

HISTORICIZING AND FICTIONALIZING YORUBA DEITIES AS NARRATIVE
STRATEGIES IN CHANGO, EL GRAN PUTAS
BY ZAPATA OLIVELLA

by
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ABSTRACT

HONORE MISSIHOUN: Historicizing and Fictionalizing Yoruba Deities as Narrative Strategies in Changó, el gran putas by Zapata Olivella
(Under the direction of Alicia Rivero)

This study of Changó by Zapata Olivella shows a worldview, an ideology that is neither strictly Western nor strictly rational. Thus my interest in this work rests on the author's creative ability to devote Changó to changing conventions. In attempting to valuate négritude, the author re-appropriates this literary movement, purges it of the Manichaeism it adopted from the dialectic of European ideologies of hierarchy of thoughts which assert that European is analytical and Black pre-logical. Zapata Olivella thereby establishes a more nuanced and complex set of relationships in négritude.

Set in this ideological framework, Changó is a model of négritude discourse which harmoniously blends indigénisme and negrismo in a historiographic metafictional intertextuality where orality, writing, history, politics, and anthropology come together in defiance of linear writing. As such, Changó is a discourse with social visions which does not overlook the dynamism of black political ideologies but takes into consideration the recombinant qualities of black Atlantic's affirmative, sociopolitical cultures.

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INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I will examine the work of an important Afro-Hispanic author. My research is an analysis of Changó, el gran putas, by the Afro-Colombian writer Manuel Zapata Olivella, whose other literary productions support my contention that Changó is the masterpiece that best exemplifies the aestheticization of the author's imaginary. Zapata Olivella's novels, short stories, and plays have been the subject of criticism by such Hispanists as Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo in The Culture of Fiction. However, she is in the minority, since most Western critics have barely mentioned Zapata Olivella or other Afro-Colombian writers. Therefore, my work will fill important gaps in the criticism of black literature in the Americas and of négritude/negritud/negrismo.

In The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (1993), a remarkable work on the African Diaspora, Paul Gilroy discusses the significance of recent United States narratives about slavery.¹ He chooses David Bradley's Chaneysville Incident (1981), Charles Johnson's Middle Passage (1990), Toni Morrison's Beloved (1987), and Sherley A. Williams's Dessa Rose (1986) as the inaugural texts of an emerging post-civil rights-era literature "militating against the tyranny of color-delineation over humanity" (Postmodern Tales of Slavery 9). These novels' philosophical arguments about racism, slavery, and history bring into focus the recovery and re-instauraton of the New World's long avoided slavery past. The novelists Gilroy selects provide this account as a crucial element in contemporary social self-understanding and identity formation, a process enacted in the

minds of today's descendants of both the violated Africans and their violators, as well as all other inheritors of the slavery legacy.

Changó, el gran putas, along with the novels designated by Gilroy, engages a memory of origin and development of black consciousness through the shared slavery experience, and validates African Americans — the Diaspora Africans — in the space and time as citizens of their modern homeland — the Americas, not Africa. I see in these novels, localized in the American experience, the literary expression of Gilroy's vision of an affirmative Black Atlantic identity accessible to all mutually respecting African Diaspora communities around the world. This identity, according to Timothy J. Cox, is where the reductive forces of national modernity, most rigidly encoded through the machinations of slavery and institutionalized racism in the Americas, can be effectively displaced in favor of a balanced sense of belonging in contemporary, modernized, and postmodern milieus.

I choose to analyze Changó in the context of Gilroy's international Diaspora theory because, on par with the other novels, Changó purposefully reconstructs the memory of slavery for contemporary audiences. To internationalize the memory-of-slavery subgenre of the novel, as well as to explore the substance of an inter-Atlantic perspective on the African Diaspora, I propose to widen the topic to include works such as Ayi Kwei Armah's Two Thousand Seasons and Ousmane Sambène's Les bouts de bois de Dieu. To present this subgenre, I will discuss how Changó shares — with some variations — a theoretical basis with the other African novels; then I will analyze Changó's poetic and rhetorical narrative features.

Zapata Olivella's works, and particularly Changó, strike me as model anthropological texts in their own right and as good proving grounds for my interpretive approach, which is

informed by anthropology. Changó teaches its reader how to interpret cultural signs within its own text; the novel plays the role of both anthropologist and native informant in this way. It starts from an identifiable cultural base: the Yoruba Oyo Kingdom of the West Atlantic Coast of Africa. Structurally, Changó is a five-part, literary representation of “truths” in the context of the black experience in Latin America and the United States. The author uses free, epic verse as he begins the first section of the text by “speaking” into existence the creation of the universe, using gods who are a part of African religiosity. The subsequent four parts are all “spoken” in a prosaic discourse as the work advances from “Eden” into Mexico, South America, Haiti, and the United States.

Each section includes fictionalized, historical elements that are unique to the Diaspora. From the outset of the novel, the Westernized ideology of divine creation is deconstructed, disrupted, and de-centered as Africa creates the first level of the palimpsest of the history of the world. In the second section, “El Muntu Americano,” the reader is immersed in a fictionalized South America. Part three, “La Rebelión de los vodus,” focuses on the Caribbean, specifically Haiti. The emphasis returns to South America in “Las Sangres Encontradas,” and in the last part of the text, “Los Ancestros combatientes,” the geographical site shifts from Latin America to North America, more precisely, the United States.

Although there are poets like Nicolás Guillén, for example, who have used negrismo, Changó appropriates and remolds the Spanish language in a genuinely African manner of narrative, combining poetry in the process of telling its stories. In this respect, Zapata Olivella’s narrative strategy parallels costumbrista writing, in which the first stage in coming to some understanding of the Indian is undoubtedly through the representation of his way of life, albeit that the level of knowledge and understanding varies with the author. As long as

the non-Indian interpreted the Indian mind through the language and literary forms of an alien culture, he was bound to present only a poor approximation of Amerindians.

Miguel Angel Asturias and José María Arguedas are two Latin-American authors who break with realism precisely because of the limitations of the genre when it comes to representing the Indian. This parallels Zapata Olivella's diegetic motif in Changó: the discovery of significance in the marginal, the concept of literature as a communal experience open to the reader's participation, the parodic rewriting of historical and literary traditions in order to demystify the dominant forms of representation, and Zapata Olivella's new approach to the aestheticization of the black in Afro-Hispanic letters.

For instance, in Hombres de maíz, Asturias's first Indianist novel, the author, like Zapata Olivella, resorts to a legend of his own creation. Using his knowledge of pre-Colombian literature, he reconstructs the story of the oppression of the Indians, the expropriation of their lands by men intent on the commercial exploitation of maize, and the Amerindians' gradual degeneration. This theme, apparently similar to those of the realist novel, is expressed in terms of Indian myth: each stage in the degradation of the Indian being is presented by a different mythic figure. The temporal scheme of the novel is a mythic time in which many thousands of years may be compressed and seen as a single moment. The language, too, is a Spanish so structured as to be analogous to Indian languages. In this regard, while orality, which I will analyze in this work, is perceived in western metaphysics as the immediacy of the voice, in the indigenous and black tradition, an oral mode of expression is a duplicitous betrayal of silence, a dynamic expressive space where the oral signifier assumes unpredictable meanings. In this respect, Ahmadou Kourouma's Les soleils des

indépendences states: “Rien en soi n’est bon, rien n’est mauvais. C’est la parole qui transfigure un fait en bien ou le tourne en mal” (109).

My concentrating on Changó reveals a worldview, an ideology that is “neither strictly Western nor strictly rational.”² Thus my interest in Zapata Olivella and Changó rests on this author’s genuine creative ability to devote his work to changing conventional assumptions about negrismo, negritud, and négritude, rather than merely reproducing them. In attempting to intervene in the valuations of négritude, Zapata Olivella re-appropriates this literary and cultural movement, purges it of its initial simplicity, of its “Manichean structure”³ — the antithetic white supremacy and black inferiority — adopted from the dialectical structure of European ideological confrontations of the hierarchical opposition of thought which assert that the European employs analytical thought and the Black is incapable of analytical thought. He thereby establishes a more nuanced and complex set of relationships than the movement possesses.

My personal stand on négritude, negritude, and negrismo is a secular, revisionist apprehension of the literary and cultural movement, combined with African and Diasporic social visions within the framework of a universal world view. To this end, I view négritude, negritud, or negrismo as a fertile matrix for the production of a variety of discourses on human conditions at large — albeit generated from a source, the black’s social visions with their multifarious manifestations — which evolve unrestricted in their forms and language but end by putting the social visions of the down-trodden, repressed, and dispossessed groups in perspective.

Based on this apprehension of the movement, my study of Changó’s négritude departs from Gilroy’s diachronic method in his analysis of the origins and development of his Black

Atlantic Diaspora theory, which argues against an African-based tradition in which influence and development move in ripples from their source. Gilroy proposes interrelated network of influence around the Atlantic Ocean where ideas criss-cross space, time, and cultural-ethnic borders. For example, Gilroy believes that the American cultures that grew up in slavery and the post-1980 media projections of the black cultures in the United States and Britain are as influential as Africa itself, if not more so, on the variety of black cultures and identities in all the countries around the Atlantic Ocean. Basically, different influences work in distinct directions for various purposes. In a similar line of ideas, it's my belief that négritude, negritud, and negrismo are complementary concepts of the black person's lived experience in Africa and in the Diaspora, and my dissertation will deal with these concepts..

Changó is Zapata Olivella's most ambitious work. In fictionalizing the geopolitics and the socio-historical realities in the spaces of the black Diaspora, the novel subverts, demythifies, and challenges the traditional Judeo-Christian, literary foundations represented in its discourse. To this end, the work rethinks the concepts of negrismo, negritud, and négritude historiographically by forcefully constructing a socio-historical reality often marginalized by the canons of Latin American and Western fiction.

In my analysis of Changó, Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction and Fanon's dialectic overlap as theoretical approaches. The novel is self-reflexive and paradoxical and also lays claim to historical events and personages: it is contradictory, historical, and political. That is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs is grounds for its rethinking of the forms and content of the past and calls for action with a social vision: "the rebellion gives proof of the rebellion's rational basis" (Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth 146).

Linda Hutcheon's "historiographic metafiction," which calls attention to the metafictional status of the text by means of making historical vestiges seem as if they were fiction also questions relations of power and offers revisionist view of history. It prevails in Zapata Olivella's discourse. In keeping with the nature of his characters, the nameless and the voiceless of society are not privileged in the traditional recounting of history, but through Zapata Olivella's reinterpretation, they make history possible. The author is able to poeticize broad occurrences and little known facts. Socio-historical and political events such as land reform movements, religious and political changes, slavery, and the clash of cultures receive a distinct treatment from Zapata Olivella, which forces the reader to ponder these events afresh. Notwithstanding this appropriation of historical and important facts, the perspective that remains in his work is that of the "unimportant" people. In this sense, Zapata Olivella's imagery is similar to Alejo Carpentier's, whose texts often begin with a mere historical name. Life and history spring from almost nothing, but are records of the writer's interest in a general cultural environment.

By using Hutcheon and Fanon's theoretical approaches, I will show how Changó "reaches beyond mere narrative in its meticulous delineation of human strengths and weaknesses, heroism and communal solidarity, and attains epic narrative level" (117) to paraphrase Soyinka on his view about epic. With Changó, as with all good epics, humanity is re-created. The social community acquires archetypal dimensions, and heroes become deities.

Following Soyinka's view on epic, I will compare Changó to Ayi Kwei Armah's Two Thousand Seasons, Ousmane Sambène's Les bouts de bois de Dieu, and Wole Soyinka's The Swamp Dwellers. These novels are all narratives in the vein of the canonical, thematic framework of négritude. Each of the writers elaborates on the individual approach to the

social “lived experiences” of the past of Africa and the Diaspora, of each of the black nations, and each specific social vision coined in an ideological message. There is no question that the works are designed for the particular audience of the writers’ race. What they are offering their audience is “the way” — “our way,” as Armah puts it in Two Thousand Seasons (314) — which is revived and forcefully chronicled, in his own manner, by Manuel Zapata Olivella in Changó.

It is important to stress that “the way” is not very distinctly specified in Two Thousand Seasons. But we learn that it is the way of life, while others are the way of contradictions and death. Nor is the goal of the way merely attainable by passive understanding. It is mandated by the destruction for all time of the agencies of opposition to the way of life. This is the primary mission of the writers of négritude. “The bare cleared earth, a restored, receptive virginity,” according to Soyinka in sexist terms (112), which is the result of Armah’s onslaught on alien contamination (the depravities of the Arab and European invaders of Africa) and which prepares the liberation of the black person’s mind from borrowed philosophies, is in conformity with Zapata Olivella’s own progressive devices. Indeed, Zapata Olivella and Armah appear to have undertaken this preliminary, literary destruction of the identified opposition as a parallel activity to their novels’ schematism. But except for the occasional utterances of their seers, such as the elderly Isanusi and Adewa, the virgin mystic in Two Thousand Seasons, and the narrative voice in the form of Ngafúa in Changó, the way remains a hazy and undefined ideology; it is the action of the characters that defines it, and its guiding principles are debated by the protagonists.

Progressively, the blotted-out areas of ethical harmony, long obliterated by the impositions of alien colonial structures, are filled out. Zapata Olivella and Armah assert a

past whose social philosophy was a natural egalitarianism, unraveling events which produced later accretions of materialist ethic in order to reinforce the unnaturalness, the abnormality of that memory. The actions of the protagonists are aimed at the retrieval of that past, but Zapata Olivella and Armah make the point that it is not a nostalgic or sentimental one. It is presented as a state embodying a social ideal. Armah goes even further: actions and motivations are deliberately invented to place such longings for a nostalgic memory in a context of betrayal of the larger aim; as self-delusion, self-destruction, and general mindlessness. In the same way as the materialist retrogression of modern Africa and the Diaspora polity — a failure to view reality not as a conglomerate of fixed entities but as a changing totality of related parts at whose core is a dynamic interaction between human labor (action) and the natural world — is an implied target of the authors' scathing criticism, as is the romanticism of négritude.

The complexity and depth of Changó's spiritual dimension owes much to something so mundane as its narrative technique. Essentially, this entails what Bakhtin, in The Dialogic Imagination (1981), would call “dialogism.” The dialogic quality of writing and the celebration of difference have brought Bakhtin into the field of postmodernist thought. We see Bakhtin's writing on the social construction of literary voices as a crucial enrichment in contemporary Marxism against an economic, reductionist tradition. Bakhtin has been noted for offering a distinctive poetics of text as polyphonic.

Bakhtin's work is useful for my dissertation because it analyzes intertextuality, the treatment of language, and culture, the notion of dialogue between discourses and shifting relations between official and popular forms. Bakhtin's interest is in difference, in the process of de-centralization and dis-unification instead of in verbal-ideological centralization

and unification. He also celebrates social and cultural heterogeneity. Utterances imply listeners, and in Bakhtin's most valued writers, different voices coexist, irrupting against one another in a ceaseless play of polyphony.

This Bakhtinian, dialogical concept helps explain in Changó how the narrators are gods, servants, musicians, horses, coachmen, and generals, to name a few of their roles. Sometimes they narrate in the first person, sometimes in the second, and sometimes in the third, with no discernible pattern. What unites and rallies them is a common subaltern status, or empathy for a subaltern status. Moreover, quite often, the narrators are spirits, voices of the ancestors, or what Tittler calls the "talking dead" in animistic terms (Catching the Spirit 3) and which is part of Zapata Olivella's narrative technique as well. Much as the narrating living and the narrating dead voices flow in and out of one another, lending one other their wisdom and their different perspectives, time and timelessness alternate with or interpenetrate each other.

Dialogism, however, cannot be considered a narrative technique in isolation from Zapata Olivella's diegetic strategy in Changó, which simultaneously centers black presence and de-centers Africanness in the New World. Yet these two apparently contradictory motions are complementary. The novel centers black presence, because the obvious situation of racism and resultant folk cultures has led to an international African-American discourse, a Diasporic call, to which the novel responds as an evident masterpiece of a high vernacular literature. Yet Changó de-centers African presence, because it situates the deported Africans and their descendants in relation to the indigenous American population, as well as to the European colonists, in the time-space of a cultural encounter called "America." Furthermore, the novel foregrounds religious and spiritual syncretism, known as voodoo,⁵ which may

appear to be an African phenomenon but is in fact the combination of beliefs from various spiritual traditions, having no exclusively African origin. Without denying racism, black culture, and race-consciousness, then, Changó illustrates the syncretic, dialogic nature of the spirituality that is most often mistaken for a “pure” one in Western criticism of culture. The novel’s abstention from privileging Africanness agrees with Zapata Olivella’s perspective on the Afro-Colombian socio-cultural reality.

As an all-encompassing focus, there is the idea of a people awakening to the forces conspiring against them and seeking to control their own destiny. Zapata Olivella’s narration could be seen from the perspective of social realism, which was still predominant in some Latin-American fiction at the inception of his literary career. Social realism is a cultural vehicle which sees literature and language as reflections of social conditions and relations. In this regard, Changó focuses on the social conditions of the black and the hidden reasons that perpetuate them in the New World. My critical approach to the novel will draw on dialogism and social realism, and will underline the social, pluralistic view of Zapata Olivella’s literary discourse.

The same trend of social discourse that we observe in Zapata Olivella’s early fiction in Colombia can be found in such realist works as Jorge Amamdo’s Jubiabá and Aluísio de Azevodo’s O Mulato, two Brazilian novels, the first dealing with social issues in the mid-twentieth century and the second focusing on Brazilian social problems of the turn of the nineteenth century, which I will examine briefly in my work. Yet Zapata Olivella created social change in Colombia by going beyond social realism and made his persistent theme — the idea of racial and political oppression— an aesthetic in itself. Changó is a re-telling of a

profound phenomenon —the socio-political realities that exist in Latin America and other geographical spaces of the African Diaspora.

Zapata Olivella’s humanizing discourse is a perennial questioning of what is primitive and non-Western. Just as Walter Ong has unearthed how the oral-literate dichotomy reflects a variety of cultural and racial prejudices which are dignified with the appellation of science, Zapata Olivella repeatedly destroys the still-current notion that societies rooted in tradition lack intellectual and technological knowledge and advances.

In this assumption, Anthropology and history are of particular importance for the Afro-Colombian scholar’s literature and troping of dignity. According to the nature of a particular work by Zapata Olivella, different disciplines conjugate more saliently than others in the text. At the heart of the text is an attempt to reveal the psychological complexities —the ethnic and cultural realities— of a given group or individual. Such a desire for genuineness situates Zapata Olivella’s literature within the context of Spanish America’s long-standing quest for self-identity, which includes the black and the Indian as integral expressions of that self-definition. Aspects of cultural history are present in Zapata Olivella’s focus on heterogeneity in his writings. These narrative choices are interconnected and point back to the writer’s strategy for achieving authenticity for his fictive world.

Following Zapata Olivella’s thread of ideas, of particular importance for my work is the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz’s transculturation theory in Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y azúcar, and in Transculturación narrativa en la América Latina by the Uruguayan literary critic Angel Rama. Fernando Ortiz’s revisionist view of history, which has affected scholarship in the Americas for decades, points out the absurdity of claims of cultural purity. Every change of culture or every “transculturation” is a process in which something is always

given in return for what is received, a system of give and take. The term “transculturation” does not imply one culture toward which the other must assimilate but an exchange between two cultures, both of them active, both contributing their share, and both bringing about a new aspect of civilization. Zapata Olivella has persistently rejected unidimensionality in his varied discourse, which followed a consistent pattern within his works long before the idea of the heterogeneity of discourse became popular in the Western hemisphere. The theoretical framework of transculturation, together with García Canclini’s Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir del modernismo, sheds light on Changó, and I will employ it in my analysis.

This theoretical account related to Changó, a summary, is an attempt to depict the intellectual background and the cultural *toile de fond* on which Zapata Olivella’s literary discourse rests. Analyzing his vast human experience from the ideological ground and the social vision of the African and the Diasporic cultural and literary movement of negritude, negritude, or negrismo, I raise the question of why Zapata Olivella is barely recognized by the mainstream literary and critical production in Latin America and the West. By the same token, I explore why négritude genuflects to other literary and cultural ideologies that negate the existence and contribution of the black experience to world culture and universal human experience. These historical ambiguities and contradictions in the Western concept of “truth” are the leitmotifs of the new historical, historiographic metafiction, and of the rethinking of the black person’s history in a universal context that my dissertation will examine in Changó.

With Wole Soyinka, I will confront the question of how it is that despite the highly praised, self-apprehending qualities of all of the works produced by black writers such as Ayi

Kwei Armah, Ousmane Sambène, and Camara Laye in the framework of négritude, it is possible to entertain a hostile attitude toward négritude's whole secular vision. There is not one of these works whose ideals may not be interpreted as the realization of the principles of race-retrieval, which are embodied in the concept of négritude, yet the movement continues to arouse more than a mere, semantic impatience among the later generation of African writers and intellectuals, in addition to the serious reservations about or tactical withdrawal from the full conception of négritude by a number of writers who founded it. However, the vision of négritude should never be underestimated. What went wrong with the movement is the designing of a creative ideology based on a falsified identification with the social vision. This vision in itself was the establishment of a distinct human entity and the glorification of its long-suppressed attributes, which I referred to as the romanticism of négritude.

Taking a new stand on négritude narrative, Changó's free-flowing discourse reveals that there are no such watertight categories in the creative spirit, that creativity is not one smooth-flowing source of human regeneration. Zapata Olivella forcefully chronicles the very idea that separating the manifestations of human genius is foreign to the black world view. The self-subjugation of négritude to Eurocentric artifacts and intellectual analysis — a process of intellection that requires the turning of the improvable into an authoritative concept, the indoctrinating of society into the acceptance of a single, simple criterion as governing any number of human acts and habits, evaluations and even understanding — is equally alien to the black creative spirit.

Reading Changó, therefore, is a counterpoint reading of Senghor and Césaire's négritude, which remained for a long time the only matrix for black literary discourse. The concept of a socio-racial direction governed the whole literary ideology of négritude gave it its choice of

mode of expression and thematic emphasis. Both for Africans on the mother-continent and for the black societies of the Diaspora, négritude ambiguously provided a lifeline which the dissociated individual could not use to return to the source of his essence, and offered a prospect for coming-into-being of new black social entities. In the process, the movement enmeshed itself unnecessarily in negative, contradictory definitions. That patronizing master discourse of négritude is sharply questioned by Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ousmane Sambène, and it is genuinely transvaluated in Afro-Hispano-American letters by Zapata Olivella, as we will see in my dissertation. Indeed, among other critical approaches to Changó, my work will focus on the transvaluative art of négritude, through the historicizing and fictionalizing of Changó and other Yoruba deities in Zapata Olivella's masterpiece, and its significance within the imaginary of the New World.

Structurally, this dissertation will be a four-part analysis of Changó. Chapter 1, "The Concept of Négritude and the Essence of Changó: Parallel structures," is dedicated to the conceptualization, forms, and content of négritude, and to the essence of Changó and his collaborative deities in Yoruba cosmogony, as well as in the New World cosmovisión. This part of my work aims to deconstruct négritude as a canon, to reshuffle its socio-historical, cultural, and literary components, and attempt to make it a literary, cultural, and ideological channel and expression of alterity for the postmodern and post-colonial voices of Africa and the black Atlantic at large. I also compare it with negritud and negrismo. The views of Wole Soyinka, Manuel Ferreira, Belinda E. Jack, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and other scholars on the history and theory of "Negro-African" literature are relevant in this first part of the work.

Chapter 2, "From Myths to Fiction," focuses on myths in literary discourse about "coming-into-being" or "the Journey and the Quest," whose motifs relate to the fall from

innocence into experience. The journey is usually a search for insight to effect a change from that which has befallen man, and the motif often requires a descent into the underworld, a going-down to the place where the dead reside to bring back new knowledge. The quest motif stresses the journey less than the sought-after results of that transfigurative trip. The search is for the lost treasure of innocence, which may be symbolized in various tangible and intangible ways. Ultimately, though, the quester hopes to find the self through uniting the conscious with the unconscious. “From Myths to Fiction” also focuses on the status of Changó as historical writing transformed into fiction, as viewed by Linda Hutcheon, and as liberationist literature in the tradition of Fanon, re-elaborated by Smart and Lewis.

This exploration of literary myths in Changó draws on the secular ideal of ideology and the social vision of myths. Soyinka’s focus on myth, as well as on literature and the African World; Barthes’s views in Mythologies; and Northrop Frye’s and other scholars’ critical approaches to myths and motifs in literature are brought to bear in this section of the work.

“Négritude and African Deities: The Necessity of the Abyss of Dissolution” is the subject of Chapter 3. In this section, I analyze the metaphor embodied in the parallel “Négritude—African Deities,” in which the African deities are the protagonists of the active battle of the will through the “abyss of dissolution” — the collective memory of dispersion and re-assembly, the recurring experience of birth and death, the essence of transition — in racial coming-into-being, and the black person’s drama as the re-enactment of the cosmic conflict.

