably as they attempted to validate political programs, cast a particular vision of the revolutionary struggles, and construe their authority as true heirs of Martí.

As a whole, Guerra's study becomes a necessary inquiry into a transitional period of Cuban history. The 1895 revolution, the 1898 U.S. occupation, the 1902 constitution of an undermined sovereign nation (considering the Platt Amendment), and the unresolved ideological tensions between three political factions partially reveal the *longue durée* of this country's political travails and perhaps the roots of current political intricacies. Though the title of the book suggests that the historian has Martí as the primary focus, Guerra concerns herself more with how various groups articulated their political programs with Martí as a piece of their strategy. Secondary historical figures are brought out in full detail—avoiding a history of great men—and, importantly, the book vividly ties in the *petites histoires* that recognize enormous agency in sectors traditionally elided from historical research (black Cuban workers in Florida, women—black and white, as well as lesser political figures—frequently Afro-Cubans). Also of great value is Guerra's use of primary sources as she employs government documents, newspaper articles and caricatures, personal letters, fictional literature, and more informal (less "historical") sources to uncover the unofficial story and tease out the contradictions of established historical research.

The books reviewed in this essay constitute a formidable sample of superior scholarship in the field of Caribbean Studies, varyingly concerned with hemispheric circuits of power and with the transnational production of culture. In different degrees, they reconsider the creation of cultural canons in key historical periods and explore multifarious intersections of hierarchies of values, social subjectivities, and ideological programs. As a group, they especially illuminate the cultural and social production of the mid to late nineteenth century and early Puerto Rican and Cuban twentieth century, key periods to understand socio-cultural dilemmas in these two islands and the complex geopolitics of culture and society within the Caribbean region. Also, as individual scholarly projects, the volumes are located in the tense negotiation between nation-based and transnational critical inquiries, and between postcolonial/cultural and more conventional works of historiography and literary analysis: proof of the toils within this vibrant field of study.

REFERENCES

- Díaz Quiñones, Arcadio  
2000 *El arte de bregar*. Río Piedras: Callejón.
- Duany, Jorge  
2002 *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Duchesne Winter, Juan  
2001 *Ciudadano insano: Ensayos bestiales sobre cultura y literatura*. Río Piedras: Callejón.
- García Calderón, Myrna  
1998 *Lecturas desde el fragmento: Escritura contemporánea e imaginario cultural en Puerto Rico*. Lima: Latinoamericana.
- Martínez San Miguel, Yolanda  
2003 *Caribe Two Ways: Cultura de la migración en el Caribe insular hispánico*. Río Piedras: Callejón.
- Negrón-Muntaner, Frances, and Ramón Grosfoguel, eds.  
1997 *Puerto Rican Jam: Rethinking Colonialism and Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pabón, Carlos  
2002 *Nación postmortem: Ensayos sobre los tiempos de insoportable ambigüedad*. Río Piedras: Callejón.
- Sánchez, Luis Rafael  
1976 *La guaracha del macho Camacho*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Flor.  
1988 *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos: Fabulación*. Hanover: Ediciones del Norte.
- Torrecilla, Arturo  
2004 *La ansiedad de ser puertorriqueño: Etnoespectáculo e hiperviolencia en la modernidad líquida*. Río Piedras: Vértigo.
- Vega, Ana Lydia  
1987 *Pasión de historia*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones La Flor.
- Vega, Ana Lydia, and Carmen Lugo Filippi  
1981 *Virgenes y mártires*. Río Piedras: Antillana.