To understand why Zapata Olivella elects Ogún for his role as a major protagonist in Changó is to penetrate the symbolism of this Yoruba deity, both as the essence of anguish and as a combative will within the cosmic embrace of the transitional gulf between death and life. He is the embodiment of Will, which is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and

creativity in man's acts. To act, the Promethean instinct of rebellion channels anguish into a creative purpose which releases man from a totally destructive despair; it liberates from within him the most energetic, deeply combative inventions which, without usurping the territory of the infernal gulf, bridges it with visionary hopes. The resulting sensibility, which is the essence of négritude, is also the sensibility of the artist, and he is a profound artist only to the degree to which he comprehends and expresses this principle of destruction and re-creation. Bakhtin's dialogism and John Mbiti's explanation of the African concept of the universe serve as theoretical clarification for this section of my work.

Since the sixties, when the historiographic study of Africa by Africans themselves gained impetus, aided by the publication of works such as D. T. Niane's Soundjata, ou l'épopée mandingue and Jan Vansina's Oral Tradition, orality has been largely accepted as a valid method of historical inquiry, whereas the formal questions about orality and literacy have been raised mainly in literary studies. Nevertheless, it should be understood that rarely, if at all, has orality commanded explicit attention in literary theory. On the other hand, in many areas of literature in the developing world, and most especially in the Black Atlantic, hardly any evaluation or criticism of literary texts occurs without some form of reference to oral tradition. Focusing attention on the terms "orality" and "literacy," chapter 4 of my dissertation, "Secondary Orality, Secondary Literature: Inventive and Innovative Cultural Writing," concentrates on Changó as an innovative approach to négritude, as a linguistic, cultural, and anthropological discourse viewed from the theoretical perspectives of narrative hybridism, as well as from the transcultural and transvaluative experiences of the Afro-Colombian author, linguist, and cultural anthropologist Zapata Olivella. The theoretical views and analyses of well-known anthropologists and social, literary, and cultural critics

such as Lévi-Strauss, Ruth Finnegan, Julien, Derrida, Irele, and Emevwo Biakolo help to clarify key concepts in this chapter.

In this work, I frequently resort to the postmodern and post-colonial theoretical and critical views of Zapata Olivella and Wole Soyinka, two critical voices joining together from either side of the Black Atlantic in their endeavor to define and propose a social vision of liberation compatible with the historical experiences of blacks in the mother-continent, Africa, and in the Diaspora.

In all this, the vision of négritude should never be belittled. Where the movement went astray was in its contrivance of a creative ideology and its false basis of identification with the social visions of the restitution and re-invention of a racial psyche, the establishment of a distinct human entity and the praise of its long-gone attributes. In attempting to achieve this praised end, however, négritude over-simplified. Its defense and protection of black values were not preceded by any articulate analysis of this African and Diasporic system of values. Its points of reference took too much from European ideas even as its political adherents pronounced themselves fanatically African.

In attempting to refute the limited evaluation to which black reality had been subjected, négritude adopted the Manichean tradition of European thought and tended to apply it to cultures whose nature is dynamic, multidimensional, and protean. Négritude not only accepted the dichotomic structure of European ideological confrontations, but also borrowed from the very components of its racist syllogism.⁴

Earlier, I stated my personal critical stand on négritude as a secular, revisionist apprehension of the literary and cultural movement. In the critical vein of Zapata Olivella

and Wole Soyinka, I want to summarize my view and concept of négritude by using the scriptural metaphor of Pe. Antônio Vieira in Sermão da Sexagésima⁶:

Uma árvore [*negritude*] tem raízes, tem tronco, tem ramos, tem folhas, tem varas, tem flores, tem frutos. Assim há-de ser o sermão, [*negritude*]: há-de ter raízes fortes e sólidas, porque há-de ser fundado no Evangelho [*visão social*]; há-de ter um só assunto e tratar uma só matéria; deste tronco hão-de nascer diversos ramos, que são diversos discursos, mas nascidos da mesma matéria e continuados nela; estes ramos não hão-de ser secos, senão cobertos de folhas, porque os discursos hão-de ser vestidos e ornados de palavras. [*originalidade inventiva*] Há-de ter esta árvore varas, que são a repressão dos vícios; há-de ter flores, que são as sentenças; e por remate de tudo isto, há-de ter frutos, que é o fruto e o fim, [*visão social*] a que se há-de ordenar o sermão. De maneira que há-de haver frutos, há-de haver flores, há-de haver varas, há-de haver folhas, há-de haver ramos, mas tudo nascido e fundado em um só tronco, que é uma só matéria. (59)

It is striking how the content of such scriptural text of the Brazilian Baroque could be so well transvaluated into a text with the secular vision of the late twentieth century, and serve as a basis for a literary and cultural movement that rejects the Manichean foundations of the Judeo-Christian philosophy. Though my critical approach to négritude through Changó may be post-colonial and postmodern in perspective, the literary and cultural movement needs “varas” in some way, in order to reach “o fruto e o fim,” the social visions of the Diaspora which need to be identified with their multidimensional manifestations and forms before becoming the source and leitmotiv of any kind of fiction and literary discourse as it appears in Changó. With this in perspective, my work is an attempt to re-think négritude, to revise the movement’s role in the criticism and production of narrative, and it confirms that Zapata Olivella’s Changó posits a new vision of négritude as a dynamic, protean, and Promethean alternative to traditional, cultural, and literary criticism and theory.

Notes

¹ Tittler 107. “Rational” means “Manichean” as used by Soyinka.

² See Soyinka in Myth 127.

³ “The theoretical and practical assertion of the supremacy of the white man is its thesis; the position of négritude as an antithetical value is the bottom of negativity.” This was the position in which négritude put itself. This quotation from Sartre is from his essay “Orphée Noir.”

⁴ Soyinka 127. “The syllogisms of the racist philosophy that provoked negritude into being were: (a) Analytical thought is a mark of advanced human development. The European employs analytical thought. Therefore, the European is highly developed. (b) The African is incapable of analytical thought. Therefore, the African is not highly developed.”

⁵ On the phenomenon of voodoo, see “Entre el vodú y la ideología” in La Isla que se repite 161-72 and read Rojo’s detailed analysis on the voodoo cult in black Atlantic.

⁶ Pe. Antônio Vieira (1608-1697) Lisbon and Bahia. A Jesuit Priest, he wrote “Sermão da Sexagésima” about holy oratory and the orator. He defended the New-Christians and the Indians against the Inquisition to which he himself later fell prey. He was able to reconcile perfectly his Jesuit background with the Baroque. He reached the apex of virtuosity in his subtle expression, in the wording of intricate logical structures teeming with allegories and antitheses. He communicated his ideas in a conscious way, revealing an extraordinary human and patriotic sentiment (or political concern), vigilance on social issues, and religious themes. His style and themes were derived from Portugal, Brazil, and the Baroque in general.

CHAPTER I

**THE CONCEPT OF NÉGRITUDE AND THE ESSENCE OF CHANGÓ AS
PARALLEL STRUCTURES**

This chapter of my dissertation is dedicated to the conceptualization, forms, and content of négritude. It also focuses on the essence of Changó and his collaborative deities in Yoruba cosmogony as well as the New World cosmovision. This part of the work aims to deconstruct négritude as a canon, to reshuffle its socio-historical, cultural, and literary components. It attempts to make négritude an ideological channel and expression of alterity for the postmodern and postcolonial voices of Africa and the black Atlantic at large. I will also compare négritude with negritud and negrismo. The view of scholars on the history and theory of Negro-African literature such as Wole Soyinka and Belinda E. Jack will be relevant in this first part of my work.

The 1950s is characterized by a number of events relevant to the continuing development of négritude and, especially, to its theory and criticism. First, the simultaneous appearance in Paris and Dakar, in 1947, of the review Présence Africaine. It was also in 1947 that Aimé Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal was first printed in book form, prefaced by André Breton.¹ In the same year, Léon Gontran Damas published the anthology of poetry from the French Empire, Poètes d'expression française 1900-1945. The framework within which the collection's thirty-five poets were presented differs significantly from that of Léopold Sédar Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française, which appeared in 1948, as their respective titles indicate. Both anthologies suggest distinct and

relatively homogeneous “fields” — poetry from the French Empire, also referred to by Damas as “poésie coloniale d’expression française,” and Negro and Malagasy poetry.

It was the Anthologie, however, that was to be of greater literary and critical significance, particularly as Senghor’s anthology was prefaced by Sartre’s penetrating and thought-provoking text, “Orphée noir.” Rapidly superseding Breton’s preface to Césaire’s Cahier in négritude theory and criticism, Sartre’s essay raised questions about the nature and scope of Negro-African writing which have shaped this criticism’s development and which remain important touchstones in literary and critical discussions. Most significantly, these questions were associated with the concept of négritude, exploited by Sartre as a highly ambiguous term. It was this very ambiguity that guaranteed négritude a place as a major critical trope in subsequent secondary sources.² Obscuring and expanding its relevance and significance for négritude literature in general and Francophone literature in particular, Sartre’s essay encouraged a diversification of arguments, a widening of the debate, that even extends to the recent concept of the black Atlantic developed by Paul Gilroy.³

Against the background of American, Haitian, and French West Indian literary and cultural movements, four journals crucial to the development of the theory and criticism of Negro-African literature — from the perspective of négritude — played an important role. These periodicals — La Revue du monde noir, first published in 1931, Légitime Défense, which appeared in 1932, L’Etudiant noir, the sole number of which was printed in 1935, and Tropiques, written in 1941 — represent the foundation of the theory and criticism of Negro-African literature in general, and of its French variant in particular. The editorial boards of these periodicals were dominated not by African intellectuals but by members of the African

Diaspora, and many of the theories and polemics of the earlier American, Haitian, and West Indian movements found their way directly into the Parisian debate.

For such a broad, ill-defined, heterogeneous, multinational, and multigeneric entity as négritude, it would be absurd to try to find any great degree of coherence in its literature, history, or criticism. Thus the arguments developed in this study cannot lead to a definitive conclusion. However, certain critical paths are followed, which a number of scholars have traveled. Such is the case with the analytical methodology left behind by négritude itself. The most striking observation that can be made is the extent to which Sartre's formulations of négritude in his complex text "Orphée noir" have directed the progress of subsequent secondary discourses of black aesthetics.

Négritude: Discourse, Ideology, and Literary Criticism

According to Richard Bjornson, a "universe of discourse" refers to the rules, procedures, assumptions, and conventions that permit verbal communication among individuals from the same community of language users.⁴ Many discourse communities may exist in the same geographic area. Discourse communities can also extend across geographic zones. If common interests, aspirations, and cultural affinities are sufficiently strong, they may even develop among speakers of different languages, as has occurred with regard to the concept of a black identity in negritude, indigénisme, and négritude that transcends regional differences. The fact that a universe of discourse exists within a particular community of language users does not imply uniformity of opinions. On the contrary, it provides people with the verbal tools they need in order to articulate their differences. A background of generally accepted meanings and meaning-producing techniques allows them to agree or disagree with one

another. In this sense, discourse is a cultural practice that constantly interacts with the nondiscursive or nonverbal cultural practices that constitute social, economic, and political life within the community. Discourse draws its significance from these other spheres of human activity while, at the same time, determining much of the significance that is attached to them. As a part of the culture-specific apparatus for making sense of the world, it enables people to conceptualize goals and ways of pursuing them, although the goals themselves may have originated as a result of political, social, or economic motives. For example, the stereotyped images of the “primitive world” that served to justify European exploitation of continents labeled as such during the colonial era belonged to a European universe of discourse that facilitated countless individual projects designed to enrich Europeans and enhance their power over others. However, once this universe of discourse was assimilated by the “primitive people,” it became the ground upon which they formulated their own aspirations for freedom and a viable sense of identity; this is dreamed of by the négritude of Soyinka and is reformulated in Changó by Zapata Olivella — texts in which literary ideology and social vision meet in particular modes of a liberationist, creative expression.

Négritude and Modernity

In Africa and the Diaspora, national consciousness involves some attempts to reconcile the demands of modernization with the cultural and sociopolitical realities of people living within a specific, geographically defined area. Paradoxically, modernization has produced both a heightened awareness of individual identity and a growth in the power of the state to control the activities of individuals. In fact, contemporary black literature is often marked by tension between these two tendencies. This derives in part from the acceptance of a concept

of the state that has been evolving in the West since the sixteenth century. In theory, this concept assumes that the success of a state is contingent upon the capacity of its citizens to realize their potential as individuals. In practice, the modern state has often resisted the individual's right to self-realization and self-expression, on the pretext of pursuing a greater social good. In reality, such restrictions usually serve the interest of a small, privileged class. In Changó, such is the role of the organized Church at the core of Agne Brown's scrutiny of the social structure in the New World and, particularly, in the United States.

Consciousness of that paradox is cleverly perpetuated by a certain universe of discourse, underpinned by Western Modernism. It prompts Changó, a postmodern, postcolonial, and historiographic metafictional universe of discourse, to stand up, as though it were the Yoruba deity of rebellion, and challenge the conservative, Manichean concept of Senghorian négritude as a literary and cultural canon that tends to treat writing from the black world as part of a single, totalizing tradition. The objective of this chapter is to review Changó's négritude as an ideology built on historiography and as part of contemporary black Atlantic literature which "has emerged gradually, slowly freeing itself from a colonial aesthetic domination, asserting an ideology and a social vision appropriate to an independent Africa and the Diaspora" (Belinda Jack, Négritude and Literary Criticism 159).

Négritude: Concept, Ambiguity, and Orphée noir

The word "négritude" was written for the first time in 1938 by Aimé Césaire of Martinique, in his book of poems Cahier d'un retour au pays natal, prefaced by André Breton. It is intimately associated with a work that claims freedom and identity by the group of young African students organized in Paris in the early 1930s, spearheaded by Césaire,

Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, and Léon Gontran Damas of Guyana. Senghor attempted the first definitions of the movement in Négritude et humanisme — Liberté 1 (1964), then systematically broadened the problematic nature of négritude in Liberté 2 (1971) and Liberté 3 (1972). Thus, in that period of excitement and reconquest of self and liberty, he became the first to define it as: “Le patrimoine culturel, les valeurs et surtout l’esprit de la civilisation négro-africaine,” or nuanced as “l’ensemble des valeurs culturelles du monde nègre” (Liberté 3 12-14).

Other definitions of the movement, however, were to be clarified or obscured by other theoretical texts. For example, in Lilyan Kesteloot’s Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d’une littérature, Césaire said “Ma négritude n’est pas une pierre, et sa surdit  se pr cipite contre la clameur du jour,” as if he were desecrating the very myth of *homo religiosus* stone (112). Stones, in their immutable permanence, reveal a mode of existence invulnerable to becoming. Consonant with the idea of immutability, myth as repetition and imitation of divine models allows *homo religiosus* to assume a humanity that has a transhuman, transcendent model. For my purpose, what demands emphasis is the fact that religious man sought to imitate and believed that he was imitating his gods, even when he allowed himself to be led into acts that verged on madness, depravity, and crime. Judaism considers the acts of *homo religiosus* not as a manifestation of God in cosmic time (like the gods of other religions) but in historical time, which is irreversible. Hegel takes over the Judeo-Christian ideology, the linear concept of history, and applies it to universal history in its totality. The whole of history becomes a theophany, defined by Almeida Costa as “designa o antiga da Epifania dos Crist os” in (Dicion rio cr tico 34). Everything that has happened in history had to happen as it did, because the universal spirit so willed it. The

road is thus opened to the various forms of twentieth-century historicist philosophies, a critical perspective of which is brought to bear on Césaire's concept of négritude.

Césaire's view was that négritude was "la conscience d'être nègre, la simple reconnaissance d'un fait, l'acceptation du fardeau du destin du nègre, de son histoire et de sa culture" (113). Was Aimé Césaire expressing the pessimistic fate of the Negro as *homo religiosus*, who should resign himself to his condition as a subhuman being with a subculture as designed for him in the myth of homo religiosus stone ("l'acceptation du fardeau du destin du nègre"), or was he rejecting that myth "Ma négritude n'est pas une pierre, et sa surdité se précipite contre la clarté du jour?" Not being a stone, négritude contains an internal dynamism that resists "la clarté du jour," which, I think, defines "le nègre" as an essence. In its historiographic development, négritude assumes variant contents and forms, provokes diverging, conflicting views of its ideological objectives.

Thanks to her experience of life in Africa, Lylian Kesteloot, a Belgian scholar, provided important historical and textual sources for the concepts of négritude in her works. Later on, those of the German researcher Jahneins Jahn, who completed a collection of eighteen systematically classified notions of négritude in Manuel de littérature néo-africaine, contributed source materials as well. Born under the sign of anticolonialism, négritude was characterized by Césaire as "la négation," "le refus d'être l'autre," "l'africanization de l'être," assuming above all a mission of the revalorization of the Negro and black culture.

In those days (1933-1935) the doors to the will of self affirmation remained totally closed to Africans, with no "réforme en perspective, et les colonisés, légitimaient notre (des nègres) dépendance politique et économique par la théorie de la table rase" (Négritude et humanisme 18).⁵ In spite of the genuine character of Léon Frobrénus's work Histoire de la civilisation

africaine (1927), Maurice Delafosse's Les Noirs de l'Afrique (1922) and other contributions to the Negro's advancement by Rivet, Michel Leiris, Marcel Griaul, Georges Balandier and Mircea Eliade, the retrograde and racist thoughts of Gobineau and Spengler remained prevalent, as did certain ideas of Levy-Bruhl which were suspicious to the Negro because of their deterministic content regarding the African. In 1955, when Aimé Césaire published his famous text Discours sur le colonialisme, following in the footsteps of works such as L'Afrique fantôme by Michel Leiris (1934), it was still possible to read from Roger Caillois that "only the West can think" and that "beyond the limits of the Western world starts the dark realm of primitive thought, which, dominated by the notion of participation, incapable of logic, is exactly the type of false thinking that characterizes the Negro's universe" ("Illusion à rebours" (1955) 109, my translation.) Such racist theories, crafted in the West since the Enlightenment, or earlier inevitably generated a resistance, within which négritude featured prominently as "race" consciousness and an ideology of a universe of black discourse. In this regard, The Crisis (1910), edited by W. E. B. Du Bois, and his work The Souls of Black Folk (1903) were often considered among the earliest expressions of négritude; they were echoed by Nardal in "Eveil de la conscience de race" in La Revue du Monde Noir (1932) as the "*sine qua non* of a 'littérature nègre,' 'la conscience de race'" (25). It is Nardal's contention that blacks in America were forced through historical circumstances to recognize their racial difference and this, in turn, encouraged the early birth of a black literature.

The Présence Africaine review (1974), led by Alioune Diop, in which French intellectuals such as André Gide, Jean Paul Sartre, Georges Balandier and others collaborated, tended to bring together all those who shared the ideal of aesthetic and ideological freedom. They

were open to different political, literary, and philosophic views, and to prevailing stances in the vast and complex world which stretches from the African continent to the Caribbean, South America, and the United States. Diop opens the review's editorial by precisely stating that it does not plead allegiance to any philosophical and political ideology and that, most importantly, it aims to include the contributions of all people of good will, regardless of their race, who are capable of helping blacks to define the African originality of their discourse but insert it in modern world literary production. This will lead to a resumption of discourse analysis which will examine ideology as a matter of discourse, or the inscriptions of social power in language.

Following Voloshinov's view on "discourse analysis" in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (1929), I apprehend a notion of ideology as the arbitrary but motivated "closure" of the infinite productivity of language, which inclined Kristeva and others to a preference for the polysemic texts of high modernism over those of classical realism. It is my contention that such polysemic texts will necessarily have social visions.

In 1948, Senghor published his celebrated Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre d'expression française et malgache. It was prefaced by the famous text "Orphée noir," in which Sartre affirmed:

La Négritude apparaît comme le temps faible d'une progression dialectique: l'affirmation théorique et pratique de la suprématie du blanc est la thèse; la position de la Négritude comme valeur antithétique est le moment de la négativité. Mais ce moment n'a pas de suffisance par lui-même et les noirs qui en usent le savent fort bien; ils savent qu'il vise à préparer la synthèse ou réalisation de l'humain dans une société sans races. Ainsi la Négritude est pour se détruire, elle est passage et non aboutissement, moyen et non fin dernière. (41)

The ambiguity of the Anthologie, which reflects that of the seminal "Orphée noir" influenced by Senghorian négritude, stems from the thesis of white supremacy and négritude's "moment of negativity" as its antithesis. The word "negativity" is controversial in the Hegelian sense

of the word “négativité” in “Orphée noir.” As a consequence, anti-négritude African writers received this text as a blow to their aesthetic view of the black world. In Peau noire, masques blancs, Frantz Fanon confessed he was outraged by Sartre’s assertion about négritude when the latter wrote: “The generation of the younger black poets has just suffered a blow that can never be forgotten” (133). In Fanon’s view, Sartre’s “Orphée noir” destroyed the Negro’s enthusiasm.

Kesteloot’s words in reaction to Fanon’s outrage need to be taken into consideration in the formulation of the concept of négritude. Kesteloot thinks that Fanon is victim of a very subtle reasoning. Sartre, indeed, speaks in philosophical terms when he writes of “négativité” in its proper Hegelian meaning, which is not derogatory. For Hegel, Spirit is also “négativité,” as well as Liberty and Consciousness/Conscience, or all that is antithetic to the immediate which derives from its daily experience with the world. Sartre uses the Hegelian dialectic explicitly; a process in which a first step, the “thesis,” necessarily causes its contrary, the “antithesis”; the ensuing struggle between them provokes the “synthesis.” This corroborates Hegel’s assertion that thought moves by dialectic through a series of accomplishments, alienations, and higher-level reconciliations: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis in his technical terminology. So Hegel’s “positive moment” corresponds to self-surpassing, suppression, and conservation. The “negative moment” of the process thus is not a sterile opposition to the thesis, which means that it is not just destined to disappear as a result of the struggle. On the contrary, “negative moment” carries new qualities unknown to the first term, which it imposes in the synthesis. “Negation of negation,” for Hegel, is not the rejection of negation, but the act of bringing a dispute to an end by acknowledging the rights of the respective sides and reconciling them.

In fact, in that work, which encompasses a vast geographic and temporal area semanticized by black, Sartre's important, authoritative preface opened ways to interpret négritude which were to reach a large audience and animate, at times, a strong polemic. In her doctoral thesis, Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature, published in 1963, Kesteloot questions some of Sartre's assertions, namely the essence noire which Senghor shares as well. Assuming a black essence would be tantamount to accepting a white essence or a yellow one, a contention rejected by cultural anthropology today. Human differences are cultural, in the broad sense of the word "culture," but not racial. This is why Kesteloot states: "Race has nothing to do with négritude! Black is not of an 'essence' different from ours" (79). Moreover, it is Sartre's opinion that négritude, with its origin in the Hegelian dialectic equation — thesis, antithesis, and synthesis — is to become obsolete once national liberation is achieved and decolonization brought to term. Kesteloot opposes that view as well, stating that if, in Sartre's own opinion, négritude is a way of "being in the world," that condition will not change with the disappearance of the other. But, even though critics tend to share Kesteloot's argument on the black movement, as the years pass by, négritude becomes more and more veiled in ambiguity and contradictory interpretations.

In reality, two essential components seemed to appear in négritude: the valorization of the African world and the revelation of the ancient values of its culture. As a result of this first aspect of the movement, the other, crystallized in its protest against colonialism and European domination in Africa, meant in theory that once the reasons for opposition were gone after national independence was achieved, the original characteristics of an African culture would persist. We need to recognize that the fire of protest flickered away with the expulsion of the colonizer, and that Europeans' awareness of African values — not only in

academic circles but also among large groups of essayists, critics, and commentators — was more significant. As a consequence, négritude seemed to have lost meaning and content. So had, rightly or wrongly, the opposition and resistance it generated, chiefly among some outstanding Nigerian writers. However, for many, and in some circumstances, the paragon of that resistance mentioned at colloquies, symposia, and seminars was without a doubt Wole Soyinka. Geral Moore, who knew Nigeria well, recorded the following words of that author: “I think that it is not necessary that a tiger run around to proclaim his tigritude” (Jahn 248); he added that such an attitude is “a bit disloyal” (248). These statements provoked interminable discussions at successive international encounters around that over-ideologized, anti-négritude banner. Soyinka takes négritude to task, perhaps, for the opportunisms which sometimes surround it. For these reasons, the young generation of French-speaking African intellectuals started questioning the meaning, motives, and presence of négritude in their writing, as they lined up with the Anglophone writers. For instance, the spirit of opposition to négritude gives birth to “Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes” in *Littérature Antillaise*, with the “Modernes” adhering to the manifesto Eloge de la Créolité (1989) by the Guadeloupean Ernest Pépin, who claims “la Créolité littéraire” as “la naissance de la première littérature authentiquement antillaise, réalisant la synthèse des différents apports culturels qui constituent l’identité caribéenne” (9).

Indeed, no one invented négritude. It already existed as a matter of fact. But another reality, an important one, revealed itself to the Africans of the generation of the 30s, in Paris. Négritude as a culture, a civilization, a Negro spirit, an oppressed race had been suffocated, degraded, always dominated, and marginalized by one protagonist, the colonizer. So the movement did not create négritude; rather, it revealed négritude to the world by imposing its

recognition as a universal value, by appealing to all blacks to exercise their right, their duty of valuing and defending it, and proclaiming the necessity of resisting colonialism so that all of them could return to their origin and become masters of their own destiny. Tiger in the jungle was free, they said. Tiger did not need to roar against anyone who oppressed and contradicted him. The black was not free. He needed to proclaim his war slogans against his enemies. Négritude, as a cultural and an African personality development expression, would continue to exist, but would evolve in symbiosis with its natural environment.

Am I vindicating Sartre's logic in "Orphée noir," or am I still at grips with the ambiguity which is the genesis of négritude? My posture is shared by many critics of "Orphée noir" and of the Senghorian négritude who do not agree with Sartre's view on the movement, and who could neither come to terms with a clear concept of the versatile, elusive nature of négritude, such as that poeticized and sung, on the one hand, by the Brazilian "O grupo de São Paulo,"⁶ and caustically criticized, on the other hand, in L'Afrique et la Révolution by Sékou Touré and in Négritude et négrologues by Stanislas Adotévi.⁷

Négritude, Ideology, and Literary Criticism

In L'idéologie dans la littérature négro-africaine d'expression française, it is Ossito Midiohouan's explicit purpose to rewrite the literary history of Negro-African narrative, attributing a considerably less significant role to négritude than in former studies.⁸ Published in 1986, his book focuses on the ideological and avoids the négritude debate by constant reference to the historiographical. The concept of a négritude literature makes sense only from outside Africa, from a vantage point that can simultaneously view black discourse from a number of areas. In the early years, that vantage point was, of course, Paris, *locus* of

négritude debate. According to Midiohouan's thesis, the genesis and evolution of Negro-African writing can be correctly identified by a careful study of the ideological framework within which works of Negro-African discourse were written. He thus emphasizes the institutional context provided by "la littérature coloniale" (213), in addition to the context in which négritude was born, in Paris in the 1930s. Negro-African literature, Midiohouan argues, is inextricably bound up with the sociopolitical context in which it is written. That context was, initially, the context of colonial literature. Since 1960, it has been the context of political independence. The preliminary association with colonial literature meant that African writers were influenced by the colonialist ideology: "If, before the Second World War, writers supported the *civilizing mission* of the West, debated tradition and modernism, the dialogue between Africa and the West while at the same time affirming — as the colonial ideology advocated — the primacy of the cultural over the political, it was because the context in which they lived did not permit them to think of the political future of Africa outside the colonial context" (214).

Similarly, after the Second World War, there remained a "culturalist" vein, represented by Senghor in particular. At the same time, new writers emerged and were committed in their poetry and, particularly, in their novel to denouncing the colonial order and affirmed their desire to make literature a weapon in the fight to liberate the black world. Nor does Midiohouan deny the relationship between sociopolitical context and the concerns of literature after independence: "This narrow relationship ... is also visible after independence, under the triple sign of continuity, renewal, and diversification" (215). Continuity, in terms of themes that were present during the colonial period, which have been modified; renewal, in terms of Africa and the Diaspora's contemporary problems, particularly in the novel;

diversification, in terms of complex and rich creative possibilities as maintained by Gilroy in his black Atlantic view, presented in a broader perspective by Zapata Olivella in Changó, and now the leitmotif of la Créolité littéraire in the West Indies.

Midiouhouan's concerns are, initially, historiographic. The dominant historiography, he argues, foregrounds négritude. As ideological concerns underpin this historiography — it argues that the birth of Negro-African literature coincides with political “engagement” by the négritude poets — his study seeks to reinstate other ideologies that have been equally associated with Negro-African literature, in particular the colonial ideology. This leads him to conclude, according to Belinda Jack, that rather than appearing suddenly at a particular historical moment, “Negro-African literature emerged gradually, slowly freeing itself from a colonial ideology and asserting an ideology appropriate to an independent black world” (159). Thus Midiouhouan's study puts négritude in perspective as an ideology, and one intimately associated with a universe of discourse that embraces historiography.

Although written at a very particular moment in terms of literary-critical mood, Sunday Anozie's Sociologie du Roman africain: réalisme, structure et détermination dans le roman moderne ouest-africain (1970) made a distinct contribution to the criticism of “Negro-African literature,” or the “African novel” in particular. The collection in which the work was published, Tiers monde et développement, and the work's title give clear indications of the study's perspective. Abandoning négritude and the myriad critical approaches it generates, Anozie relies on the writings of Barthes, Luckacs, Balandier, Bastide, and Sartre to emphasize the role of the novelist within the changing political and social context of Africa and the Diaspora. The principal sociological texts on which he bases his study are

Georges Balandier's Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire (1963) and Roger Bastide's Sociologie et Psychanalyse (1950).⁹

As the sociological is paramount in Anozie's study, his analysis is not confined to the work of Francophone novelists but takes into account Anglophone, Lusophone, and the Diaspora's novelists as well: "Novels written in West Africa, in English or French, are here considered as forming a totality or as integrated into the same literary space (8).

Thus négritude covering an "espace littéraire" that is neither "coherent nor complete" had its conflicting ideological antecedents. Only the critics who did not want to combine the criteria of synchrony and diachrony in the analysis of the sociocultural phenomena that developed around the movement in its evolution could ignore the important signs and the extraordinary events that made it a phenomenon that anti-Senghorian and anti-Sartrean dissatisfaction could not totally delete. In Midiohouan's historiographic perspective and Anozie's sociological approach to négritude literature, I feel that Changó is the contemporary négritude novel par excellence. The novel evades all attempts at definition in the genre by its structure, and its sociological universe negotiates meanings in the mosaic toile de fond, where the diverse human experiences tied together by the Atlantic Ocean embrace and run into one another in tidal and ebb waves.

Indigénisme and Négritude in the Spirit of Légitime Défense

Négritude's remote origin dates from the first decades of the twentieth century, back to the American movement that Alain Locke (1886-1954) named "Renascimento Negro," whose goal was to question the alienating condition of blacks in the Americas. Du Bois (1868-1963), who founded the review The Crisis, defended civil equality and maintained that

blacks had to adapt to white society, rejecting the notion of an Afro-American subculture, whereas Marcus Garvey formulated the concept of “Mother-Africa” and launched the slogan “Africa for the Africans,” based on the concept of “African Personality.” It was a theoretical, polemical, and at times sinuous movement, in some aspects, and famous writers such as Sterling Brown, Claude McKay, Count Cullen, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright infused it with the forces that nourished the ideals of the Negro’s emancipation. Historians of négritude like Jahneins Jahn and Lilyan Kesteloot thought that the influence of the Negro-American movement was substantial in many geographical areas of Afro-American culture, such as the Caribbean, notably in cultural expressions like the Haitian indigénisme and the Cuban negrismo.

For Senghor, the importance of developments in America for the evolution of events in Paris, in terms of the general meaning of the word négritude — the discovery of black values and the recognition for the Negro of his situation — was born in the United States of America. However, the essence and critical typology of Negro-African literature, as advocated and developed by writers in Paris during the 1930s, were in part based on ideas and polemics current in political and cultural debates not only in the United States, but also in Haiti and the French West Indies, where, from the end of the nineteenth century onward, political thoughts were frequently transformed into quasi-literary “programs.” It was in cultural and more particularly in literary debates that ideas developed most fruitfully and influentially. The first black Republic, Haiti, was in many ways, a far greater model in terms of its cultural “program” than in terms of its unique political history. One of the island’s principal cultural concerns was to define the specificity of Haitian literature, or the literature of the “New Negro.”

Indigénisme, Haitianisme, or Africanisme

Stifled by the American occupation of 1915, haitianisme centered its objectives on the valorization of its African roots by including the fundamentals of a religious culture, the “Voodoo cult,” channeled in many cases through the Creole language. Writers like Jacques Roumain and Jean Price-Mars, to mention just two celebrated authors among many, were at the origin of that movement. Like any comparable broadly cultural but also literary and political concept, indigénisme varies in its definition. Responding to a sense of rootlessness, dislocation, loss of identity, and absence of cultural homogeneity, indigénisme involved a “rooting” of consciousness and an attempt to reinstate the potential of art by reestablishing the artist as the voice of the community. The writers grouped around the Indigenous Movement attempted to rediscover a buried cultural language, still present but obscured within the Haitian consciousness. Thus poetry was, according to Normil G. Sylvain, “un instrument de connaissance” that would reconstitute Haitian ethnicity.¹⁰

A further element in indigénisme’s attempts to redefine and redirect Haitian literature concerns the significance of Africa in Haitian culture. The Indigenists presented Africa as the embodiment of a quintessential cultural wholeness and authenticity. They celebrated their Africanness¹¹ and advocated a return to the freedom of African traditions, traces of which remained in Haitian culture. The obvious corollary of this was, of course, opposition to European tradition and the rejection of rationalism in particular.

The Africa celebrated in Haitian poetry was largely an abstraction. At a literary-historical level, however, it encouraged Haitian literature to be seen within the wider context of a worldwide “black” literature. This idea was echoed in Paul Morand’s introduction to his Anthologie de la poésie haïtienne indigène (1928), which encouraged the island’s literary

aspirations to be compared “aux efforts littéraires de toute votre race, de Chicago à Madagascar” (8). Narrow imitations of French models were considered inappropriate and irrelevant, and the indigenous reality was to become the focus of attention. In emphasizing parallels with both South American writers and the black writers of the Harlem Renaissance, indigénisme also placed Haitian literature within a wider context.

Haiti’s political history, unique in the Caribbean, promoted a literature in which notions of patriotism, for example, were important even in the nineteenth century, preparing for the concept of a national literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. The patriotic spirit encouraged a reevaluation of the Haitian reality in terms of landscape, tradition, and history. Haiti had been independent since 1804, and there was a real meaning in the notion of rediscovering an “arrière-pays culturel,” as Edouard Glissant called the Haitian reality in Les Lettres Nouvelles (1956)¹². The American imperialist threat to independence encouraged Haitian writers to see the parallels between their literary concerns and those of black Americans, thus allowing for a broader perspective. The idea of black patriotism and resistance to Western domination — the liberationist essence of Changó’s négritude — as championed by Haitian indigénisme¹³ is heralded by Zapata Olivella in chapter 5 of the novel “Los ancestros combatientes,” in Ngafúa’s words to Agne Brown: “Así las cosas, Agne Brown, mi combate, la llamada rebelión de Nat Turner, era eso: una batalla más en la gran guerra contra la esclavitud” (392). It is a long battle of resistance and liberation. However, in the French West Indies, the situation was, of course, very different; here it was within the very specific context of French colonialism that literary developments took place. Whereas, in Africa, writing by the first Africans was generally prose and subsumed into colonial literature and judged by the latter’s standards, in the West Indies, poetry was the dominant

genre, initially imitating certain metropolitan French models, those of Romanticism, Symbolism, and Parnassianism, in particular. By the same token, Spanish American indigenismo differs fundamentally from Haitian indigénisme.

Indigenismo has a long tradition in Latin American history. Its importance as a philosophical aspect of Latin American thought dates to the beginnings of European attempts to subdue the aboriginal inhabitants of the New World. It is a uniquely American phenomenon, and its origins are inextricably bound together with debates on the question of how conquered indigenous peoples should be treated. Bartolomé de las Casas presented the earliest articulate defense of indigenous rights from a European perspective, and was essentially the founder of indigenist thought in the Americas. Las Casas led the fight to end the abuse, exploitation, and slavery of Indians, and he also served the function of an anthropologist in the New World. He argued that the Spanish were not superior, just different, and that each civilization had its own advantages and disadvantages. However, Las Casas was not really radical or revolutionary. More than anything, he retained his loyalty to the Catholic Church and to the Spanish crown. His thought had strong elements of utopianism (he was a contemporary to the English Thomas More), and he set the agenda for many subsequent discussions on Indigenous issues.

Modern indigenismo first emerged in the nineteenth century in Peru and Mexico, two countries with large indigenous populations which remained marginalized from the dominant culture. Indigenismo was most commonly characterized by its romantic and humanitarian impulses, often expressed by its advocates through the medium of literature. This indigenista discourse became dominated by intellectuals who were often strongly influenced by

Spencerian Positivist thought and had the goal of assimilating the surviving indigenous peoples in the Americas into a dominant Spanish or Portuguese culture.

By the 1920s, indigenismo had converted into a form of protest against the injustices which Indians faced. Political parties, especially ones formed in a populist mode, began to exploit indigenist ideologies for their political gain. Indigenismo flourished in the 1930s, particularly in Peru and Mexico, and in the 1950s was institutionalized in the Guatemalan and Bolivian Revolutions. With the officialization of indigenismo, it lost its revolutionary potential to change the Indians' colonial and exploited situation. Elite mestizo intellectuals and leftist political leaders led this movement, which they often used only to advance their own political agendas.

Thus by being a national and nationalist movement, indigénisme did not have the sociopolitical scope of indigenismo, whose ideologies included most of Latin America. Indigénisme centered basically on the affirmation of black personality and on the reinforcement of black cultural identity. Cultural, artistic, and highly literary, it promoted the use of Creole, which was deeply rooted in Haiti, parallel to the French language on the island. Indigénisme, then, was, on the one hand, the cultural expression of a people who had yet to fully discover their African roots and who, on the other hand, seemed to lack in strong aspirations toward the development of a national Creole literature. In the following development of this chapter, I will show that Changó harmoniously weaves together elements of indigénisme and indigenismo into a new Latin American aesthetic.

Cuban Negrismo

In Cuba from 1928, with the intervention of Euro-Cubans later reinforced by Afro-Cubans, a national movement, negrismo started to gain cultural notoriety with names such as Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén.¹⁴ One of the characteristics of negrismo was the use of a European language, Spanish, incorporating “the Afro-Caribbean rhythm,” “le rythme afro-caribéen,” by J. Jahn in Manuel de littérature néo-africaine (238), translated as “o ritmo afro-caraíbe” by M. Ferreira in his work on black narrative, O Discurso no percurso africano I (68-69). It is a movement very close to the Haitian indigénisme, as both started and gained ground in the same epoch, yet with some variations. In the framework of negrismo, Jahneinz Jahn called attention to many literary and cultural events that occurred in Cuba from the beginning of the 20th century through the 1930s, underscoring the importance of the works of Fernando Ortiz, a scientist, musician, ethnologist, historian, and linguist. Ortiz focused his early researches on the cultural phenomena of the inferior Afro-Cuban social classes; he published Los negros brujos in 1906 and Los negros esclavos, a study on black slaves, in 1916. More importantly, his 1923 Glosario de afronegrismos is, according to Manuel Ferreira’s critical work, O discurso no percurso africano I, “Uma recolha de palavras africanas onde a assonância Africana utilizada na negritude popular cubana e de palavras de origem espanhola tendo tomado um novo sentido na negritude cubana indica que muitas destas palavras têm um ritmo e uma ressonância tipicamente africanos: mais tarde, havíamos de encontrá-las nas obras dos autores afro-cubanos” (72). These words of Ferreira recall the literary and anthropological works of Miguel Angel Asturias, and José María Arguedas, and their focus on indigenismo in Latin American letters, and particularly, Manuel Zapata Olivella’s Changó, the novel whose analysis is the object of this dissertation. It is obvious

that these were key cultural manifestations that helped to construct a climate conducive to the search for a new language in poetry, most certainly, but in fiction as well.

Changó in the Spirit of Légitime Défense and Black Atlantic

While promoting the philosophy of the liberation of self, Romanticism also developed the writers's capabilities for expression and sensibility. And traveling over the traditional paths of French and European literary revolution — realism, symbolism, naturalism — the writers continued to enhance their creative abilities and developed social and political intervention tools through aesthetic representations of an ideal world. In this regard, it is important to understand that it is not the first, genuine concept of négritude that is the object of a virulent criticism, nor the foundation stone which justifies the movement's reason for being in the 1930s. Rather, it is the Senghorian négritude which, in principle, is conservative, established, and therefore retrograde, and which tends to impose itself as a canon for black aesthetic production that is rejected by the young generation of black Atlantic fiction writers and artists. Critics resent négritude on the grounds that, liberated from the restraint of the rhetoric and the specificity of African aesthetics, freed from the norms of the poetic text as presented by Raymond I. William in Critics on Wallace Stevens, there are evasions and metaphorization of the mind to which expression is subjected everywhere, in the creative world, which in its meaning-creating process, seeks ways of escaping the vigilant eyes of authority whose language mystifies reality consciously or unconsciously. According to Barthes in Mythologies, and I agree, this repressive authority cannot hold a definitive grip on creativity and language.

In the same vein, in Muntu, for instance, Janheinz Jahn rejects language as a literature's basic criterion of definition, arguing that the narratives of North America and South Africa, although they share a common language, are clearly distinct. For this reason, language for the neo-African writer is simply a vehicle for the expression of Negro-African culture. This Jahn justifies by stressing the African writer's special relationship with language, bound up in the concept of "nommo."¹⁵ For it is the writer who gives language meaning, as Ahmadou Kourouma argues in Les soleils des indépendances.¹⁶ Language is not a fixed code that the author exploits. According to Jahn, it is only by the act of "profération" that language acquires meaning. This brings to mind Saussure's opposition between "langue" and "parole." So the Negro-African text is not an expression, or an act, of language; it does not bring a pre-existing meaning to life. The Negro-African discourse is better understood as "parole": language is given significance by the poet's act: "Every word which he pronounces is interpreted anew and the terms of his discourse, the chains of phonemes (lexemes and morphemes), thus receive this their specific meaning" (Muntu 172).

To this end, Ménil's view in Légitime Défense (1941), a political and historiographic journal of criticism of Francophone Negro-African literature, is relevant: "It is thus appropriate for the black West Indian to recognize firstly his own passions and only to express himself, to opt for the opposite of the utilitarian, for dreams and for poetry. While pursuing his aim he will come across fantastic images, poems, stories, the jazz of black Americans and works of the French which, through effort and by means of the power of passion and dream, have captured the freshness of Africa" (9). Ménil's words recall French dada and surrealist authors such as Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Appolinaire, and Reverdy.

According to M n l, the act of writing a “litt rature utile” will fail to liberate the colored West Indian: he will simply be expressing “les sentiments d’un autre” (8). What is required is the freeing of “les puissances de passion et d’imagination” (8). Here M n l implies that these “forces” emanate from an authentic self. The liberation of “ses passions propres” (8) will come about by “means of dreaming and poetry” (9): these activities will allow the West Indian writer to recognize aspects of himself with which, because of French assimilation, he has lost touch. In examining the position of this writer and the possibilities for an authentic West Indian literature, M n l’s text reveals the extent to which surrealism is advocated not as orthodoxy, but as one technique — among a number — likely to allow for appropriate West Indian themes and liberate a specifically West Indian consciousness.

By extension to Afro-Hispano-American literary discourse, M n l’s “les puissances de passion et d’imagination” can be applied by exploring one’s own fictional world, as Zapata Olivella does in Chang , a free-flowing universe of discourse, liberated from the classical restraint of Western aesthetics. This is how Chang , a different n gritude discourse, harmoniously blends indig nisme and negrismo, in a historiographic intertextuality,¹⁷ where orality, writing, sociology, politics, and anthropology come together in defiance of a universe of linear discourse. In my view, Chang  is, par excellence, the n gritude discourse that “does not overlook the development and change of black political ideologies, and which takes into consideration the restless, recombinant qualities of the black Atlantic’s affirmative political cultures” (Gilroy, The Black Atlantic 31).

In this historiographic and intertextual perspective, Chang  espouses a pluralistic position which affirms blackness as an open signifier and seeks to celebrate complex representations of a black particularity that is internally divided: by class, sexuality, gender, age, ethnicity,

economics, and political consciousness. It is my contention, sharing Gilroy's view in "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity,"¹⁸ that there is no unitary idea of black community in Changó, and that Zapata Olivella rightly repudiates the authoritarian tendencies of those who police black cultural and aesthetic expression in the name of a canon, or of their own particular history or priorities. An ontologically grounded black essentialism is replaced by a libertarian, strategic alternative, which is reflected in the very structure of Changó, whose polyphonic qualities of black cultural expression form the main aesthetic consideration.

In the theoretical framework of Ménéil's Légitime Défense and Gilroy's Black Atlantic concept, in its historical development, négritude posed the problem of the origin of a literature produced by blacks. It is important to note that in the historiographic Légitime Défense, critics such as Ménéil defined, in a particularly clear way, the necessary relationship between literature and politics, as in Black Atlantic, and this allowed Légitime Défense to clarify cogently the Midiohuanian conditions that may give rise to a new literature.¹⁹ The development of the Senghorian négritude current has been seen by some critics as a reaction against, and denial of, the theses of Légitime Défense. It would be true to say that Légitime Défense was from the beginning one of the forms that Negro-African literature was going to take, one which — by refusing precisely the narrowly cultural "rooting" present, for example, in Senghor, Birago, Diop, and B. Dadié — placed criticism and the spirit of revolt at the forefront, and to which should be attached, notably, Césaire, Fanon, Armah, Soyinka, and Zapata Olivella, whose liberationist views of négritude converge toward the black Atlantic concept embraced by Changó.

Changó and his Collaborative Deities in Negritude Aesthetics

Novels that use slavery as a territory for inter-cultural understanding have emerged throughout the various regions of the New World in recent years. Repetition of this form of aesthetics is redefining the state of knowledge about the Americas' past and its peoples — not only those of African descent and sensibility, but anyone of American descent and sensibility. With this new literature and vantage point have come innovative uses of memory, where imagination supplants historical empiricism and mythological idealization as an operant of cultural pathos. Recent writings among which Changó features prominently in Afro-Hispano-American letters, and the novels in particular, end the suspicion of black aesthetics as a derivative or pathological response to whiteness or as an ambivalent identification with blackness or American-ness. The role that improvisational imagination similar to jazz aesthetics plays in Changó, reconstructing intercultural collective memory, departs not only from the black literary tradition of representation by autobiography, mimesis, and militancy; more than that, the preference for *inventio*, evidenced throughout the long span of African New World writing, is unapologetically embraced as it explodes restrictions on representational modes. Black literary history is the story of increasing freedom of self-expression over and above the limitations, erasures, or silencing imposed by the dominant publishing establishment or self-imposed by an internalized white gaze. The analysis that follows concentrates on Changó and demonstrates that it is a resistant, contrapuntal, liberationist discourse which appears to be historiographical and metafictional, in Linda Hutcheon's postmodernist view on dissident narrative in A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (1990) and also in her The Politics of Postmodernism (1989).

Changó and the “Hinterland of Transition to a New Strength for Action”²⁰

Placed in a self-expressive context and viewed from a spatial perspective, Changó aims to reflect through physical and symbolic means the archetypal struggle of the moral being against external forces. This view of the novel sees its fictional world as a constant battleground for forces larger than the petty infractions of habitual, communal norms or patterns of human relationships and expectations, beyond the actual twists and incidents of action and their resolutions. The normal social activity of black writers gives clues to mental conditioning by colonial history or culture, such as that demonstrated by Senghorian négritude and the discourse it generates; or, conversely, it shows the will to break free of such nightmares in its projection of a future society. The literature which devotes itself to this social expression is a revelation both of the individual sensibility of the writers and of the traditional and colonial background of Africa and the Diaspora’s contemporary reality. Commensurate with Françoise Meltzer’s argument on the “unconscious,”²¹ my view is that the communal norms in Changó are Gilroyan in spirit: they are a “dynamic model of the unconscious, an economic one” (Lentricchia and McLaughlin, Critical Terms for Literary Study 151), because they reveal a system of control and exchanges: tension which builds up, seeking release into consciousness, in order to maintain a balance and stability, seen as socially profitable.

The world of Changó is created for the purpose of that communal presence which alone defines it, whose social experience, historic, race-informative, cosmogonic, for this objective, the universe of Changó becomes the affective, rational, and intuitive milieu. In such a novel, there will be no compass points, no horizontal or vertical definitions of a way. There are no reserved spaces for the protagonists Ngafúa and Agne Brown and their interactions, for their

very acts as representational beings are defined in turn by nothing less than the infinite cosmos within which the origin of their community and its contemporaneous experience of being is firmly embedded.

The point which first retains my attention in Changó is the beginning of the novel, with the free-verse epic poems “La Tierra de los Ancestros” in which Ngafúa “rememora el irrompible nudo de los vivos con los muertos,” “relata la prisión de Changó,” “en sueños, entreoye la maldición de Changó,” and “canto a Changó” (6-27). In this first part of the novel, I recognize the integral nature of poetry and dancing in the mimetic rite — the world of Changó is seen as a stage — and the withdrawal of the individuals — the couple Ngafúa/Agne Brown — into an inner world from which they return, communicating a new strength for social action. The definition of this inner world as “fantasy” in certain criticism of the novel betrays a Eurocentric conditioning or alienation. For instance, in a comparison of Changó with the Yoruba tragic art, Soyinka’s Fourth Stage which indeed belongs in the mysteries of Ogún, we do not find that the Yoruba, as the Greek did, built for his chorus the scaffolding of a fictive chthonic realm and placed thereon fictive nature spirits on which foundation, claims Nietzsche, Greek tragedy developed: in short, the principle of illusion. Yoruba tragedy plunges straight into the chthonic realm, the transitional matrix of death and individual and communal becoming. Into this universal womb once plunged and emerged Ogún, the first actor of his community. The actors in Ogún mysteries are the communicant chorus, containing within their collective being the essence of that transitional abyss which they mystically express. The protagonist actor, every god-suffused choric individual, like Ogún before him, uttering visions symbolic of the transitional gulf, stands now as it were beside himself, observant, understanding, and creating. At this stage the actor experiences

the sublime aesthetic joy, not within Nietzsche's heart of original oneness but in the distanced appreciation of the cosmic struggle (Soyinka, Myth 142-45). This resolved aesthetic serenity is the link between Ogún's tragic art and Obatala's plastic beauty, which expresses complementarity of the gods through interactions in Yoruba cosmivision.

Following Ménil and Soyinka, I describe the inner world instead as "the primal reality, the hinterland of transition." It is the gulf that must be constantly diminished through sacrifices and rituals. In the black and more specifically Yoruba cosmivision, the gods are the final measure of eternity, as humans are of earthly transience. Past, present, and future being so pertinently conceived and woven into black's world view, the element of eternity which is the gods' prerogative does not have the same quality of remoteness which it has in Judeo-Christian culture. The belief of the black in the contemporaneous existence within his daily experience of these aspects of time has long been recognized but always misinterpreted. Black is not like White, concerned with the purely conceptual aspects of time; they are too concretely realized in his own life, religion, sensitivity, to be mere tags for explaining the metaphysical order of the world. In concrete cognitions, present life, contains within itself manifestations of the ancestral, the living, and the unborn. All are vitally linked within the intimations and affectiveness of life, beyond mere abstract conceptualization. Nevertheless, black does not for that reason fail to distinguish between himself and the deities, the ancestors, the unborn, and his own reality, or obliterate his awareness of the essential gulf that exists between the different areas of existence.

Consonant with my view on the inner world as the primal reality and hinterland of transition, Changó's community emerges from its ritual experience charged with new strength for action because of the protagonists' "Promethean raid on the durable resources of

the transitional world” (Myth 144).²² Immersed in this inner world, they are enabled empathically to transmit its essence to the choric participants of the rites — the community. Nor do such communicants withdraw from social reality, but, rather, their consciousness is stretched to embrace another and primal reality. The nature of an inner world in a cohesive society is the essentialization of a rational world view, one which is elicited from the reality of social and natural experience and from the integrated reality of racial myths into a living morality. The mythic inner world is the psychic substructure and temporal subsidence, the cumulative history and empirical observations of the community. It is nonetheless primal in that time, in its cyclic reality, is fundamental to it. The inner world is not static, being constantly renewed and enriched by the moral and historic experience of man.

In the universe of Changó, the means to the inner world of transition, the vortex of archetypes and birth of primal images, is the ritualized experience of the gods themselves and of Ogún particularly. In Yoruba pantheon, Ogún is the god of iron and steel. Originally, he was a hunter deity; according to legend, before Olorún (the supreme god) decided to create terra firma, Ogún used to climb down to the great swamp on a cobweb in order to hunt. When terra firma had been created and earth had been given more or less the appearance that it has today, the gods descended to take possession of it. When they had covered part of the distance to earth, they arrived at what Bolaji Idowu refers to as “a place of no-road” (Olódumarè. God in Yoruba Belief 37), probably some sort of thicket. Try as they might, none of the gods could cut a road through the thicket, for they did not have the proper tools. Ogún, however, had tools, and he cut a road so that he and the other divinities were able to continue their journey. Having arrived on earth, the gods settled down in the holy city of Ife and offered the only crown in their possession to Ogún. However, Ogún, who was

accustomed to the free and lonely life of a hunter, found no pleasure in living within the confines of society, even as king of his equals. Consequently, he left Ife and made a home for himself on a high mountain, whence he descended only to hunt or to wage wars and conquer territories. Eventually, having had enough of his solitary life, Ogún wished to return to the social life upon which he had earlier turned his back. This, however, was easier said than done, for the warlike god was so terrifying in appearance that no society dared receive him. But after he had adorned himself with palm fronds, he looked less repellent and was admitted into the city of Irè, where he was even crowned king. Legend had it that Ogún was the son of Oduduwa, who made him king of Irè as a token of appreciation of his bravery in battle.

Thus Ogún is the great pioneer among Yoruba divinities. It was he who prepared the way for the other gods as they were descending to earth. It is also believed that even today, he makes the way smooth for the divinities in their spiritual encounters with the world of men and that he also opens the way of material and spiritual prosperity for his worshippers. Since Ogún is the god of iron and steel, he protects everyone who uses tools made of these materials. He is the god of war, hunting, blacksmiths, engineers, mechanics, lorry drivers, barbers, butchers, and wood-carvers. He also acts as presiding divinity over oaths and covenant-making or the cementing of pacts. Ogún's favorite sacrifice is a dog, and several kinds of trees used in making bows and arrows are sacred to him. Ogún, in his own way, is just as capricious as dangerous, but on what might be termed a more grandiose scale; he is by nature hard, fierce, and terrible, but is not regarded as evil. Rather, it is strongly believed that he demands justice, fair play, and rectitude.

Strictly speaking, Olorún himself is not one of the gods of the Yoruba pantheon. He is, as Idowu puts it, “over and above all divinities and men” (26). The other divinities are Olorún’s subordinate, whose duty it is to govern the world in accordance with Olorún’s commands.

Foremost among these deities is Obatalá, or Orihsa-nlá, whom Idowu calls “the great or arch-divinity” (71). Obatalá, who is probably very ancient, acts as “the deputy of Olódúmarè on earth in his creative and executive functions” (Soyinka, Interpreters 9). It was Obatalá who created our earth, at the command of Olorún. It also fell to Obatalá’s lot to create human beings or, to be more precise, human bodies. Obatalá shapes the bodies from earth or clay, but the only one who has the power to give life to these bodies is Olorún himself. However, it is Obatalá alone who decides the shape of the bodies that he creates, which is why he is thought to be responsible for all sorts of physical deficiencies.

In certain areas of Yoruba land, it is believed that after Olorún has blown the breath of life into man, he leaves him in the care of Obatalá who follows him, watches over him through all the ups and downs of life, and attempts to teach him what is right and what is wrong. There is no better guide through life, for Obatalá represents to the Yoruba the idea of ritual and ethical purity, and therefore the demands and sanctions of high morality. Immaculate whiteness is often associated with him. Obatalá abhors blood, war, and all kinds of violence; “he is for peace, order, and clean living” (Soyinka, Myth, Literature 179).

The gods’ identification with the innate mythopoeia of music — artistic creativity and language which express the nature and social function of gods such as presented, for instance, in the song “Canto a Changó, Oricha fecundo” (Changó 26-27) — is not fortuitous, especially with Ogún. Cultural anthropology teaches that music is the intensive language of transition and its communicant means, the catalyst and solvent of its regenerative treasure.

The protagonists in Changó, Ngafúa/Agne Brown, dare not venture into that inner world unprepared, without symbolic sacrifices and the invocation of the eudemonic guardians of the abyss epitomized by Elegba.²³ In the symbolic disintegration and retrieval of the protagonists' ego is reflected the destiny of being human. "The concept of négritude and the essence of Changó as Parallel Structures" allegorically posits Ngafúa/Agne Brown as Zapata Olivella's concept of négritude — complementarity of the two worlds of the dead and the living — and equates the literary and cultural movement with Ogún as "the embodiment of challenge, the Promethean instinct in man, Agne Brown, constantly at the service of society for its full self-realization" (Soyinka 30).

Négritude and Three Yoruba Deities: Changó, Obatalá, and Ogún

In this section of my analysis, the parallel between négritude and the Yoruba deities Changó, Obatalá, and Ogún is based on the nature of these gods' attributes which, in addition to their flexible histories, have made them the favorites of poets and novelists, modern and traditional. And even more, they seem to travel well. The African world of the Americas testifies to this both in its socio-religious reality and in the secular arts and literature. Symbols of Yemayá, Ochosí, Esú, Elegba, and Changó²⁴ not only lead a dynamic existence with Roman Catholic saints,²⁵ but are fused with the twentieth-century technological and revolutionary expressionism.²⁶ I use the word "Expressionism" in its French meaning as "tendance artistique et littéraire du 20^{ème} siècle qui s'attache à l'intensité de l'expression" (Le Petit Larousse). In my work I am most interested in this word's connoting intensity of revolutionary action to forge and shape new human and social destiny for the down-trodden and the dispossessed.

The three deities, Changó, Ogún, and Obatalá, the subjects of this analysis are represented in Changó by the passage-rites of hero-gods, a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonize with his social, physical, and psychic environment. The setting of the ritual, of the drama of the gods, is the cosmic totality, and our approach to this drama might usefully be made through the comparable example of the epic, which represents also, at a different level, another access to the Rites of Passage. The epic celebrates the victory of the human spirit over forces inimical to self-affirmation. It concretizes in the form of action the arduous birth of the individual or communal entity, creates a new being through utilizing and stressing the language of self-glorification to which human nature is prone. The immovable and eternal immensity that surrounds man creates the need to challenge, confront, and initiate a rapport with the realm of that infinity. It is the natural home of the unseen deities, a resting place for the departed and a staging house for the unborn. Intuitions, sudden psychic emanations, could come, logically, only from such an incomparable immensity. A storehouse for creative and destructive essences, it requires a challenger, a human representative to breach it periodically on behalf of the community's well-being. Changó's world, the ritual arena of this confrontation, comes to represent the symbolic chthonic space.²⁷ The presence of the challengers, Ngafúa/Agne Brown, who represent Changó's affirmative négritude within it is the earliest physical expression of man's fearful and destructive awareness of the cosmic context of his existence. Its magic microcosm is created by the communal presence, and in this charged space, the chthonic inhabitants are challenged.²⁸

Changó

Deity Changó is interesting for his essentiality in a cosmic functionalist framework, in company with several others.²⁹ In the Yoruba man-cosmos organization, where social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure, Changó is the agent of lightning, the cosmic agent of a swift, retributive justice. In “Los Orígenes,” the first part of the novel, “La maldición de Changó: Ngáfúa relata la prisión y exilio de Changó,” Changó is anthropomorphic. In the matrix of a society’s conceptions of becoming subject, he is cast in the frame of racial or social origination, and his tragic rites are consequently a deadly conflict on the human and historic plane charged with the passion and terror of superhuman, uncontrollable forces. In the following poetic lines in the novel, “La maldición de Changó” conveys the awesome passion of Changó:

Escucha Muntu que te alejas / las pasadas, las vivas historias / los gloriosos tiempos de Changó / y su trágica maldición. / ... El furibundo y generoso Changó / odiado por sus súbditos / venerado por su Gloria / a sus hermanos hizo la Guerra / a Orún, a Ochosí, a Oke, a Olokún / y hasta al dulce Oko / el músico, el poeta. ... A sus más hábiles gladiadores: / ¡Al noble Gbonka! / ¡A Timi, el valiente! / Enseñóles el tiro de la lanza / ... romper los invisibles hilos de la araña / ... Envidia tuvo de sus fieles generales / ... En sus largas noches sin sueño / olvidado de su stirpe sagrada / concibió la perversa estratagema / de enfrentar hasta la muerte / con sus armas hechizadas / a los guerreros frente a frente / en duelo interminable / que no quisieron ver las madres / ... La embrujada espada de Gbonka / apuntando la garganta de Timi / contra ella certero la dirige / desatando la tragedia / ... Dolorido, desgarrado asesino de su hermano / ... temblorosas las manos / acercóse a Changó / y la cabeza ensangrentada / lentamente / a sus pies depositó / ... Refugióse en el exilio / ... Los ancianos / los más cerca a los Ancestros / depositarios de las normas y la justicia / en silencio, / en el solitario diálogo del insomnio / ... censuraban al tirano! / ... Hasta que Omo Oba / el primer y único hombre inmortal / ... proscrito por Odumare a vivir en los volcanes / escapóse de su lúgubre tronera / ... Predicó en la plaza, en los establos / contra el temido, el odiado Changó / para arrojarlo de la Oyo Imperial / y a Gbonka, el noble, coronar / ... Mientras prisionero de la turba / sale de Oyo el gran Oricha / Coronado rey entraba Gbonka / ... ¡Eléyay dolor de Changó! Su cólera contuvo, bebió la injuria. / Fue después, hoy, momentos no muertos / de la divina venganza / cuando a sus hijos / ... condenó al destierro en país lejano. (15-22)

In this quotation, Changó reaches deeply into the collective memory of human rites of passage — ordeal, survival, social and individual purgation — and embodies, in his passion, action and personae, an end result which is the moral code of society.

In the historic pattern of Changó's rites, temporal dislocation appears. In some mythic accounts of Changó, this deity, a wild vengeful slaughter upon menials who had dared to defy his authority condemns himself as a result of an opprobrious act and commits suicide. Yet he leaps up straight from his downfall into identification with god of fierce power, who assumes the agency of lightning in Yoruba cosmogony, becomes a neo-technic ancestor and is capable of extending his territory of lightning to embrace electricity in the affective consciousness of his followers (Soyinka, Myth 54). This seeming cosmic anachronism is in fact a handy clue to temporal concepts in the Yoruba world view and in Changó. Traditional thought operates not in a linear conception of time but in a cyclic reality. Kerenyi elicits parallel verities from Greek mythology in his essay "The Primordial Child in Primordial times."³⁰ The Yoruba proverb "If humanity were not, the gods would not be," hardly commensurate with the Judeo-Christian theology of "In the beginning, God was," has implications that go beyond the mere question of sequential time. The gods remain abstractions of man-emanating concepts or experiences which presuppose the human medium. No philosophy can negate this fact, which formulates the black cosmogonic wisdom prevailing in Zapata Olivella's imagery. It is also an affective social principle which intertwines multiple existences, a balancing principle which prevents total inflexibility in the age-hierarchies that normally govern traditional society. This challenges theories of modernity. "Illusions et désillusions de la modernité," a chapter at the core of Philippe Laburthe and Tolra Warnier's Ethnologie-Anthropologie, echoes Zapata Olivella's diegetic

technique, saying: “Par contraste, les sociétés de la tradition et l’ethno-anthropologie à leur école n’ont pas de peine à lier en un discours unique l’imaginaire, le pouvoir, les procédés techniques, l’arrière-monde des esprits et des dieux” (9). In this view, Changó is a revelation that modern and traditional societies have identical practices: they live on hybrid and socio-technical production, but ignore it.

The deities exist in the same relationship with humanity as these multiple worlds and are an expression of its cyclic nature. Changó’s fusion with a primal phenomenon is an operation of the same concept, and the drama on a human plane that precedes his apotheosis is a further affirmation of the principle of continuity inherent in myths of origin, secular or cosmic. Changó’s tragic fall is the result of a hubristic act: the powerful king throws himself in conflict not simply with subjects or peers but with the racial fount of his own being.

Weak, vacillating, treacherous, and disloyal, the human unit that constitutes the chorus of his downfall is in Changó’s drama, the total context of racial beginning; the ritual metaphor communicates this, and the poetry, songs, music — all is woven into its affirmation.³² Yet side by side with acceptance of the need to destroy this disruptive, uncontrollable factor in the mortal community, the need to assert the communal will for a harmonious existence, is recognition of the superhuman energies of an exceptional man. Apotheosis, the joining of energies in cosmic continuity, follows logically, and Changó is set to work at his new functions with a wide safety zone of creativity between him and lesser mortals. The poem “Canto a Changó, Oricha fecundo” illustrates the resetting of this deity’s mythic functions in the liberating energies of Changó’s cosmovision, set in the context of the New World. This is the poem sung by Ngafúa and synthesized as: “¡Changó! / Voz forjada del trueno. / Siéntate, descansa tu descomunal falo / tu gran útero, / ¡Dame tu palabra saliva / dadora de la

luz y de la muerte / chispa de la vida! / ¡Aliento del fuego! / ¡Luz del relámpago! / ¡Dame tu trueno! Madre del pensamiento / la danza / el canto / la música / préstame tu ritmo, / palabra batiente, / acomoda aquí tu voz tambor / tu ritmo, tu lengua!” (26-27)

The leitmotif of this poem is rehabilitation, the renewal of the energies for liberation signified by recurrent phrases of regeneration and fertility such as “descomunal falo, gran útero, chispa de la vida, madre del pensamiento” (26). Ngafúa, in his didactic speech to Agne Brown, recognizes the contradictory nature of Changó as he presents the deity as endowed with “descomunal falo” and with “gran útero” whose “palabra saliva es dadora de la luz y de la muerte” simultaneously. The deity is androgenous in essence. Ngafúa knows that Changó is a transient deity who cannot be tamed or defined. This ancestral voice, Ngafúa, infuses in Agne Brown the energies of liberation, the liberating négritude of Zapata Olivella, and presents his vision of the movement by singing to the deity: “¡chispa de la vida! / préstame tu ritmo, / acomoda aquí tu voz tambor / tu ritmo, tu lengua!” The use of the verb “acomoda” is indeed relevant to the context of Changó as a novel centered in the New World. The adverb “aquí” not only designates the Americas, but is above all meant for Agne Brown, to whom Ngafúa is giving the secret “axche”³² — “logos, the word as understanding, the word as the audible, the visible, and sign of reason, more weighty, forceful, and action-packed than the ordinary word” (Gates, The Signifying Monkey 7) — as the epitome of the rebirth of a new, liberationist, contextual force in the black Atlantic. Ngafúa harnesses the power of the Yoruba deity, synthesizes it, and accommodates it to the resisting context of blacks in the Americas, challenging the Senghorian, African tradition-based négritude. In the image of deity Changó, the novel remains nebulous about Agne’s sex in its two thirds, which

may imply Zapata Olivella's skepticism toward a canonical definition of négritude. I deal with Agne as a female protagonist in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

The social visions expressed in the works of Soyinka, Armah, Towa, Mongo Betty, and Ousmane Sambène expose the weaknesses and the simplistic approach of négritude as a cultural, literary, economic, and sociopolitical ideology for the problem of the liberation of Africa and the Diaspora. In vain African progressists conjure with foreign triers of négritude like Father Tempels, Pierre Verger, and Herskovits. For the new breed of critics, these co-founders of the movement have never written a line or provided one clue that fleshes out, at the very least, a composite image of the African world. When ideological relations deny, both in theory and in action, the reality of a cultural entity which is defined as the African world while asserting theirs even to the extent of inviting the African world to sublimate its existence in theirs, the political motivation is to be questioned. It is my contention that, against such a backdrop, Changó is engaged in the simultaneous act of eliciting from history, mythology, and literature, for the benefit of blacks, a continuing process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its nonexistence or its irrelevance — retrogression, reactionarism, racism — in contemporary world reality. This is also an obvious process in the schemata of interrupted histories. The solution for the moment, according to Zapata Olivella's repetitive, communicative style through Agne Brown, appears to be a continuing objective re-statement of that self-apprehension, to call attention to it in living works of the imagination, placing them in the context of apprehension of the black race.

However, nothing in Changó suggests a detailed uniqueness of the African or black world. Man exists, nonetheless, in a comprehensive world of myth, history, and mores; in such a

total context, the black world, like any other “world,” is unique. Yet it possesses, in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarity. Agne Brown, Zapata Olivella’s personification of négritude, is the hybrid vision of the New World portrayed in Changó, epitomized in the versatile character of the Yoruba deity Changó, in whose perspective I apprehend Gilroy’s cultural and sociopolitical theory of the black Atlantic in a global framework of secular vision. This means, in Soyinka’s terms, “A creative concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions” (66).

Obatalá

The other deity, Obatalá, is the qualities of a saint. He represents, within the cyclic image of Yoruba existential concepts, the virtues of social and individual accommodation: patience, suffering, peacebleness, all the imperatives of harmony in the universe, the essence of quietude and forbearance. Diametrically opposed to Obatalá, we find the assertiveness of Ogún, our third deity. What all these gods have in common, though they all bear the essence of purity, is that their history is always marked by some act of excess, hubris, and human weakness. The consequences are significantly measured in human terms, and the gods find themselves under an eternal obligation of practical penance which compensates humanity for the gods’ failure to meet social expectation.³³

The notable error of Obatalá, god of soul purity, was his weakness for drink. To him belongs the function of molding human beings, into whose forms Olodumarè, the supreme deity, breathes life: “Obatalá, “primer hombre mortal creado por Odumarè, a quien dio a Odudúa por compañera. Ambos Orichas fueron los padres de Aganyú y Yemayá. En la

mitología Yoruba, Odudúa es Oricha de la tierra. Se le representa en forma de madre sentada que da de mamar a su hijo” (524). In the Yoruba pantheon, Obatalá’s specificity is procreation, and fertility is symbolized by his female companion Odudúa, Oricha of the earth, always represented breast-feeding a child. One day, Obatalá drank too much palm wine. His craftsman’s fingers slipped badly, and he molded cripples, albinos, and blind people. As a consequence of this error, Obatalá rigidly, squarely forbids palm wine to his followers. The compensating, complementary principle of the Yoruba world view is revealed in the fact that by contrast, Ogún makes palm wine a mandatory ingredient of his worship.

The Yoruba can be reassuringly pragmatic. They assert straightforwardly that Obatalá was tipsy and his hand slipped, bringing god firmly within the human attribute of fallibility. Since human weakness is known to cause certain deplorable consequences for society, it also requires a search for remedial activities, and it is this cycle which ensures the constant regenerative process of the universe. By bringing the gods within this cycle, a continuity of the cosmic regulation involving the worlds of the ancestors and the unborn is also guaranteed.

Along the same lines, in The Culture of Fiction, Captain-Hidalgo wrote: “I do not subscribe wholeheartedly to the traditional position on the origins of the concept of a sole God. There is often a problem with claiming ultimate origins for anything including religious concepts. ...Yet outside of Christian theology other apologists for religion claim the concept of Man as responsible for his own fate. Moreover, the sense of redemption in *Changó* is not only an ethical question but a political one” (150). In the framework of Captain-Hidalgo’s view, I maintain that Omo-Oba, “primer y único hombre inmortal creado

por Odumarè y que, de vez en cuando, sale de sus abismos a predicar entre los hombres la desobediencia a las leyes establecidas por Odumarè y los Orichas” (Changó 525), led the rebellion that overthrew Changó’s throne in Ile-Ife and established Gbonka in power for the social well-being of the Oyo kingdom. For a similar social vision in a different context, this deity, in Changó, in the New World, sides strategically with god Changó in the universe of the gods and fuels the spirit of rebellion, resistance, and liberation represented by Agne Brown. The act of hubris or its opposite — weakness, excessive passivity or inertia in Obatalá, for example — leads to a disruption of balances within nature, and this in turn triggers compensating energies.

A determination to replant the displaced racial psyche was one reason for the ease and permanence with which African gods were syncretized with Roman Catholic saints, and also because of the Inquisition — the Church forbade their worship during the colonial period in the Americas, in Latin America and the Caribbean in particular. The process was so complete that these deities became part of the spiritual lives of a number of white Roman Catholics themselves who, in Brazil or Cuba, became regular worshippers in the Candomblé or Bembé respectively, adopting the Yoruba orishas in their full essence as their patron gods. The racial, cultural hybridism and syncretism of the Americas are a recurrent thread of ideas in Changó, and Ngafúa, one of the narrative voices in the novel, summarizes the concept to Agne Brown:

Agne Brown, si oyes mis palabras descubrirás el grano de luz que yace oculto en las sombras, el mundo espiritual que permitió sobrevivir a nuestros mayores en el infierno de la plantación. ... - Examina tu alma a la luz de dos lámparas y te explicarás la penumbra de tu doble existencia. Nadie, sino tú, escogida por Legba, podrás tener conciencia de tus dos mundos: África viviendo en el alma de América. El destino de nuestra sangre es encender un nuevo renacimiento en el corazón anciano de la humanidad. (421)

The idea of complementarity which escapes theology, and which is denied by the Santa Inquisición in Changó, is brought into perspective in an intellectual, secular view by Agne Brown's professor of anthropology, Harrington, when he says:

¿Se trata entonces de africanizar la actitud religiosa del blanco Americano? ... Aunque no pretendo justificar la supremacía Blanca, no es menos cierto que mis antepasados entre todas las razas han sido los encargados de desarrollar la técnica científica y que esa técnica les confiere poder sobre los otros humanos. A ustedes los negros les han sido asignadas otras tareas que cumplir. Pero creo que el papel de Atlas también es importante. Sin vuestra fortaleza la humanidad se hubiera estancado en la barbarie: el músculo de los Negros convertido en palanca de los Blancos también mueve el mundo. (349)

It is my view that Harrington is not recreating the classical dichotomy of intelligence vs. non-intelligence, but a simple combination of factors conducive to human common well-being.

Agne Brown built up between the two views of Ancestor Ngafúa and of Professor Harrington, who said, “¡Para renacer hay que morir!” (350), concludes: “Usted lo ha dicho: ¡Renacer! El hecho de que el pueblo Negro haya podido sobrevivir a tanta ignominia, recreándose siempre más poderoso, es una prueba irrefutable de que estamos señalados por Changó para cumplir el destino de liberar a los hombres. El culto a los Ancestros, la ligazón entre los vivos y los muertos, pondrá fin al mito de los dioses individuales y egoístas. ¡No hay Dios más poderoso que la familia del Muntu!” (350).

The essence of Changó comes full circle in Agne Brown's words. To begin with, this deity is a racially essential catalyst in the Negro's mission to liberate mankind: “el pueblo Negro ... estamos señalados por Changó para cumplir el destino de liberar a los hombres.” Moreover, the methodology for accomplishing such a social vision is clearly stated as “El culto a los Ancestros, la ligazón entre los vivos y los muertos,” whose objective it is “pondrá fin al mito de los dioses individuales y egoístas.” Central to Agne Brown's view of the gods and of God is a scathing criticism of the myth of God, a subversion of the established order

of ideas cast in divine mythology. Changó is “self-consciously liberationist.”³⁴ It is built on African aesthetic principles, for the novel is meant to construct an African mythological framework that explicates not merely Zapata Olivella’s fictional universe but, more pertinently, the real world.

Totally liberationist, the couple Ancestor Ngafúa/Agne Brown parallel the spiritual world of the gods vs. the material world of humans. The first step toward liberation is liberating the self from the shackles of alienating divine mythology, which is the ethical basis of Greek tragedy as it developed through the pessimistic line of Aeschylus to Shakespeare’s “As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods; / They kill us for their sport” (King Lear 14) In Changó and Yoruba world view, the penalties which societies exact from their deities in reparation for real or symbolic injuries — Yoruba deities commit serious infractions against mortal being — are an index of the extent to which the principles of natural restitution for social disharmony may be said to govern the moral structure of that society and influence its social laws — a natural restitution, because the relationship between man and god, the embodiment of nature and cosmic principle, cannot be seen in any other terms but those of naturalness. This relationship represents the deductions and applications of cosmic and natural ordering, and it provides not only ethical but technical, socio-economic norms for such a society. By making the gods responsible to judgments so down-to-earth, a passive reliance on the caprices of external forces, such as in the Judeo-Christian God, is excluded; their regenerative aspects are catalyzed into operation through a ritual recourse to gods’error-ridden rites of passage. Even in the epic poems sung at the beginning of Changó, we see Ngafúa’s recurrent references to such antecedents in the divine moral history of Changó. Divine memory cannot rest; it is constantly reshuffled, and incantations are uttered as

reminders of the gods' natural responsibilities. The comparative "No hay Dios más poderoso que la familia del Muntu" sets "Dios," the powerful unidimensional God, on equal footing with the Muntu family. The syntagm even negates this God's power, in contrast to the role destined to the Muntu family, who are meant to liberate the oppressed world. Agne Brown's *Changó* leaps beyond racial and class preoccupations to embrace the task of liberating humanity in its total composite.

Ogún and the Gulf of Transition to Self-Affirmation and Liberty

Our third deity, Ogún, is known in *Changó* as "Oricha del hierro y el fuego, a quien los yorubas hacían sacrificios humanos o de animales antes de ir a la guerra. En África se le conoce bajo siete formas diferentes y en Haití constituye toda una familia: los Ogúns: Ferraille, Badugru, Ashadé, Balindjo, y otros, todos relacionados con la guerra" (524).

Though we may know the essence of Ogún, the nature of this deity, like that of his peers in the Yoruba pantheon, is an active metaphor for human social preoccupations, and therefore cannot be written in stone. Suffice it to say that in Africa alone, Ogún the deity bears seven different forms — is polymorphic — while constituting a whole family in the New World. At this juncture, we come again to the functionalist, terrestrialist existence of African gods at odds with the transcendentalist essence of Christian saints. Wole Soyinka expresses this view in "The Ritual Archetype" in *Myth, Literature and the African World*: "When ritual archetypes acquire new aesthetic characteristics, we may expect re-adjustments of the moral imperatives that brought them into existence in the first place, at the centre of man's efforts to order the universe" (25). Gods are closely associated with collective myth construction aimed at social vision with communal harmony in sight. To achieve this,

Lourenço de Lima Reis, who wrote broadly on African deities in Brazil in Pos-colonialismo, identidade e mestiçagem cultural: A literatura de Wole Soyinka, thinks that “Só a união da essência humana à essência divina poderia restaurar, mesmo que provisoriamente, a totalidade cósmica original e diminuir o sentimento de incompletude de homens e deuses: a interação das duas essências criaria uma unidade e uma personalidade completas baseadas no princípio de complementaridade” (155). These words echo the Cuban Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation, as well as the Mexican García Canclini’s view on cultural hybridism in the Americas.

Originating from Fernando Ortiz’s theory of transculturation, hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, and racial. Linguistic examples include “pidgin” and “creole” languages, and these echo the foundational use of the term by the linguist and cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it to suggest the disruptive and transfiguring power of multivocal language situation and, by extension, of multivocal narratives.

The term “hybridity” has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer / colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Hybridity has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural exchange. The idea of hybridity also underlies other attempts to stress the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process in expressions of syncreticity, cultural synergy, and transculturation. I will contextualize the theoretical concepts of hybridism and transculturation in my work.

Using Ortiz's concept of transculturation, Rama offers a critical examination of the anthropological and literary work of José María Arguedas, a Peruvian ethnologist and writer who, like Zapata Olivella in Colombia, dedicated his life to revalorizing and integrating the Quechua³⁵ and Hispanic cultural traditions that make up his nation, Peru. For Rama, transculturation facilitates the historical examination of Latin American cultural production in the context of colonialism and imperialism.

Undoubtedly, Arguedas struggled with the tools he received from indigenous tradition and the West and tried to adapt them to his own purposes, not always successfully.³⁶ Like Ortiz, Arguedas, and García Canclini, Zapata Olivella rejects prevailing assumptions about progress and "acculturation" and seeks instead to explore the dynamics of cultural transformation underpinning the formation of cultures in the New World and Latin America in particular. Arguedas' statement that "I am not an acculturated person; I am a Peruvian who proudly, as a happy devil, speaks in Christian and in Indian, in Spanish and Quechua" (my translation; 1971, 297) supports the spirit of cultural hybridism prevailing in Changó. It is my view that the principle guiding Changó is Zapata Olivella's effort to view the New World as an infinite source of creativity, a universe endowed with such extraordinary, diverse and rich traditions, with such imaginative myths and poetry, that "From here to imitate someone is quite scandalous" (Arguedas, Formación de una cultura nacional indoamericana 298).³⁷

Following Malinowski in his introduction to Ortiz's work Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar (1940), it is my contention, in agreement with Ortiz's view, that every change of culture, or every transculturation, is a process in which something is always given in return for what one receives, a system of give and take. It is an operation in which both parts of the equation are modified, a deal from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex, a

reality that is not a mechanical agglomeration of traits, nor even a mosaic, but a new phenomenon, original and independent. To describe this process, Malinowski writes: “The word ‘trans-culturation,’ stemming from Latin roots, provides us with a term that does not contain the implication of one certain culture toward which the other must tend, but an exchange between two cultures, both of them active, both contributing their share, and both co-operating to bring about a new reality of civilization” (54). In line with this cultural phenomenon, I believe that Changó emphasizes an exchange of important factors, a transculturation, in which the chief determining forces are the new cultures as well as the old traits of the cultures in contact, the interplay of economic factors peculiar to the New World as well as a new social organization of labor, capital, and enterprise.

However, Ogún of Changó, an essence appropriated by Zapata Olivella for an aesthetic purpose, should be differentiated from the oricha Ogún of Yoruba mythology. The former is an essence, a mythic construct imagined by an author, a “builder of myths” who selects those most appropriate for the creation of a mythological character, representative of a culture, endowed with a social vision. In Changó, as in most discourses in the black Atlantic about this deity, the essential Ogún is illustrated using the Hellenic concepts as a combination of the Dionysian, Apollonian, and Promethean principles. In this respect, according to de Lima Reis in Pós-Colonialismo, “Tanto Ogún quanto Dionísio são deuses da fertilidade masculina, cujo símbolo é o falo, representado pelo tirso e pelo opa ogun” (231). Ogún is the epitome of the abyss of transition, and he encapsulates the Yoruba cosmogony’s coming-into-being in his own rites of passage. He is known as the “protector of orphans, roof over the homeless, terrible guardian of the sacred oath” (Soyinka, Myth 26). He stands for a transcendental,

humane, but rigidly restorative justice. In Myth, the following praise-chants give a more balanced view of the truthful nature of Ogún:

Rich-laden is his house, yet, decked in palm fronds
He ventures forth, refuge of the down-trodden.
To rescue slaves he unleashed the judgment of war
Because of the blind, plunged into the forest
Of curative herbs, Bountiful One
Who stands bulwark to offsprings of the dead in heaven
Salutations O lone being, who bathes in rivers of blood. (26-26)

Ogún is also a master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, the essence of destruction and creativity, a recluse and a gregarious imbibor, a reluctant leader of men and deities. He is “Lord of the road” of Ifá; that is, he opens the way to the heart of Ifá’s wisdom, thus representing the knowledge-seeking instinct, an attribute which sets him apart as the only deity who “sought the way” and harnessed the resources of science to carve a passage through primordial chaos for the gods’ reunion with man — the tandems of Ogún/Ashandé, Ogún/Nagó, Ogún/Ngafúa, and Ogún/Olugbalá. The journey of discovery to build self and community and its direction are at the heart of Ogún’s being and the relationship of this god to man. Its direction and motivation are also an indication of the geocentric bias of the Yoruba cosmovision transcultured in Changó, for it was the gods who needed to come to man, anguished by a continuing sense of incompleteness, needing to recover their long-lost essence of totality. Ogún was to lead them through the abyss of transition, “the dark continuum of transition where occurs the inter-transmutation of essence-ideal and materiality which houses the ultimate expression of cosmic will” (26). Ogún’s was the first rite of passage through the chthonic realm,³⁸ which Soyinka puts as:

A projection of man’s conflict with forces that challenge his efforts to harmonize with his environment, physical, social, and psychic. The natural home of the unseen deities, a resting-place for the departed and a staging-house for the unborn, the chthonic realm is a storehouse for creative and destructive essences which requires a

challenger, a human representative to breach it periodically on behalf of the well-being of the community. (2-3)

The universe of Changó is a fragmented, turbulent world. As such, it epitomizes the gods' spiritual unrest, whose cause dates back to the gods' own origin. Yoruba mythology teaches that, once, there was a solitary being, the primogenitor of god and man, assisted only by a slave, Atunda. The slave rebelled and rolled a huge boulder onto the god, who was tending his garden on a hillside, sending him hurtling into the abyss in a myriad of fragments. Atunda's rebellious act created the multiple god-head which, according to Soyinka, translated into the transference of social functions: the division of labor and professions among the deities. The shard, the gene of original oneness which contained the creative flint or spark, appears to have passed into the being of Ogún, who manifests a temperament for artistic creativity matched by technological proficiency. His world is the universe of craft, song, and poetry. The practitioners of Ijala, the supreme lyrical form of Yoruba poetic art, are followers of Ogún the hunter. Ijala celebrates the deity, the animals, and the plant lives, seeking to capture the essence and relationships of growing things and the insights of man into the secrets of the universe. With creativity, however, went its complementary aspect, and Ogún came to symbolize the creative-destructive principle. This does not in any way interfere with the creative province of Obatalá, whose task is to shape the lifeless form of man. Nor is Obatalá ever moved to destroy. Obatalá incarnates the essence of creator, not like Ogún, the essence of creativity itself.

Yet none of these gods, not even Ogún, was complete in himself. There had to be a journey across the void to drink at the fount of mortality, the chthonic realm, though some myths suggest that the trip aimed to inspect humanity and see if our material world separated from the ancestor's was indeed thriving. But the void had become impenetrable. A long

isolation from the world of men had created an impassable barrier, which the gods tried to demolish and bridge in vain. Ogún at last took over. Armed with the first technical instrument, which he had forged from the ore of mountain-wombs, he cleared the primordial jungle, plunged through the abyss and called on the others to follow.

In recognition of his prowess on behalf of humanity, his kinsmen begged Ogún to rule over them. Ogún is aware of his own nature, and wisdom caused him to shrink from ruling as a king. Such, however, is the willful nature of Ogún that he does not, unlike Obatalá, forbid the use of palm wine in his worship — on the contrary. Ogún is the embodiment of challenge, the Promethean instinct in man, constantly at the service of society for its full self-realization. Hence his role of explorer through primordial chaos, which he conquered, then bridged, with the aid of the artifacts of his science. The other deities following could only share vicariously in the original experience. Only Ogún experienced the process of being literally torn asunder in cosmic winds, of rescuing himself from the precarious edge of total dissolution by harnessing the untouched part of himself, the will. This is the unique essentiality of Ogún in Yoruba metaphysics: as embodiment of the social, communal will invested in a protagonist of its choice, like in his human counterparts: the pragmatic leader of the Senegalese colonial railway workers Bakayoko, in Les Bouts de bois de Dieu by Ousmane Sambène, and the prophet Isanusi in Ayi Kwei Armah's Two Thousand Seasons who define the “way” as “a call to creation and creativity” (317). It is as a paradigm of this experience of dissolution and re-integration that Agne Brown in Changó is called upon and initiated into the realm of the gods by ancestor Ogún-Ngafúa in the ritual of archetypes.

Ogún's action did not happen in vacuum. His move was a drama of individual stress, yet this moment of individuation was communicant, because it enabled the other gods to share,

and its end-in-view was no less than a strengthening of the communal psyche. The protagonist undertook the action for the community, both at the practical and the symbolic level. In Changó, Agne Brown's didactic connection with the world of the ancestors enables this protagonist to operate on the same plane. S/he prepares mentally and physically for her/his disintegration and reassembly within the universal womb of origin, to experience the transitional yet inchoate matrix of death and being. Such a protagonist becomes the unresisting mouthpiece of the gods, uttering sounds that he barely comprehends but which are the reflections of the awesome glimpse of that transitional gulf, the forging place of the dark world-will and psyche. The constant invocation of the African gods, and particularly of Ogún, and the unrestricted paradigm of their freedom to act in liberating the American Muntu is a purposeful exhortation to Agne Brown to make a foray into the psychic abyss of the re-creative energies of the gods. In this essence, Agne Brown transcends the restraining framework of the canonical négritude and espouses the polymorphous essence of creative Ogún.

It is because of the reality of this gulf, this abyss, so crucial to Changó's cosmic ordering, that Ogún becomes a key figure in understanding the novel's metaphysical world. The gulf is what must constantly be diminished or rendered less threateningly remote by sacrifices, rituals, and ceremonies of appeasement to the cosmic powers who guard the gulf.³⁹ Ogún, by incorporating in himself so many seemingly contradictory attributes, represents the closest conception of the original oneness of Orixá-nlá.⁴⁰ The hybrid character of Ogún is also significantly demonstrated in his festival and symbolic sacrifice in Yoruba mythology. In the process of ritual celebration of that deity, the staff of Ogún, represented by long willow poles topped by lumps of ore bound in palm fronds, is borne by men through the town. The

heavy ore at the top and the suppleness of the wood strain the stave in vibrant curves, forcing the men to move about among the revelers, who constantly yield them room as they seek to keep the pole balanced —balancing the pole is everyone’s job, not the pole bearers’ alone.

The dynamic fusion in the willful nature of Ogún, represented in the dance of lumps of ore, is complemented by the peaceful symbolism of the palm in which the ore is bound; the men’s manic leaps up Ogún’s hillside by the beatific recessional of the women who meet them at the foothills and accompany them home with song. Through it all — in the association of the palm frond with the wine of Ogún’s error, yet the symbol of his peaceful nature; the aggressive ore and its restrictive fronds, a ballet-type tension of balance in the men with the leaded poles; in the fusion of image and fertility invocations in the straining phallus-heads framed against the sky and the thudding feet of sweat-covered men on the earth; in the resonant rhythms of Ogún’s iron gongs and the peaceful resolution of the indigo figures and voices of women on the plain — a dynamic marriage unfolds of the aesthetics of ritualism and the moralities of control, balance, and sacrifice, the protagonist spirit and the imperatives of cohesion, diffusing a spiritual tonality that enriches the individual being and the community.

Western thought has always tended to accept myth, lore, and social techniques of imparting knowledge or stabilizing society as evidence of orthodox rigidity. The opposite, an attitude of philosophic accommodation, is constantly revealed in the attributes accorded most African deities, as these gods deny the existence of impurities or “foreign matter, in their digestive system” (Soyinka, *Myth* 54). Indeed, experiences which, until the event, lie outside the tribe’s cognition are absorbed through the god’s agency, converted into yet another piece of social armor in its struggle for existence, and they enter the lore of the

community. This dynamic principle of phagocytose and synthesis creates for society a non-doctrinaire mold of constant awareness, one which escapes the monopolistic orbit of the priesthood and any claims to gnostic secrets by special cults. Interpretation, as it does universally, rests mostly in the hands of such intermediaries, the priests, but rarely with the dogmatic finality of Christianity or Islam. In Changó, this role is epitomized in the polymorphic ancestor Ngafúa, who reinforces, by invocations and mytho-historical recitals, the existing consciousness of cosmic entanglement in the community, and who initiates Agne Brown into the difficult application of such truths to domestic and communal undertakings.

It is my belief that this accommodative nature, which does not, however, contradict or pollute the gods' true essences, is what makes the deity Changó capable of extending his territory of lightning to Nigeria's giant Electrical Power Authority, (NEPA)⁴¹ in the affective consciousness of his followers in Yoruba land and in the black cosmogony in the New World. Ogún, on his part, becomes not merely the god of war but the god of revolution in the most contemporary context, and this is not only in Africa but in the Americas, where his worship has spread. Some critics of Latin American sociopolitical issues stress the irony that the Roman Catholic props of the Batista regime in Cuba, as they discovered when it was too late, should have worried less about Karl Marx than about Ogún, the re-discovered deity of revolution.

In the same thread of ideas on cultural hybridism, in the black Atlantic, for instance, the Brazilian Modernismo is based on Oswald de Andrade's concept of the "bárbaro tecnizado," a materialization of the Andradean theory of "Antropofagia," of which Macunaíma is the highest expression.⁴² In the process of "antropofagia," the "bárbaro tecnizado" appropriates

colonial culture and technology and digests them with the African cultural contribution to Brazil in the cauldron of the Amerindian cultures and civilizations.

In Africa something similar occurs after the independences: instead of the obsolete notion of the emotive “le nègre bon Sauvage” of the Seghorian négritude, Wole Soyinka proposes Ogún as a cultural model. With its hybrid essence and complex nature, the deity penetrates African literature, causing a schism within the African canon. Changó’s social vision supersedes Andrade and Soyinka’s. It posits Agne Brown as a critical, syncretic “bárbaro tecnizado,” as the essence of the African Ogún in a new perspective of black Atlantic criticism of négritude, subverting the Eurocentricity and traditional Africanness of the canon to make it a more representative, creative matrix of alternative, resistant voices emerging from the periphery and the oppressed world.⁴³ As such, Agne Brown is a sum total of virtues incarnated by Dionysus, Apollo, and Prometheus, a cultural, hybrid hero, a combatant protagonist of arts and technology who cannibalizes the appropriate in an alien culture to build her own. Agne Brown is begotten and begets at the same time, and is, in the words of the talking-dead body of Malcolm, in his interview with her from his mortuary casket, “la madre Sosa Illamba recogiendo en su seno la semilla de ciento de millones de Negros asesinados por la Loba Blanca,⁴⁴ ... la hija de Yemayá, madre que no necesitas del engendro del varón para parir heroes y mártires” (508).

Agne Brown epitomizes my critical view on négritude as a literary and cultural canon. My analysis in this chapter comes full circle in the words of the Brazilian critic Haroldo de Campos, who writes in Boletim Bibliográfico:

Paralelo ao Brasil da geléia geral, ou da salada lingüística e cultura planetária, temos a África híbrida de Soyinka, marcada pela tensão entre a busca da africanidade e a inserção em um contexto globalizado. È essa África que se acha representada em Ogum-Dionísio, signo do mau selvagem, devorador de brancos, antropófago, que,

através da transculturação ou transvaloração, torna-se capaz tanto de apropriação como de expropriação, desierarquização, desconstrução. (109)

It is to be understood that Agne Brown, “África” transcultured and transvalued into “Ogum-Dionísio” in the new conditions of black, is to become “devorador de brancos” and “devorador de la Loba Blanca” in the oppressed world, in the liberationist perspective of black Atlantic négritude. The dialogue the protagonist witnesses between Elegba, “el abridor de caminos” and the “difuntos” is a didactic, sententious message which points out the inadequacy of Senghorian négritude in the liberationist struggle of the black. Agne Brown is made to understand from the horse’s mouth:

Difuntos que podéis mirar de cerca las Sombras de los Ancestros, compared vuestros insignificantes actos con las hazañas de nuestros Antepasados y encontraréis justificada la furia de los Orichas. ¡Desde que Changó condenó al Muntu a sufrir el yugo de los extraños en extrañas tierras, hasta hoy, se suman los siglos sin que vuestros puños hayan dado cumplimiento a su mandato de haceros libres! ¡Ya es hora que comprendáis que el tiempo para los vivos no es inagotable! (511)

It is not by coincidence that Changó ends on those vibrant words of Elegba whom Ngafúa implores in the opening epic poem, saying “Dame la palabra viva / que todo lo une / que todo lo mata / que todo lo resucita” (31). The wisdom of the word has been taught to Agne Brown through the novel whose initiating cycle is complete as the protagonist is brought to the reality that négritude, in essence, is the emanation of a multiple world: the world of the gods, the world of the ancestors, the world of the living, and the world of the not-yet-born. As such, négritude movement transcends space and time; it eludes all attempts at definition. Like the word, it remains floating since “live, it unites, it destroys, and it resuscitates” at the same time. In chapter 2, by analyzing myth and its motifs, I will focus attention on the use of the linguistic and philosophical term “word” in its polysemic essence as claimed by Ngafúa from Elegba and Changó.

Notes

¹ André Breton is one of the founders of the surrealist movement. His influence on literary criticism in the West Indies is salient in the works of René Ménéil, whose view on Negro-African literature in French is summarized in Modernism and Négritude (1981) as a synthesis of négritude and Breton's surrealism. Ménéil's view is in consonance with Tropiques, a journal which allows for the diversity of concerns displayed by articles in those effervescent days of négritude. See Belinda Jack's Négritude and Literary Criticism 46-47. See also Octavio Paz's "Order and Accident" in Conjunctions and Disjunctions 133-135.

² Secondary sources include works of theory and criticism, literary histories, essays and articles, and, to a lesser extent, prefaces and introductions to anthologies. Whereas most "autonomous" literatures are marked by national, geographic, linguistic, and racial homogeneity, the literature explored by the secondary texts in négritude emanates from a less stable context and is governed by more problematic characteristics. See "Introduction" in Négritude and Literary Criticism.

³ The Black Atlantic concept is an attempt to show that the experiences of black people were part of the abstract modernity we find so puzzling and to produce as evidence some of the things that black intellectuals had said — sometimes as defenders of the West, sometimes as its harshest critics — about their sense of embeddedness in the modern world. In my work, I use "black Atlantic" in the meaning of intercultural and transnational formation. In this concept, in its critical deployment, for instance, Paul Gilroy shows how different nationalist paradigms for thinking about cultural history fail when confronted by black Atlantic theory. See "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" in The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness 1-40. See also Abiola Irele's "Negritude of Black Cultural Nationalism."

⁴ See Bjornson's introduction to The African Quest for Freedom 11-17.

⁵ Ferreira's quotation of Senghor in Portuguese, "Os colonizados" na opinião de Senghor, "legitimavam a nossa [dos negros] dependência política e económica pela teoria da tábua rasa" (58), connotes an antithetic radicalism of négritude to the racist theories led by Gobineau and Spengler, and which were in vogue in the 1930s.

⁶ See Manuel Ferreira, "Negritude, negrismo, indigenismo" in O Discurso no percurso africano I 64. "O grupo de São Paulo" in Brazil, founded in the early 70s promotes the Cadernos negros, of which at least seven volumes had been published. The group defends négritude and finds in it the dynamic to implement a creative, dialectic, and revolutionary function in art as social criticism.

⁷ See O Discurso no percurso africano 64-65.

⁸ Midiohouan's study as a secondary discourse is a watershed event in négritude literary criticism. The name Midiohouan itself is significant for the new blood it brought to black criticism. In the Fon language of Dahomey (Bénin), known as the Latin Quarter of colonial French Africa, Midiohouan, in one pronunciation, literally means "change your arrow of

combat.” In another pronunciation, it means “you have not renewed your blood.” Therefore, this critic bearing such a name along with his study projects négritude in a postmodern, historiographic perspective.

⁹ Roger Bastide is a French sociologist who writes abundantly on black writers’ works and psychologies. See “De Anchiota a Cruz e Sousa.” in Diário de São Paulo 9 (1946): 9.

¹⁰ Normil G. Sylvain writes about poetry, “Chronique-Programme,” in La Revue Indigène 1 (1927) 9-10: “Intellectual and artistic, economic and commercial life. [sic] The Haitian point of view ... and as the word ‘indigène’ [‘native’] is made into a term of abuse we reclaim it as a title, the native’s point of view. A return to sincerity and the natural, to the living model, to direct description, a perfume more strongly suffused with ‘haïtienneté’ [‘Haitianness’], that’s what seems to characterize our youthful poetry.” Thus the purpose of the review is to endeavor to achieve a faithful and lively picture of the diverse manifestations of contemporary Haitian life and thought.

¹¹ See “Africanness and Blackness” in “The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity” in Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic 3-20.

¹² Glissant mentions rediscovery of an “arrière-pays culturel” in terms of landscapes, tradition, and history in “Note sur une ‘poésie nationale’ chez les peuples noirs,” in Les Lettres Nouvelles 30-34.

¹³ For a succinct view on indigénisme and indigenismo, see “Indigenismo and Indian Movements in Twentieth-Century Ecuador” by Marc Becker. See also the Chapter on “Negritude, negrismo, indigenismo” in Ferreira’s O Discurso no percurso africano I.

¹⁴ For a critical look at negrismo, see subtitle “Fictionalized History, Historical Fiction in El reino de este mundo” in essay “Dissembling History: Postmodern Irony as Narrative.” (Postmodern Tales of Slavery in the Americas 59-69). See also Nicolás Guillén in An Introduction to selected Afro-Latino Writers by Margaret Lindsay Morris. The Afro-Cuban Guillén, born in 1902, was the first person of color to write Afro-Cuban literature that was accepted on a wide scale. He was a tremendously gifted poet and looked with unclouded eyes at all black traditions. Guillén’s work covers a wide spectrum — from black folklore, to music, to dance, to popular scenes, to tragedy, to suffering, to happiness, to myth and finally to racial conflict. He paints the life of black Cubans with an enormously rich poetic language that has a music quality. Guillén invented the “son,” a poetic form based on the popular Afro-Cuban music, and he used it as a social protest vehicle for criticizing the way blacks were forced to live due to a lack of education.

¹⁵ The approach adopted by Janheinz Jahn’s book Muntu (first published in 1958), differs fundamentally from the other major studies of Negro-African literature of the period. Although he recognizes the politically committed “element” in Negro-African narrative (and poetry in particular), Muntu focuses on the conceptual aspects of African philosophy which, expressed within African poetry and prose, define the literature’s specificity. The essential concepts that Jahn isolates are muntu, ntu, and nommo. For the development of these

concepts, see “Seminal Studies: Historiography and Criticism” in Belinda Jack’s Negritude and Literary Criticism 109-13.

¹⁶ Relevant to Jahn’s view on “langue” is this quotation from Les soleils des indépendances by Kourouma in the introduction of this dissertation: “Rien en soi n’est bon, rien n’est mauvais. C’est la parole qui transfigure un fait en bien ou le tourne en mal” (109).

¹⁷ I use the term “historiographic intertextuality” expanding the “historiographic metafiction” developed by Linda Hutcheon in her acclaimed A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (1988). Hutcheon reminds us that before the rise of scientific history in the 19th century, literature and history were considered branches from the same tree of learning for the purpose of interpreting experience until the two disciplines began to be viewed as mutually exclusive. Postmodern theory seeks to challenge this idea of exclusivity. In assessing the commonalities between literature and history, Hutcheon discloses what she sees as the implied teachings of “historiographic metafiction,” which I designate in my work as “historiographic intertextuality.” Hutcheon concludes: “They (history and literature) have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality” (105). For Hutcheon, literature does not escape interfacing with history; rather, the two complement each other.

¹⁸ See Preface to The Black Atlantic 9.

¹⁹ For a critical development on Black Atlantic concept, see Preface to The Black Atlantic 9.

²⁰ This quoted phrase is from Soyinka’s The Road, London and Ibadan 1965, in the preface “For the Producer.” Cf. Soyinka, Myth, literature, where the author speaks of “the withdrawal of the individual into an inner world from which he returns, communicating a new strength for action,” as a characteristic of poetry and dancing within the framework of “the mimetic rite” (42). Soyinka also uses “the movement of transition” in Myth, literature. To what extent does this movement give cause for an optimistic view of the future? It is hardly possible to give a simple answer to this question. What is obvious is that Soyinka’s divinities do not fulfill a traditional *deus ex machina* function, in the sense that every problem is immediately solved as soon as they appear on the stage. Most of the villagers of the play The Dance of the Forests are not even aware of the presence of the gods, and it stands to reason that you cannot be affected by what you are not conscious of. However, the message of this play cannot be said to be one of hopeless pessimism, for the protagonist, Rola, who is no longer Madame Tortoise, is reformed, and some of her lines, as well the role she played in the creation of “Demoke’s totem,” could be seen as indications that she should be regarded as a typical representative of her society, perhaps even of the whole of mankind, particularly its less attractive aspects. If Rola can be reformed, there is hope of a better future for mankind. However, there are no guarantees. The same psychological mood prevails in Changó.

²¹ See Meltzer's analysis on "dynamic unconscious" and "presence of unconscious activity" in "unconscious" in Critical Terms for Literary Studies 147-51.

²² See "Movement of Transition" in Soyinka's Myth.

²³ For more on the gatekeeper Elegba, see "A Myth of Origins: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey," in Gates' The Signifying Monkey (23-27).

²⁴ See more about these gods in A Writer and His Gods by Stephan Larsen. See also "Cuaderno de Bitácora" Changó (512-28).

²⁵ See "The Yoruba Religion in Latin America" in "The Myths — A Brief Introduction to Yoruba Gods."

²⁶ See W. J. T. Mitchell's "Representation" in Critical Terms for Literary Study 15-16.

²⁷ See "Myth de la terre, du monde souterrain" in Divinités chtoniennes: Littérature et anthropologie by Van Delft 153-58. In Changó, the couple Ancestor Ngafúa/AgneBrown symbolize intimacy between the world of the dead and the world of the living. The two worlds flow one into the other in search of complementarity. See also *Tantrismo* in "Evae y Prajnaparamita." Conjunciones y Disyunciones 62-87.

²⁸ See "The Road" in A Writer and His Gods 64-76.

²⁹ See Claude Lévi-Strauss's view on social structure in the cosmic and human worlds in "The Structural Study of Myth" in Mcquillan's The Narrative Reader 75-80.

³⁰ In C. G. Jung and Kerenji.

³¹ My use of Mythopoeia, following Soyinka in Myth.

³² Detailed explanation in "A Myth of Origins: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey" in The Signifying Monkey 7-8.

³³ See Achebe's Arrow of God (1969). See also Soyinka's "Ideology and Social Vision (I): The Religious Factor." in Myth 87-96. For Protestantism the gap was unbridgeable, and the result was the extermination of American Indians or their incarceration on 'reservations.'"

³⁴ See the use of the expression in "Changó, el gran putas: A Postmodern Historiographic Metafictional Text by Tillis.

³⁵ Quechua/Quíchua: In ethnography, indigenous people who inhabited a vast region of South America which included the north of Argentina, Bolivia, Equator, and Peru. The ancient language of the Inca Empire, it is still spoken today in those countries. José-María Arguedas undertook to revitalize culture in his native Peru by blending Quechua and Spanish linguistic patrimonies for his national purpose, cultural hybridism.

³⁶ See José María Arguedas in the introduction to Ortiz's Contrapunteo cubano 36-40. Jurgen Golte, a German anthropologist specializing in Andean studies, commented on Arguedas in "Latin America: The Anthropology of Conquest" in Anthropology: Ancestors and Heirs (1980): "Arguedas learned anthropology in order to put his knowledge at the service of the Quechua peoples but failed to reach his goal. For him anthropology was not suitable for expressing and appreciating the Quechua world view. Poetry and the novel proved more valuable to him, but even with these he lost hope as the Quechua tradition and experience were being rapidly annihilated. He committed suicide in January 1970" (386-87).

³⁷ "Imitar desde aquí a alguien resulta algo escandaloso" In Arguedas's Formación de una cultura nacional indoamericana (1977) 298.

³⁸ See more development on the Chthonic Realm in "Morality and Aesthetics in the Ritual Archetype" in Myth 1-4.

³⁹ See the mytho-sociological function of Elegba in H. L. Gates, Jr.'s The Signifying Monkey "A Myth of Origins" (3-10). Zapata Olivella writes in "Cuaderno de Bitácora" in Changó: "Elegba, Legba, Elegúa, Exú: (El Poderoso). Disitntos nombres para denominar al Oricha intermediario entre los difuntos y los vivos. Es imprescindible su invocación y presencia para que desciendan las demás deidades. Sin su ayuda ningún difunto encuentra el camino que conduce hacia la Morada de los Ancestros" (517).

⁴⁰ See more on deity Obatalá or Orixá-nlá in Larsen's A Writer and His Gods 21-27.

⁴¹ The acronym stands for Nigeria Electricity Power Authority. In front of NEPA's headquarters skyscraper in Lagos stands a huge statue of Ogún carrying an axe on his left shoulder, a symbol of action, creativity, technology, and power. This connotes a deep penetration of Ogún's myth in Yoruba socio-economic, and political structure even in today's Nigeria.

⁴² An important aspect of the Brazilian Modernismo championed by Oswald de Andrade, "La propuesta antropofágica tiene una vocación dionisiaca; la actitud de devoración frente a los valores europeos; y la manifestación de un lirismo telúrico, hundido en un inconsciente individual y colectivo, del cual Macunaíma sería su más alta expresión" (Andrade 223-24).

⁴³ Edward Said uses the term *reinscription* in Culture and Imperialism as part of a spatial metaphor of "overlapping territories" in which the resistant culture must "recover forms already established ... by the culture of empire." But, as Said sees it, this process is not necessarily tragic (Culture and Imperialism 210, 216). See also *resistance* and *dissidence* in the introduction of Eleni Coundouriotis' Claiming History: Colonialism, Ethnography, and the Novel.

⁴⁴ See the comment in Zoggyie's In Search of the fathers 94 on quotations from Changó: The alien land is identified as "América / la tierra del martirio // America / land of suffering" and home of "las Lobas Blancas / the White Wolves," who are depicted as "mercaderes de los hombres / traders in men" and "violadoras de mujeres/ rapers of women" (24). These white wolves, the infuriated Changó repeats, will destroy the ethnic identity, the gods, and the languages of his traitorous ex-vassals.

These are the whites who participated in and/or actively supported the transatlantic slave trade. As Zapata himself says in “Los Ancestros combatientes: Una saga afro-americana,” he used the term to distinguish this group of whites from “todos aquellos de sangre caucásica que superando los prejuicios de la raza se alían al africano en su lucha por liberarse” ”all those of Caucasian blood who overcame racial prejudice and allied themselves with the African in his struggle for freedom” (55).

CHAPTER II

CHANGÓ AS DISSIDENCE FROM ARCHETYPES AND CREATIVITY

This chapter centers on one of the fundamental building blocks of literature, myth, and applies postcolonial theory to examine the thematic and aesthetic of Changó, a quintessential demonstration of Zapata Olivella's working out of myth and archetype beyond their traditional dimensions. This author reworks archetype from the inside out in order to reinscribe historical discourse¹ on black identity in the Americas. A central issue throughout his works is the social, liberating function of literature, and Changó provides ample testimony for this. In fact, literature's social dimension, for Zapata Olivella — in consonance with Northrop Frye's ideas on art in Myth and Metaphor — is focused on community, which is art's ultimate dimension. Literature gives us the freedom to see and understand the world. It creates visions of what life can become when freed from the superego, and it therefore provides models for social change. The Freudian superego is the antipode of the id, the instinctual pole of the personality that it seeks to repress. In my dissertation, superego equates with repression of artistic creativity aimed at social transformation.² To achieve this goal, literature, properly speaking, can be said to come into existence at the moment a text with a vision is imposed upon archetype.

The fundamental liaison between experience and form has never been severed in literary texts, no matter how tautly stretched. But the reflection of experience is only one of literature's functions: when that experience is social, we move into areas of ideological projection and social vision.³ It is this latter form of literature that holds the most promise for

strengthening the bond between experience and medium, since it prevents the entrenchment of the habitual, the sclerosis of the imaginative function by that past or present reality upon which it reflects. However, the practical effects of the claims of literary ideology on the creative process can lead to predictability, imaginative constraint, and thematic excisions, as Soyinka remarks in “Ideology and Social Vision” in Myth, Literature, and the African World.

Much fiction by black writers is still rooted in the concept of literature as part of the normal social activity of human beings,⁴ but one which is nonetheless individual in its expression and its choice of areas of concern. Such writing is always socially significant, for it gives clues to mental conditioning by previous history or colonial culture, as demonstrated by the Senghorian négritude; or, conversely, it shows the will to break free from such incubi as myths, archetypes, and official history in its projection of a future society. The literature which devotes itself to this dissident exegetic endeavor⁵ is a revelation both of the writer’s individual sensibility — consciousness, persona, personality — of the traditional and colonial background of his/her collective unconscious.⁶

In my analysis, I resort to postcolonial theory in the Afrocentric perspective of Eleni Coundouriotis in Claiming History, where she sees postcoloniality as “a space of becoming into which one has no access other than by transgressing beyond the boundaries of a Manichean discussion divided between native and Westerner” (18). Postcolonial critics deconstruct Western discourse as it has been exercised since Europe assumed dominance of the world’s civilization. They do this by subverting the Europe’s claims to sole legitimacy and by proposing a contrapuntal discourse that presents itself as equally legitimate and thus a valid alternative way of looking at reality.

In addition to Wole Soyinka, Frantz Fanon, and Abiola Irele, I rely on theorists such as

Abdul JanMohammed for his views on Manichaeism and Homi Bhabha for his thoughts on culture, to mention but a few of the postcolonial critics who inspire the development of my work. Northrop Frye's reflections on myth and Lévi-Strauss's structural study of myth are instrumental for my analysis of *Changó*, which, by virtue of its thematic, artistic, and Afrocentric presentation, is the very embodiment of an old literary project stretched to new heights.

Changó is, par excellence, a work of social significance, because it is social and visionary, since Zapata Olivella's imagery is far more preoccupied with a visionary projection of society than with speculative perspectives of literature, or of any medium of expression. If we accept Trotsky's view⁷ that literature written in a situation of revolutionary confrontation cannot but be imbued with the spirit of social hatred, it is then logical to expect that literature which sets out to depict the realities of such a situation must reflect that social hatred in the components of the resolution. Writing directed at the product of a social matrix should expect to remain within it, not as a mere, extraneous interference, but as an organic outgrowth of the communal issue at hand, and resolve the conflicts which belong to that milieu by the logical interactions of its components. And this is Zapata Olivella's exegetic strategy in *Changó*, a virtual universe of creativity where this author's imagination runs completely free to expose the historical sources of the cultural estrangement of being black in the Americas. Here, Trotsky's view is relevant again, as he maintains that we cannot tear out of the future what can only develop as an inseparable, historical part of it. In Changó, Zapata Olivella appears to proceed along Trotsky's lines on history, and his novel is a discourse on the social history of blacks in the Americas. Changó assumes a circular, diachronic look into the liberationist struggle of an embattled group of people.⁸

Changó thematically and artistically confronts the crucial problems that have historically contributed to the sociocultural estrangement of the enslaved black in the Americas. The novel is a thematic and aesthetic endeavor to address the salient issue of identity by innovating ways which break with the established positions that are characteristic of the debates around it. Relentlessly, Changó points out the complex nature of Latin American society, given its varied ethnic composition and long history of miscegenation. Below, I will examine how Changó challenges myth, archetype and history and creates an alternative négritude counternarrative space in Western aesthetics.

Myth, History, and Archetypes in Changó

A fantasy completely discontinuous with its social context would be impossible to write: no author's mind is capable of getting so detached from its social milieu. Even the writings of psychotic or similarly disturbed people are still bound to their surroundings, however off-course their interpretations of facts. Narrative literature, a reflection of the conscious and unconscious experience (the Freudian id, or Jung's collective unconscious) of the artist, is the center of gravity of myth and descends directly from it in its more customary sense of a story about a god which is frequently employed in connection with ritual.⁹ Being a story, myth is always potentially literary, and very soon becomes so, or has close relatives that do so. At the center is a body of "serious" stories: they may be asserted to have really happened, but what is important about them is that they are stories which are particularly urgent for the community to know, as Socrates and Glaucon, two Plato's fictional spokesmen suggest in The Republic through their conversation the "useful falsehood" that human beings like the metals gold, silver, and bronze possess different natures that fit each of them to a particular

function within the operation of the society as a whole, basis of the concept of the “Myth of the Metals” in Republic V¹⁰ where Plato develops his philosophy on ethics and theory of the state. These stories tell us about the recognized gods, the legendary history, the origins of law, class structure, kinship formations, and natural features. They do not as a rule, differ in structure from other stories that are told simply for entertainment, but they have a different social function.

The less serious stories become folktales, traveling over the world through all barriers of language and culture, interchanging their motifs and themes with other stories. Their literary life is at first nomadic, and only later, often not until the rise of writing, do they become absorbed into the general body of written literature. The more serious stories, on the other hand, become the cultural possession of a specific society: they form the verbal nucleus of a shared tradition. The stories of the Bible had this distinctively mythical status for Christian Europe down to the eighteenth century or so; the stories of Homer had it for Greek and much Roman culture.¹¹

Myth is commonly the immediate point of departure when one is speaking of belief. Myth stems from an entire system of beliefs — a system that forms the whole that is mythology. The term “myth” means any of the immemorial patterns of response to the human situation in its most permanent aspects: death, love, the biological family, the relationship with the Unknown, whether those patterns be considered by scholars to reside in the Jungian Collective Unconscious or the Platonic world of ideas. The archetypal belongs to the meta-personal, to what Freudians call id; that is, it belongs to the community at its deepest, pre-conscious levels of acceptance. So myth feeds the archetypal, and human history provides myth with its substance. Barthes writes on myth and history in

Mythologies: “It is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language, ancient or not. Mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things” (110). Speech of this kind is a message. It is therefore by no means confined to oral speech. It can consist of modes of writing or representations, not just written discourse.

Myth and archetype join together in the author’s signature, which Burrows, Shawcross, and Lapidès define in Myths and Motifs as “the sum total of individuating factors in a work, the sign of the Persona or Personality through which an archetype is rendered, and which itself tends to become a subject as well as a means of the poem” (28). Archetype is not static, fixed. Thus literature, properly speaking, comes into existence only at the moment a signature is imposed upon archetype. The purely archetypal, without signature elements, is the myth.

It might be too early, though, to posit Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (1532) as a historical, dialogic turn in narrative writing.¹² As an early contrapuntal discourse in traditional literary production, this work corroborates the views exposed in Myths and Motifs on myth and archetype, by emphasizing the importance of the author’s name with more focus on the material, the down-to-earth problems of humanity. Along the same thread of subversive ideas, as Calvino puts it in The Use of Literature, Barthes tends to think of literature as “the awareness that language has of being language, of having a density of its own, and its own independent existence. For literature, language is never transparent, and is never merely an instrument to convey a ‘meaning’ or a ‘fact’ or a ‘thought’ or a ‘truth’; that is, language cannot mean anything but itself” (28-29). Thus literature knows that language is never naïve

that in writing one cannot say anything extraneous to writing, or express any truth that is not a truth having to do with the art of writing.

Consonant with Barthes' view, it is my contention that archetype is just a floating form which is expressed into significance through the sign of the author's persona or personality, and it "tends to become a subject as well as a means of the poem." The verb "tends" reinforces the floating nature of archetype, as does the use of the indefinite article in the phrase "*a* subject as well as *a* means of the poem." It is not "*the* subject," it is not "*the* means," as "subject" and "means" are not definitive. The indefinite article hints that archetype is protean, flexible, and polysemic in nature. It can espouse any forms that social conjunctures dictate to myth on which it feeds, and vice versa.

Following Barthes and Burrows, Shawcross, and Lapides, my work has a double theoretical objective: on the one hand, an ideological critique bearing on the language cultivated by myth; on the other, a first attempt to dissect semiologically the mechanics of this language and how these apply to Changó. I am convinced after Saussure that by treating "collective representations" (Mythologies 9) as sign-systems, one might hope to go further than the formal game of unmasking them and account in detail for the mystification which transforms an established Western culture into a universal nature.

In light of this theoretical account, we can identify a structural dynamic in the interrelation of myth and archetype with signature or the author's name in most of Zapata Olivella's fiction, particularly in Changó. However, though Changó may appear to owe allegiance to some worldview, or to a traditional, mythical, and archetypal formulation, such as the liberationist impulse incarnated by the myth of Changó and fiction writing drawn from the Iberian epic tradition, the novel seems to be a culturally independent or isolated phenomenon

in Spanish-American letters, relativizing the very broad association with global myths that psychoanalysis and anthropology have developed on productions of art.

In Changó, in its creative impulse, signature or the author's creativity unshackles the writer's visionary ego, the socially motivated impulse of his inner self, itself completely freed from all imaginative boundaries. In the process of the fictional creation, the vision of ego reduces myth and archetype to their common denominator — dogmatism and repression of imagination; it subdues them by imposing on them new metaphors and cultural idioms which express Changó into existence as a result of a historical and cultural transvaluation of values. The novel's particular Afrocentric style ascribes to signature a Promethean, protean creative power that not only breaks the die-casting of myth and archetype on imagery and imagination, but also stretches them to a field of aesthetic never attained before in Spanish-American writing. Through the process of transvaluation of values, Zapata Olivella enriches myth and archetype in an innovative, idiosyncratic way. The Afro-Colombian author's imagery is at its best in Changó. The free-flowing verve of imagination, metaphors, and idioms weaving historical events, sociological, and anthropological "realities" of a world brought together by history — the New World — is, par excellence, the illustration of the unlimited human capacity to create when given free rein to delve into the virtual universe of ideas.

The problem criticism should underscore in this eclectic text, Changó, is the absurdity of the Manichean mold in which myth, history, and archetype tend to cast all work of imagination and creativity. Myth, by nature, fabricates circumstantial truths at an initial stage, then perpetuates them in the archetype and reshuffles the same truths in response to the demand of the archetype under pressure from the evolving collective unconscious, which

dictates an urgent need to re-adapt. Myth and archetype, therefore, are in a ceaseless dialectical interrelation. Myth is not static, and neither is archetype stagnant. Signature, or the writer's ego, is subject to change and to evolution. In this process, a work of art may not be interpreted as a result of an influence but should be seen as a confluence of dynamic entities, thus expanding beyond a Manichean perception of things. Changó belongs to this type of dialogic projection of art, which subverts the univocal, linear concept of classical creativity. Zapata Olivella dissents from Hegelian historiography¹³ and from the Socratic Myth of the Metals¹⁴ two mythical and archetypal speculations of the history of philosophy on social structure and order based on birth and class discrimination that are crucial to Western thought and to its conception of the other.

I contend that Changó, as a contrapuntal, dialogic rewriting of the history of black in Western archetypes, denounces the ideological function of official history imbued with Hegelian historiography and the Socratic myth, whose "first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory, destroy its books, its culture, its history, and then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. In so doing, before long, official history will have the nation to begin to forget what it is and what it was, and will have the world around it forget even faster" (Kundera, The Book of Laughter and Forgetting 159). The theoretical framework set by Milan Kundera (and by George Orwell in Nineteen Eighty-Four) against Hegel for his view on history, on the one hand, and against Socrates, whose myth backs the tendency to value people in accordance with their past and predetermined place in life and society, on the other hand, will be brought to bear on the dissident character of Changó.

Changó in the Archetypes of Dissidence

According to Captain-Hidalgo, talk of global literature in today's scholarship too often means affinity with the European and the United States' works of art. Such global dialogues cry out for enrichment through ties with other regions of the world. In this respect, an evaluation of Zapata Olivella's globality as a writer must be achieved through several types of discourse. Among them are the exploration of postcolonial, neocolonial discourse, African Diaspora reflections and their obvious affinities to European and American thought. Ultimately, however, the critic must take into account this writer's uniqueness. In Spanish-American fiction, for instance, we recognize myth as an organizing principle in the works of artists like Asturias, Carpentier, Fuentes, García Márquez, or Rulfo. However, the signature Zapata Olivella imposes on Afro-Hispano-American literature adds new dimensions to fiction writing in the West: it is diegetic dissidence, new literary narrative text writing within the Latin American canon and archetypes.

In my work, I approach Changó with the contention that dissidence and resistance are not exclusive or parallel paradigms but complementary diegetic patterns in Zapata Olivella's literary practice. In Coundouriotis's view, resistance, which has been a dominant pattern in postcolonial studies, often provides a useful entry into the history of texts. However, resistance has been theorized mostly in terms of the opposition between the European and the other. Said's work in Culture and Imperialism especially goes a long way in this direction. "Dissidence," on the other hand, "proclaims difference from within. It subverts from within. It orients our attention toward the internal dynamics of a community where it is most difficult to look" (Coundouriotis, Claiming History 20). The idea of internal dynamics of community exposed by Coundouriotis in her concept of dissidence is corroborated by Barthes's critical

work Mythologies on the energetic, hidden, social intent of myth and archetype, which, vicariously and authoritatively, try to feed and justify petrified social structure, language, and status quo. Changó contrapuntally combines resistance and dissidence paradigms to expose the black-subjugating mechanism of the myth and archetypes of social praxis in the Americas.

On the same creative trajectory, the sense of realism in Zapata Olivella's imagery is innovative and subverts Western archetypes as well. In part II of Culture of Fiction in the Works of Manuel Zapata Olivella, Captain-Hidalgo deals with the subject of "realism." She defines realism as "writing that acknowledges its ultimate grounding in the referential as opposed to the non empirical and the abstract" (43). But an inquiry into Captain-Hidalgo's chapter, "Social Realism till the Bitter End?" is far from a search for a literature that is "real" or even "realistic." Such declarations would seem inoffensive enough were it not for an insistent tradition in literary theory that sees a work solely as its own referent. Her study opposes such an assertion, particularly its representation in extant strains of New Criticism.¹⁵ Despite Zapata Olivella's focus on the downtrodden, the reader is treated to individual portraits of some of the characters in Changó. The carefully drawn depictions contribute to a sense of their humanization. Such a characterization is too often lacking in many authors' treatment of the poor in their works, but it is one of the strengths of Zapata Olivella's entire literary trajectory.

A second approach to realism reveals that "limited realism" (Captain-Hidalgo, Culture of Fiction 77-94) is evident in Zapata Olivella's literature. Defined as non-social realism, unlike the social realist texts, there is no prevailing structure into which we can mold the works of limited realism. Changó belongs to that category of texts by its dissenting pattern,

as I showed above. Literature of “limited realism” houses the majority of Zapata Olivella’s more stylistically innovative fiction. Despite the diversity of his narrative styles, the general typology of his texts is based on decentering, displacing, subverting, and fictionalizing historical accounts, creating a complex textuality of certain chronological events: those of Africans in the Americas. One finds in Zapata Olivella’s works a movement away from a focus on the thematic.

Along this thread of ideas, we agree with Eagleton that literature is a peculiar mode of linguistic organization which, by a particular disturbance of conventional modes of signification, so foregrounds certain modes of sense-making as to allow us to perceive the ideology to which they adhere. This makes the textual universe of Changó a theater which doubles, prolongs, compacts, and variegates its signs, shaking them free from single determinants, merging and eliding them with freedom, in order to draw the reader into a deeper, experiential entry into the space thereby created. Changó is not a text with an excessive parade of devices, or a text which bears a form of natural, innocent, seemingly transparent writing. Because its unreality permits a more-than-natural flexing and compacting of senses, we apprehend this novel for the versions of historical reality it offers, with dynamic, non-universal values. This view of the text as an energetic, dialogic universe of ideas is, for instance, corroborated by the analysis that Celso Cunha and Lindley Cintra make on “linguagem, língua, discurso, estilo” in Nova Gramática do Português Contemporâneo: “a partir da nova concepção da língua como diassistema, tornou-se possível o esclarecimento de numerosos casos de polimorfismo, de pluralidade de normas e de toda a inter-relação dos factores geográficos, históricos, sociais, psicológicos que actuam no complexo operar de uma língua e orientam a sua deriva” (3). This linguistic conclusion

allows us to affirm that expression (language) does not exist before ideas (thought) and that the interrelation between language and thought is a dynamic, dialectic one. Expression feeds on idea and thought lives on language. They are commensurate with each other.

In the “limited realism” paradigm of literary texts, plots do not always terminate at the end of the narrative but remain open-ended. Indeed, relative to Zapata Olivella’s novelistic structure, Captain-Hidalgo considers Changó “a plotless ‘tale’ that through a type of extended, narrative iteration manages to repeat in an engaging fashion the attempts of a people to win freedom” (154). Because of the plurality, complexity, and multifarious nature of the mechanism of the oppression and enslavement of black in the Americas, as well as the multidimensional character of the liberation strategies adopted by this group of oppressed people, however, Changó’s plot, in my estimation, centers on the ever-continuing yet repetitive struggle of diasporic Africans to achieve freedom from racial suffering. Such a novel is dialogic par excellence, and many plots are woven together in the same discursive universe. It is almost impossible to trace one plot to a definitive end. The thematic organic to the plots is polysemic because of the complexity and plurality of its nature. Captain-Hidalgo’s assessment seems to suggest that Zapata Olivella employs an aesthetic of extended, repetitious narration that has no relevance to Changó’s totality. This critique makes interesting contrasts between Zapata Olivella’s work and other texts of eighteenth century writers of the African American literary trajectory in the United States, such as Phyllis Wheatley and Jupiter Hammon, who explored the trope of Africanity in literature. However, though the works of those black writers might have touched on certain aspects of African thematic in the New World aesthetic, their literary paradigm was totally circumscribed by Western archetypes and canon. Zapata Olivella’s novelistic structure

purposefully deterritorizes and reterritorizes the Judeo-Christian canon. I contend that the technique of repetition is yet another example of this author's mastery of fiction writing. This Zapata Olivellian literary aesthetic, in the spirit of postmodernism, decenters the narrative structure of Changó and Africanizes its novelistic style.

While Captain-Hidalgo suggests limited realism as a strategic juxtaposition to the social realism in her study, this by no means argues for an absolute contrast with the seemingly realist moment of Zapata Olivella's initial writing within realism, a literary movement in vogue in Latin America in the 1950s. Not all elements of social realism find a precise opposite in limited realism, for there is continuity in the writer's work that acknowledges a mutual origin of text. The continuation of a group character, the downtrodden people altogether, as opposed to an individual one, and a general sense of social justice are perhaps the most salient of these constants in his discourse paradigm. The overall sense of grounding in social reality is, naturally, the binding force of these constants.

Furthermore, Changó explores various domains of human experience. Based on my argument on myth, archetype, and signature, analysis of a fictional creation being a focus on an inexhaustible, open-ended universe of ideas, it should also be noticed that archetypal criticism is delivered from the bondage of time, speaking of confluences rather than influences, and finding the explication of a given work in things written later as well as earlier than the "original piece." Such is the case with socio-artistic developments surrounding the deity Changó and other Yoruba gods of West Africa, which receive enriching inputs from texts written on Yoruba culture in Brazil, Cuba, and vice versa.

Certainly, contemplation of the archetype pushes the critic beyond semantics, and beyond the kind of analysis that considers it has done all when it assures us that the parts and whole

of a text cohere. Critic in pursuit of archetype find themselves involved, for instance, in anthropology, sociology, history, and psychology, because they provide useful tools to better explore and understand the human experiences spoken into a discourse; and they discover that they have come upon a way of binding together a fractured world, of uniting literature and nonliterature without reducing the text into a definite, closed universe of thought.

In so doing, Zapata Olivella certainly endured being an outcast from the mainstream of Spanish-American literature, but he did not and will not suffer the ritual dismemberment of Orpheus ripped by the Maenads when he had withdrawn for lonely contemplation to develop creativity, persona, or personality beyond the collective unconscious. This ancient myth of Orpheus suggests that a sacrifice is involved as well as a punishment — the casting out and rending of the poet being reinterpreted as death suffered for the group, by one who has dared to make the first forays out of collectivity toward personality and has endured the consequent revenge of the group as devotees of the unconscious.

In the mask of his life and the manifold masks of his work, the writer expresses for a whole society the ritual meaning of its inarticulate selves; the artist goes forth not to re-create the conscience of his race, but to redeem its unconscious. Zapata Olivella's creative focus is to redeem the collective unconscious of the Americas, especially the United States, whose preponderant role in the emancipation of blacks and all oppressed people he stresses in Agne Brown and her intellectual, socio-visionary interactions with the American Church and intelligentsia. It is impossible to get back into the primal Garden of the initial, biblical paradise archetypes, but, to paraphrase Fiedler in "Archetype and Signature" in Myths and Motifs in Literature, we can yield ourselves to the dreams and images that mean paradise regained. Changó aims to regain that paradise for the suffering people of the world.

Structural Anthropology and the Myth of Changó

My method aims to eliminate obstacles in some mythological analysis of Changó, namely, the notion of the quest for the “true” version, or the “earlier” version of truth. On the contrary, I see myth as consisting of all its versions: myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such by the community. An important consequence is that, if myth is made up of all its variants, its structural analysis should take all of them into account. The reason for the discouraging results in works on general mythology is that comparative mythologists have selected preferred versions of myth instead of using them all. Also, when several variants of the same myth are used for the same tribe, the frame of reference becomes multi-dimensional, and as soon as the comparison is enlarged, the number of dimensions required increases until it appears quite impossible to handle all of them objectively. The confusions and platitudes which are the outcome of comparative mythology can be explained by the fact that multifaceted frames of reference are often ignored or are naïvely replaced by two- or three-dimensional ones: indeed, progress in comparative mythology will depend on the cooperation of cultural and literary anthropologists like José María Arguedas and Zapata Olivella, for instance, who would undertake to express in symbols multifaceted relations in myth which cannot be handled otherwise.

The question has been raised why myth and oral literature more generally, are so much addicted to duplication, triplication, or even quadruplication of the same sequence. Indeed, the function of repetition is to render the structure of myth apparent, a “slated” structure which comes to the surface through repetition (Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology 219).

However, the slates are not absolutely identical. And since the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction of truth, a theoretically

infinite number of slates will be generated, each one slightly different from the others. Thus, as I mentioned earlier, myth grows spirally until the intellectual impulse which has produced it is exhausted. Its “growth” is a continuous process, whereas its “structure” remains discontinuous.

Many who attempt to explain alleged differences between the so-called primitive mind and scientific thought have resorted to qualitative differences between the working processes of the mind in both cases, while assuming that the entities which they were studying remained very much the same. Structural analysis leads to a completely different view, namely, that the logic of mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and that the difference lies, not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied. This is well in agreement with the situation that prevails in the field of technology: “What makes a steel ax superior to a stone ax is not that the first one is better made than the second one. They are equally well made, but steel is quite different from stone” (Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology 230). In the same way, similar logical processes operate in myth as in science; man has always been thinking equally well. The improvement lies, not necessarily in an alleged progress of man’s mind, but in the discovery of new areas to which it may apply its “unchanged” and “unchanging” powers. According to that logic, what makes a Eurocentric narrative superior to an Afrocentric narrative is not that the former is better written than the latter. They are equally well written, but a Eurocentric narrative-matrix is quite different from an Afrocentric one.

Although experience contradicts social theory, communal life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. The social life of the African gods spearheaded by Changó is the one Zapata Olivella is projecting on today’s Africa and the Diaspora. This projection

foregrounds the symptoms of the malaise of black people in the Americas, and the solution appears to be incarnated in the deity Changó.

With Changó, Zapata Olivella departs from his peers Arguedas, Asturias, Carpentier, and Rulfo in that, for the first time in Spanish-American writing, the African cultural element is successfully incorporated on its own terms as Spanish-American. This claim of uniqueness is further affirmed by the fact that Changó is profoundly Afrocentric while at the same time it is thoroughly a New World phenomenon.¹⁶ Even though it is outside of direct European influence it simultaneously expands the notion of Western culture. Changó represents an intriguing challenge to its critic precisely because, in part, it belongs to all of the categories mentioned above without contradiction.

The most immediately compelling point of departure for the analysis of Changó is the deity who lends his name to the title of the novel. Furthermore, the text shows that the speaker's worldview is rooted in African cosmogony. All of the characters who make up the Changó figure are of African descent, and their struggle is waged against la Loba Blanca.¹⁷ A study of concrete African elements in the novel leads the reader to the more specific culture of the Yoruba. Zapata Olivella's very selection of the Yoruba deity Changó as the narrative axis offers some key investigative material for the aesthetic remaking of the world according to the artist. Changó is not only a true mythic figure of Yoruba culture, he springs from history as well.

As far as mythic semiotic is concerned, Changó is anthropomorphic in origin. But in attempting to enter into the matrix of a society's conceptions of becoming and affirming self-identity, this deity stands for Yoruba racial or social origination, according to Soyinka in Myth, Literature and the African World View. The deity's mytho-symbolic function

transferred to the Americas, the leitmotif of Changó, finds its expression in “Changó’s tragic rites as a deadly conflict on the human and historic plane, charged nonetheless with the passion and terror of superhuman, uncontrollable forces” (8). Deity Changó is the representation of historical injustice suffered by a group of people who must fight back resolutely to regain their freedom.

The story goes that a crime of injustice against a disguised deity is committed within the kingdom of the legendary fourth king of Oyo, Changó, but without his knowledge, bringing about dearth, famine, and plague. When he at last discovers the identity of the long-suffering god, Oxalá¹⁸ king Changó flies into rage and challenges Olodumarè, the Supreme Deity, in the following words:¹⁹

Blow, winds, and efface the memory of this crime! Swell seas, and wash my kingdom clean of this guilt! And you, lord of destiny, how can I respect you from now on? You wrote my life in the eternal books. You are to blame for it! Thunders that I control explode with all your might! Attack the heavens! I want to fight with Olodumarè. I challenge that power which made me cover myself with so much shame! More! More! Set fire to the skies!²⁰

In this passionate and fiery message to Olodumarè deity Changó’s language emphasizes social justice, attacking the imbalance between social justice and authority, and rebelling against the Supreme Power to liberate self from bondage. Changó brings Olodumarè’s authority down to earth and even subverts the cosmic power of the Supreme Deity, “the Owner of Heaven.”²¹ Now Changó stands in Olodumarè’s stead and assumes the power which is the prerogative of the Owner of Heaven as he speaks of “thunder that I control.” Imagine the strength of this declaration, with emphasis on pronoun “I.” Changó attempts, through calculated subversion, to empty the Owner of Heaven of all his power by asserting and affirming Changó’s own. This strategy of stripping Olodumarè of his authority is expressed in the recurrent use of the first person pronoun and possessive adjective in “my

kingdom,” “You wrote my life,” “how can I respect you,” “thunders that I control,” “I want to fight with Olodumarè,” “I challenge that power which made me cover myself with so much shame.” Changó’s aversion for the Supreme Deity, the epitome of authority, is total. The rejection of this power archetype is symbolically represented in its designation with the derogative demonstrative “that,” which the speaking subject, Changó, uses to push it away out of his immediate proximity. I will come back to Changó’s mytho-symbolic resistance, dissidence, and subversion of authority and power in the next section of this chapter.

The furious deity conjures all the forces that surround him to resolve the injustice which afflicts a member of his community: “winds, seas, and thunder” are called into a swift and retributive action with the verbs “blow, swell, explode with all your might, and attack.” These verbs of action express belligerence against the established, petrified power of authority and aim to “efface the memory of a crime,” “wash a kingdom and clean a guilt.”

The words “crime” and “guilt” are to be taken with a pinch of salt because, with deity Changó, their significance may be totally unpredictable, and they can also connote as much ambiguity as Changó’s character himself. Did not Changó proper commit the worst sociohistorical crime on the human plane by causing, through a hubristic, egotistical act, the terrible enslavement of his people in the New World? Is condemning one’s own subjects to bondage in an alien land to serve la Loba Blanca not a crime whose memory should be effaced as well? Is the kingdom not broken apart and his children scattered all over the New World as slaves to be washed and cleaned like the king’s guilt as well? The suffering deity Oxalá, rebuking the anthropomorphic Changó for blasphemy against Olodumarè and bringing him under control, is a sign that Changó is also endowed with human characteristics and that his social deeds can be ambiguous, ambivalent, and subject to semiotic

interpretations. So though the deity's curse on his people may be deemed reprehensible for its historical consequences on human plane, the belligerent and energetic temperament behind Changó's crime and guilt can be appropriated as a vital force worth emulating for black people's liberation struggle in the context of the Diaspora.

Changó's determination to challenge Olodumarè's authority is total, and his vehement, subversive action reaches a point of no return when Changó says "Lord of destiny, how can I respect you from now on? You wrote my life in the eternal books." In Yoruba cosmology, this deity challenges injustices suffered by the weak of society. As such, he swiftly questions the suffering wrought upon Oxalá under the supreme authority of Olodumarè, whose power "made Changó cover himself with so much shame." He urges thunder to attack the heavens and set fire to the skies which are the dwelling places of Olodumarè, thus totally obliterating the authority thereby represented. That is the myth of Changó, the deity of swift and retributive justice, god of belligerence against authority and subversion of power, representation of vicarious sacrifice with social vision. Zapata Olivella appropriates these essences of Changó and weaves them into the postmodern, postcolonial, and liberationist discourse of Changó.

Changó and Dissidence in the Mytho-Historical Genesis of Narrative

Resistance, a dominant paradigm in postcoloniality, provides a useful entry into the historicity of Changó. I use resistance in Said's terms, as spilling out over the boundaries of literary production that, in recent years, has kept the relationship between West and non-West one between critics of culture and producers of culture. But for my analysis of Changó, I find more relevant Coundouriotis's suggestion of a different paradigm, one of dissidence

rather than resistance. According to Coundouriotis in Claiming History, “Dissidence proclaims difference from within. It shatters the cohesion of a national community. Dissident speech poses different challenges for historical criticism because it is often successfully co-opted and requires rediscovery through a historical lens that can properly contextualize it” (20). Dissidence subverts from within. It orients our attention toward the internal dynamics of a community where it is most difficult to look. This thinking joins Barthes’s analysis in Mythologies of the pseudo-innocence of myth:

The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the ‘naturalness’ with which news-papers, art, and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history. In short, in the account given of our contemporary circumstances, I resented seeing Nature and History confused at every turn, and I wanted to track down, in the decorative display of *what-goes-without-saying*, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there. (11)

Coundouriotis’s theorization of dissidence and Barthes’s view on myth provide an efficient critical line along which I look into how myth and history function as geneses of the identity of the black in Western narrative discourse. Changó is written in the Western epic tradition and sets out to demystify myth and history which, for ages, have nourished fiction and culture against black. This confers on Changó the status of literature of dissidence and creativity in Nawal El Saadawi’s terms in The Dissident Word: it is “inspired and stimulated by our living our own lives and not by copying theories of struggle from books. ... Creativity means uniqueness: discovery, innovation, and dissidence” (156). As such, Changó is dissenting, subverting, and contrapuntal writing in the framework of Western, Spanish-American, and négritude narratives.

In his article “Changó, el gran putas as Liberation Literature,” Ian Smart describes Changó as a novel based in African culture and principles. Furthermore, he writes, the novel works toward gaining the validation of African culture and its principles. According to Smart, the

novel's African background is particularly important, because this foundation greatly helps the work to qualify as "liberation literature," a term which echoes Fanon's "fighting literature" or a "revolutionary literature" in The Wretched of the Earth.²² Smart states: "Changó speaks about liberation. More importantly, built on demonstrably African aesthetic principles, it affirms the existence of a peculiar and systematic African culture; it acts out liberation about which it speaks" (15). Smart further argues that the theme of freedom within the novel is discussed through various principal characters whose primary role is to liberate people of African descent from oppression.

In "Conversación con el Doctor Manuel Zapata Olivella, Bogota, 1980; 1983," an interview with Zapata Olivella conducted by Captain-Hidalgo, the author explains his choice of the term "putas" for the title of his work. Although he mentions the demonic connotations of the term, Zapata Olivella provides a much more complex definition of the phrase. He states:

En la realidad ese libro se llama así porque toda la obra ha sido concebida con esa connotación referida al personaje central, es la lucha del negro en este continente. Pues bien, parece que el vocablo 'putas' es universal en el habla castellana. También se lo aplica con la misma connotación en España. Se trata de un ente imaginario capaz de sobre ponerse a la muerte, a la adversidad, que puede asumir todas las formas malignas, que encarna el demonio, pero a la par reunir en sí todas las formas nobles y bondadosas que se atribuyen a Dios. Pues bien, yo creo que esta es la palabra justa para aplicarse al pueblo negro, que ha podido sobrevivir de las cacerías en Africa, de las tremendas condiciones de miseria y de hambre a las cuales fue sometido durante la travesía y que pudo sobrevivir a todos los regímenes de esclavitud en este continente. No se dejó arrebatarse en ningún momento su sonrisa. Por esto considero que el concepto de 'el Putas' es el más adecuado para el título de mi novela. (30)

As we can see, "el putas" can mean much more than simply the devil. "El putas" is an entity of tremendous strength, power and perseverance. Furthermore, although this being is capable of embodying "negative" forms, it also possesses all of the positive traits attributed to God.

Captain-Hidalgo also believes “el putas” is “easily translatable” to “mother-fucker” (Culture of Fiction 132). In her discussion of the book’s title, Captain-Hidalgo uses former Black Panther Bobby Seale’s definition of “mother-fucker” as a basis for her discussion of the title. She quotes Seale: “Today, one can use the word to refer to a friend or someone he respects for doing things he never thought could be done by a black man. Well, it’s kind of a real complimentary statement to a brother or even a sister when one vicariously relates to someone who’s black and pulls a fantastic feat. We will joyfully say, ‘Man, he’s a motherfucker’” (133).²³

We can see that the title “Changó, el gran putas” captures the essence of the book as expressed by Zapata Olivella. Deity Changó, in being “the baddest mother-fucker,”²⁴ as Smart translates the title, is an entity without parallel. As Luisa Ossa puts it, “Changó is the best of the best, the most exceptional of the exceptional, and not one to be messed with.”²⁵

In Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon states that colonized people are judged, in large part, by their ability to adopt the dominant culture’s language. He gives the example of the Antilles, stating, “The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter — that is, he will come closer to being a real human being — in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language” (18). He later affirms that the idea that colonized people are judged in proportion to their mastery of the dominant culture’s language is not exclusive to the Antilles, and may be generalized to include all colonized people. With this idea in mind, it is my belief that we can view Zapata Olivella’s use of “el gran putas” as a tool to combat the mental colonization described by Fanon. In the introduction to the Dictionary of Afro-American Slang, Major writes, “Black slang stems ... from a ... rejection of the life-styles, social patterns, and thinking in general of the Euro-American sensibility” (10). Major’s statement may also be

applied to Zapata Olivella's use of "el gran putas."

By using those words to describe the African deity Changó, and furthermore as part of the title of his novel, the author demonstrates his refusal to be controlled by Eurocentric standards of language usage and culture. Through this refusal, Zapata Olivella validates the African perspective on which his novel is based.

Discussing the title of the work in his interview with Captain-Hidalgo, Zapata Olivella affirms that he used the phrase "el putas" not only for its meaning, but also to validate a popular expression which may be looked upon as controversial in academic circles. Zapata Olivella states:

Ahora, la palabra 'putas' en castellano no solo se justifica en el contexto de la obra sino que es una manera también de recoger una expresión popular, dignificarla, llevarla a la condición literaria y mostrársela a aquellos escritores academistas, elitistas que consideran que a los libros hay que darles nombres de acuerdo con la tradición European, que comparten la censura de la Academia o de los críticos del sistema de oppression en que viven nuestros pueblos. (30)

In his article, Smart thinks that the various principal characters who play the role of liberators in Changó are "tricksters" who use "trickery" to achieve their goals.²⁶ He further theorizes that the use of trickery is necessary to empower the oppressed, and he believes that the manner in which Changó discusses the African-American struggle for liberation supports this theory. For the same reasons that Zapata Olivella describes Changó as "el gran putas," I think that we must be cautious in using the term trickster. Zapata Olivella's presentation of Changó as "el gran putas" serves a double purpose. First, it elevates and glorifies an African deity. Furthermore, by referring to Changó as "el gran putas," as "the baddest mother-fucker," he glorifies him in non-European terms. Instead, the deity is sung in African-American words. Therefore, the classification of Changó as a trickster may become problematic because it has the potential to impose European paradigms on the figure of this

deity, standards which conflict with African and Diasporic perspectives. In the novel, Changó is not simply an entity who relies on trickery to achieve his goals, nor is he an evil deity who is cruel for the sake of being cruel. He is simply a powerful deity who acts in the manner he sees fit. When he believes that his subjects do not honor him sufficiently, he condemns them to slavery. However, despite the curse, he makes it clear that they will regain their freedom. Changó just stipulates that the muntu must work to recover their liberty. They must earn it.

Therefore, I would not equate Changó's expectation that the muntu, with his guidance, will find a way of freeing themselves from bondage with trickery. The term trickster, because of the negative connotations it evokes, is inadequate to describe Changó. It reduces this powerful African god to a deceitful deity who uses malice to achieve his objective, which is not how Changó is portrayed in the novel. By devaluing the title character, this reduction of Changó to a trickster in turn undermines the work's endeavor to validate African culture.

In her article "Reading Trickster; or, Theoretical Reservation and a Seneca tale," Karen Oakes questions the application of trickster theories to Native American literature. She contends that many trickster theories, in reference to Native American narrative, attempt to open a new discursive space for Native American discourse but instead end up reserving a space for it "within dominant Western theory" (148). I think that the same holds true for Smart's application of trickster theory to Changó. While Smart's intent is to validate the novel's African principles, his use of the trickster categorization places the novel within a Western discourse paradigm. Instead of attempting to fit Changó into Western categories, we should simply accept the deity for what he is, "el gran putas."

As a revision of the social history of the Americas, Changó is important for two reasons. The first is the fact that it recapitulates the entire African component of that history which the official discourse has chosen to ignore; the other is its ability to re-inscribe this particular dimension of American history back into the Western hemisphere ethos. In writing about these events, Zapata Olivella succeeds, particularly, in publicizing the constant denial of the existence of Afro-Hispanics and their problems as a community. Moreover, Changó unravels the full human cost of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and disseminates the contributions of its victims and their descendants over the last four centuries in the Americas.

While the terrible experiences of Changó's accursed subjects aboard the metonymic slave ship and their subsequent ordeals with the Inquisition in Cartagena alone more than reveal the tragedy that was the trans-Atlantic slave trade, their achievements and those of their descendants find expression in the remaining parts of the novel, especially in the portions dealing with the Haitian and Mexican revolutions as well as the American Civil War and the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. Here, many blacks' personalities are assigned functions that clearly identify them as the individuals who marked their time by either initiating a much-needed revolt or winning the battle that turned the tide in favor of the independence forces.

The first case is best represented by Father Morelos in Mexico, who is often credited with taking the Mexican Independence struggle to the north of the country after the example of Father Miguel Hidalgo in the south. Colombian José Prudencio Padilla exemplifies the second scenario. An excellent naval tactician, he is presented in Changó as the architect of the victory that prompted the capitulation of the Spanish Navy in Maracaibo, Venezuela, a battle depicted in the novel as the last Spanish stand in Northern South America. The strategy

that made it all possible was simple. It required Padilla to pilot a small boat to the rear of the enemy ship and attack it from that point at the same time that his men torpedoed it from the front (265).

Along the line of the idea of fight for the liberation of the black and the downtrodden, Zoggyie writes in In Search of the Fathers: “What makes these liberators thematically important is not the mere fact that they saved the day. It is rather the fact that they, and not the traditional heroes, did so. And by traditional heroes, I mean people like Simón Bolívar and Father Hidalgo himself” (165). As we are aware, Bolívar, for instance, is almost a god in Spanish-American history. It is he who is often credited with liberating more than half of that continent from the control of the Spanish crown. By thus attributing a victory as crucial as the one recounted above to Padilla, Zapata Olivella suggests that Bolívar may have been overrated by White historians, a detail one discerns from Padilla’s own comments on the incident:

Vamos, padre, a ganar la batalla de mi perdición. Las envidias de mis superiores y enemigos nunca me perdonarán que sea yo el escogido de Changó para brillar en la gran batalla de Maracaibo. Nunca antes a ninguno de nuestros generales le fue dado vencer en una tan difícil y gloriosa hazaña: abatir el último intento de la Corona Española por recuperar a sus dominios arrebatados por la revolución americana. (267-68)

Another historical subversion and deconstruction in Changó happens with the figure of Theodore Roosevelt. Often presented as a fearless hero in the war in which Spain lost Cuba to the United States²⁷ the ex-president appears here as a man who owed his very survival in that conflict to a company of black soldiers. He and his famous Rough Riders are rescued, for instance, from the San Juan Hill battle in Eastern Cuba by the 25th (Black) Regiment, after which they can insult their rescuers. As the narrator states, “el Comandante tiene un momento lúcido y reconoce la valentía de sus soldados Negros. Pero recobrando sus

instintos racistas, no vacilará en sindicarlos públicamente de cobardes” (479). The point Zapata Olivella is making here is painfully obvious. Heroes are only those who have a voice and the power to back it up. Being black, the rescuing soldiers had neither of these, hence the relegation of their deeds that day to the dregs of history.

In the same vein of subverting and rewriting history, Changó demystifies the historical legend of Abraham Lincoln. This mammoth of American history is portrayed as not such a friend of American blacks as he is often purported to be. The Civil War, he supposedly confessed, “no se había desatado para salvar o destruir la esclavitud” (493). But even worse, he castigated generals Fremont and Hunter for freeing slaves in Missouri and Hilton Head, respectively (493). Although the president’s alleged actions are not exactly new in contemporary American history, by incorporating them into Changó, Zapata Olivella forces his readers to take a fresh look at the Redeemer of the American Union, to see him not as the compassionate leader that he is often claimed to be, but as just another cold, calculating politician. What emerges at the end of such scrutiny is “a defamiliarized Lincoln so morally pigmified that he may as well have been one of the black heroes that Roosevelt and his collaborators chose to ignore” (In Search of the Fathers 167-68). In this particular instance, history becomes a tool for leveling the ideological playing field for both black and white Americans.

Throughout Changó, we can note the author’s conscious endeavor to rewrite Diaspora Africans back into the histories of the Americas. Long obliterated by mainstream history as a result of its Hegelian definition of who or what makes legitimate history, these black liberators and their achievements are aggressively exposed in the narrative, mainly as a way of forcing the majority non-black cultures to recognize this component of the American

population.

Zapata Olivella's prime objective in Changó is to displace, resist, and subvert the classical sociohistorical discourse on the "Wretched of the Earth," to borrow the term from Fanon, by defamiliarizing the archetype which perpetuates a dehumanizing image of a very important historical segment of the New World social fabric as ahistorical. Changó re-positions the other by trivializing the magnitude of the stories told in classical texts, such as The Iliad, The Odyssey, and The Divine Comedy. In this perspective, we apprehend Zapata Olivella's concerns in "Los Ancestros Combatientes" in Changó:

Desde que Changó fue publicado, hace ocho años, en diversos reportajes y artículos he tenido oportunidad de referirme a los propósitos que me llevaron a concebirla. Me preguntaba en aquel entonces, ¿por qué la más grande tragedia vivida por la humanidad en toda su historia no había servido de tema para un gran poema o novela? En contraste, episodios menos trágicos, como la Guerra de Troya, o la vida privada de los italianos, habían tenido su Ilíada y Odisea o su Divina Comedia. (51)

Changó, History, Literature, and Rewriting Black in Narrative

History is more than a meditation on the identity of those who share it. It is also a weapon. In this respect, George Orwell wrote in Nineteen Eighty-Four, "Who controls the past controls the future, and who controls the present controls the past" (251). Milan Kundera's The Book of Laughter and Forgetting expresses similar thinking (159). To implement this historical creation of blank space in the memory of a people, myth multifaceted, dynamic, adaptive nature and official history find their way into literature, which plays a fundamental role in legitimizing and perpetuating this erasure of the collective unconsciousness.

History's ideological function is Socratic and dates back to the Myth of the Metals. In Plato's The Republic V, this myth supports the current tendency to value citizens in

accordance with their past. Socrates claimed that God used different metals to make individuals, which then conditioned them for a specific ability in society. Robert B. Downs writes: “The role of religion in Plato’s ideal state is basic. All citizens are to be compelled to believe in gods on pain of death or imprisonment, because lack of piety undermines the strength of the state” (Books that Changed the World 60). A severe critic, John Bagnell Bury, in his History of the Freedom of Thought, notes: “But the point of interest in Plato’s attitude is that he did not care much whether a religion was true, but only whether it was morally useful; he was prepared to promote morality by edifying fables; and he condemned the popular mythology not because it was false, but because it did make for righteousness” (122-23).

Would the general populace accept the system of government to be imposed upon them in Plato’s commonwealth? To make the scheme palatable, the people are to be persuaded, through “*beneficent falsehoods*,” that the Guardians (leaders) are endowed with a kind of divine power and are a chosen people (The RepublicV 472). One of the characters in The Republic, Glaucon, asks, “Is such an order of things possible, and how, if at all?” Socrates is quoted as replying:

Until philosophers are kings or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those common natures who pursue either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from evils — no, nor the human race, as I believe, and then only will this our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day. (The Republic V 473)

Through this myth, platonic politics takes as a fundamental premise the absolute supremacy of the state. Though the ideal state is to be governed by philosophers, scarcely any freedom is allowed in any human activity, and intellectual freedom, in particular, is ruthlessly suppressed. The welfare of the state is all-important, and only the state is

enduring. Individuals come and go in quick succession, and they must, if necessary, be sacrificed to the state. For these reasons in Books that Changed the World Bertrand Russell calls Plato “the greatest exponent of totalitarianism” (61). Plato’s myth of one group of people divinely endowed with intelligence and the other devoid of intelligent faculty has nourished a Manichean ideology, culture, and literature of division within the human race since the days of ancient Greek civilization.

In The Mismeasure of Man, Stephen J. Gould exposes the anatomy of the “Truth” and of the narrative discourse that the Myth of the Metals incarnates. Ever Since Darwin, Ontogeny and Phylogeny, and Flaws in a Victorian Veil, all of them by Gould, are scathing criticisms of the same myth, where official history and collective memory connive against the freedom of the weak people in society. Although this myth has had devastating consequences on all the groups to which it has since been applied, none has suffered as much as the victims of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism in Africa.²⁸ Consistent with the myth, these people were viewed as subhuman herds of brass and iron products, as they are categorized in Plato’s The Republic V, and as reified elements for trade as “piezas de India” by la Loba Blanca in Changó. Their only purpose in life was to serve their masters, who saw themselves as the golden equivalents of the alleged divine project. This line of thought is instrumental to current Euro-American biases toward the New World and Africa. Because of the former-slave and ex-colonial status of these two groups, their histories tend to be made into “beneficent falsehoods.” An equitable treatment would acknowledge them as the equals of their one-time masters, who undoubtedly think of themselves as the sole heirs of the gold and silver creatures.

Hegel supported the application of the Myth of the Metals to Africans in his Philosophy of

History. In this book which is thought to be at the root of modern Western historiography, Hegel describes the African continent as “the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night” (148). Hegel implies that “the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature” (157) is the essence of the continent. The message is that Africa and her peoples are yet to do anything that is history-worthy, that they are still at the dawn of history.

The Eurocentric structure of history that emanates from Philosophy of History provides a form of rationality, a framework of beliefs, which naturalizes and justifies a certain sort of self-imposition of the Western social structure and dispossession of black self and dignity. It accomplishes this by promoting insensitivity to the other’s needs, agency, and prior claims as well as belief in the colonizer’s apartness, superiority, and right to conquer or master the other. Thus it provides a distorted framework for perception of the other, and the project of mastery it gives rise to involves dangerous forms of denial, perception, and belief which can put the Eurocentric perceiver out of touch with reality about the other. The framework of mastery does not provide a basis for sensitive, sympathetic, or reliable understanding and observation of either the other or the self; mastery is a framework of moral and cultural blindness. Think, for example, with Val Plumwood, in “Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism Parallels and Politics” in Ecofeminism, Women, Culture, Nature, of what such a Eurocentric framework led White Australians to believe about Aboriginal people: that they were semi-animals without worthwhile knowledge, agriculture, culture, or techne, that they were wandering nomads with no ties to their lands, were without religion, were all basically the same, and so on. It told white Australians that the Aboriginal presence in that land imposed no limits on their conquering actions, that the land was terra nullius, simply

“available for settlement” (344). In all that, Eurocentricity created a belief system, a mythology, which was the very opposite of the truth, and evidence to the contrary was simply not observed, was discounted or denied.

The theory of mastery parallels Hegel’s definition of legitimate history, which continues to be the basis on which many Western historians judge non-Western achievements, including those relating to Africa and its Diaspora. Since most blacks continue to pass on their deeds orally, it is unfair to say, as Hegel does, that an event is history-worthy only if it is witnessed by or reported to a professional. Unfortunately, as the Afrocentrist critic M. K. Asante correctly remarks, this school of thought created sociologists, anthropologists, and historians. Explorers and merchants, especially those who scouted Asia and Africa prior to Columbus’s voyage to the Americas were of the same stripe, and the biased accounts they gave of their explorations were the sources of countless speculations circulated through literature.

In The Philosophy of History, Hegel recognizes two forms of “valid” history, reflective and philosophical. Subdividing reflective history into pragmatical, critical, and fragmentary history, he finds fault with almost all four methods. For instance, universal history, which attempts to investigate whole groups, countries, or even the world, is less than ideal because some of its practitioners tend not to modify the individuality of their tone to conform to the period and culture from which their data emanate (76). For its part, critical history, which Hegel defines as the “criticism of historical narratives” with the aim of determining “their truth and credibility,” is problematic because one of its major components, historiography, relies on what he calls “subjective fantasies” instead of precise facts (79).

The fragmentary version, which deals with such abstract topics as the history of art, law,

and religion, is the one with which Hegel most identifies, chiefly because it forms the transition to his so-called “Philosophical History of the World” (79). This is because the latter, unlike original and reflective history is not self-explanatory. It may, like these, work with given historical events, but unlike them, it does not merely recount the events as they occurred. Instead, it thoughtfully contemplates them with the aim of finding the guide to what Hegel calls the “inner soul” of every people.

It is easy to see why such a conception of history would incite Western historians into denying Africans in general and New World Africans in particular their undeniable contributions to world civilization. As people who transmitted their deeds by word of mouth until recently, Africans were not worth writing about since the only “real” historical material is what is transcribed on paper, ready to be subjected to the contemplations that Hegel advocates.

In Changó, therefore, a rewriting of history, a counternarrative or contrapuntal writing of black realities into literature, is associated with Zapata Olivella’s relentless project, not merely in opposition to official history, but in an attempt to re-posit black identity in a way that seeks to complement the hegemonic notions of tradition, the inability of narrative to complete the totalizing ambition of its teleologically determined form, and the necessity of new narrative syntagm, a displacing rewording of traditional discourse on black, in order to continue history rewriting in a chain of exchange of views, of the constant production of ideas. Supporting Zapata Olivella’s intellectual endeavor, in “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man,” Henry Louis Gates suggests that:

People arrive at an understanding of themselves and the world through narratives—narratives purveyed by school teachers, newscasters, ‘authorities,’ and all the other authors of our common sense. Counternarratives are, in turn, the means by which groups contest that dominant reality and the fretwork of assumptions that supports it.

Sometimes delusion lies that way; sometimes not. There's a sense in which much of black history is simply counternarrative that has been documented and legitimized, by slow, hard-won scholarship. (57)

The condition of the counternarrative arises because the form of narrative syntagm cannot express a totality of experience, although it attempts to disguise this necessary failing in the imaginary figure of closure. Counternarratives are an inclusive part of the production of the communal narrative-matrix and are, therefore, important for prolonging intersubjective experience. As this reading of Gates suggests, this condition of contrapuntality is continually present in the social space of intersubjective discourse. The complexity and density of black social history since the contact of Africa with the West transcends the narrow, experiential framework circumscribed in narrative by a writing subject. Discourse syntagm and intersubjectivity continue subjective narrative, which is always incomplete, and re-adapt it with vision to new social circumstances. Based on this view, I contend that text, as an aesthetic product, should aim to change society. Therefore, it should be a dynamic entity, breaking with the bourgeois notion of aesthetic as "art for art."

While this theorization of contrapuntality is related to an already well-established reading practice in postcolonial discourse, it is not quite the same thing as closure of text or definition of a reading practice. In "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," in Illuminations, Walter Benjamin notes that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (248). If he is correct, the production of any literary or artistic text depends upon a system of a repressive social, political, economic, hierarchical production, the explicit residue of which is often excluded from the text. This is to recognize that a totalization of experience by a narrative is impossible, and this impossibility is disguised in the process of editing and selection which creates the imaginary figure of the oppressor's closure.

Edward Said builds upon Benjamin's insight to propose his own notion of "contrapuntal reading." He recognizes that "all literary texts ... are not bounded by their formal historical beginning and endings" (Culture and Imperialism 78). Reading the counternarrative entails, for Said, identifying the material which the editing and selection process of the singular narrative-mark has eschewed. The identification and piecing together of this material constitutes, on the part of the readerly subject, the production of a narrative syntagm which holds together several narrative-marks in a chain of contiguity. Said's identification of a relation of difference between narrative and counternarrative leads him to conclude that, in terms of the experience represented in literary narrative, "The striking consequence has been to disguise the power situation and to conceal how much the experience of the stronger party overlaps with and, strangely, depends on the weaker" (231). In other words, both narrative and counternarrative are immanent within a shared system of production. The conditions of contrapuntality are therefore necessary conditions of narrativity which are the processes of narrative production within the communal narrative-matrix.

Zapata Olivella's counterdiscursive strategy in Changó harmonizes with the views developed by Gates, Benjamin, and Said. The idea of an infinite structural integration of narrative and counternarrative in a communal narrative-matrix is symbolically advocated in Changó in Legba's message at the wake of Malcolm X. At the funeral ceremony, Legba personally informs the deceased character and his underworld-bound traveling companions that "Habéis sido convocados por Changó" (510). Changó's subsequent speech to them, which also concludes the novel, may sound like an admission of failure on Zapata Olivella's part to accomplish what he set out to do in the work:

-Difuntos que podéis mirar de cerca las Sombras de los Ancestros, comparad vuestros insignificantes actos con las hazañas de nuestros Antepasados y encontraréis

justificada la furia de los Orichas. ¡Desde que Changó condenó al Muntu a sufrir el yugo de los extraños en extrañas tierras, hasta hoy, se suman los siglos sin que vuestros puños hayan dado cumplimiento a su mandato de haceros libres!

¡Ya es hora que comprendáis que el tiempo para los vivos no es inagotable! (511)

Rather than a failure, however, the statement should be seen as an admission of a reality, the reality that the struggle for black dignity throughout the world is far from over. But the causes of the struggle and the objectives assigned to it are the sources of vigilant counternarratives, the relentless contrapuntal-writing which must compensate for the blank spaces that narratives often create in the Western collective unconscious against blacks.

Demonized in the low to high Middle Ages and humiliated from the Golden Age on through the tragedy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the African colonial experience, blacks, Zapata Olivella suggests, have come a long way. However, they still have some distance to travel to liberation, a distance for which time is running out.

Négritude narrative discourse should also be a literature of response in the style of Changó, “importing and subverting conventions, mixing styles and expressions, ... narrating and enacting a history of transcultural contact” (Arac, Claiming History 169). This is because négritude discourse’s “responsiveness,” as part of Jonathan Arac’s “historicality” of literature, should aim at “historical transformations, rather than either fulfillments of social status quo or invariants of official history” (25). In this vein, Changó deconstructs European imperialist discourse in Latin America by questioning the authority of works like Columbus’s El diario de Colón and Bernal Díaz del Castillo’s Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España, which inspired José Vasconcelos’ theory on race in the New World. We should also be reminded of Changó’s deconstructive stand before Homer’s two great epics, The Iliad and The Odyssey, and Dante’s Divine Comedy.

Moreover, Changó is a discourse of indirect response to such baroque writing as the

Cantigas de Santa María of Alfonso X, which offers one of the best examples of demonization of the black in Western imagery. Its parallel in the humiliation scheme of Spain is without doubt Francisco de Quevedo's twenty-three-stanza poem, "Boda de Negros."²⁹ There is no denying the fact that the poem's language is derogatory toward black people and, therefore, contributed in no small measure to the widespread anti-black sentiment that accompanied the fall of the Moors in 1492.

While Cervantes's "El celoso extremeño" (Novelas ejemplares 1621) comes to mind, other works in which characterize blacks negatively include María by Jorge Isaacs in 1867, Cecilia Valdés by Cirilio Villaverde in 1839 and 1882, El alfaréz real by Eustaquio Palacios in 1886, El negro que tenía el alma blanca by Alberto Insúa in 1922, La marquesa de Yolombó by Tomás Carrasquilla in 1926, and "Lo que se derrumba," a short story by Manuel Urbaneja Archelpohl. With the exception of Carrasquilla's work, where the notion of slavery as an opportunity for African Christianization is criticized, all the others talk of blacks who either prefer to remain in bondage or regret their freedom after their liberation.

Antislavery Discourse and Social Psychology of Slavery

There were many texts whose social focus was antislavery and abolitionist in the Americas, but they were in minority. In Cuba as in the United States and Brazil, a school of antislavery literature existed and became more vocal as the nineteenth century wore on. It is in opposition to the institution of slavery that Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's Sab was published in 1841, Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin in the United States in 1852, and Aluísio Azevedo's Mulato in Brazil in 1881, for example.

In Cuba, abolitionist views were repressed by the Spanish crown, which was anxious to

preserve the island's colonial status, in contrast to most other Latin American countries, where slavery were officially abolished after political independence from Spain had been achieved. The interests of the sugar oligarchy, the "sacharocracy," determined what Antonio Benítez Rojo terms Cuba's "discurso del poder" in La Isla que se repite 12-14. Many are the histories and chronicles that describe slavery in Cuba; but there are few personal accounts. In contrast with the numerous United States slave narratives, in Latin America autobiographies of slaves or former slaves are rare. Manzano's Autobiografía de un esclavo (1840), for instance, is the only autobiographical account written by a slave during slavery that has surfaced to date. In Cuba, histories of those who bore the ignominious mark of human bondage, who were in some way connected to the traffic and sale of slaves, or who hunted down maroons for their bounty are extremely limited for reasons both diverse and obvious: first and foremost, the racial and social prejudices of the colonial period's master discourse, which dissuaded writers from representing marginalized peoples or themes of slavery in their texts; the slaves' almost total illiteracy, which precluded their chronicling the crimes and abuses of slavery; the lack of a clearly developed sense of nationalism, which might have created an interest in preserving the experiences of the slaves through oral histories; and, finally, the slaves' constant fear of punishment and the writers' dread of official censorship. Deschamps Chapeaux points out that repression of history as: "chronicle a marginalized social group within a broader context, when it is only looked upon as a workforce producing wealth that is appropriated by the masters. Such was the case of the black slave within a slave society, in which the voices of protest, rebellion, the constant yearning for liberty were, if not unknown, silenced and subjected to the whip and prison. Those who wrote history were unacquainted with the people who formed part of this history

(11).³⁰

However, in the 1830s some Cuban white intellectuals were genuinely concerned with establishing a counterdiscourse which was antislavery but not abolitionist in nature. They rallied around the Venezuelan-born planter Domingo Del Monte (1804-1853). They used their writings to plead for the curtailment of the illegal slave trade and pointed out the injustices of the institution of slavery on human and moral grounds, yet never went so far as to openly advocate the emancipation of blacks. Nevertheless, in this counternarrative, scholars like Benítez Rojo, Netchinsky, and Luis see the roots of the incipient Cuban identity in literature.

Del Monte's influence over his followers was prodigious. In 1835, in a forerunner to today's Latin American testimonial literature, Del Monte found a literate mulatto slave, Juan Francisco Manzano, and urged him to write his autobiography. According to Netchinsky, Manzano quite literally wrote his way out of bondage (Engendering a Cuban Literature 27). In order to elicit sympathy from Cuban readers for antislavery narratives, the Del Monte authors often dwelt on incidents where innocent and submissive slaves were barbarously mistreated. But given the prevailing fear of slave uprisings among their readership, these writers never dared to present a rebellious black who might resort to violence. However, in Luis's view, in spite of the group's essentially conservative stance their "antislavery narrative represented one side of a dialogue on slavery which directly threatened slavers and Spanish officials in Cuba" (Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuba 61).

In constructing the self, Manzano's Autobiografía de un esclavo, like all personal histories, is a structured composite of the writer's internal world and a portion of a reconstructed external universe tied to his individual experience; the two voices are

reconstituted so that internal and external history, that of the self and his collectivity, meld into a single, new creation. In Manzano's text, the slave, presented by Manzano, is the victim of the conflict of two visions — that of the slave and that of the master. But in writing of his life, Manzano is cautious not to discuss the question of slavery's immorality or question the codes of the master discourse. His attention is focused on individual experiences that, taken together, underline slavery's injustices. We receive and interpret his memoirs as a narration of an abominable system of economic exploitation. The subject moves between happy and somber notes, thus creating the image of a contradictory being, successively docile, rebellious, sad, euphoric, innocent, and mundane (Schulman's "Introduction" Annals of the New York Academy of Science 356-67).

This ambivalence is characteristic of Manzano's existence, and, in the end, it destroys his will. Del Monte pointed out that the consequences of slavery would touch both masters and slaves, and the most intelligent observer of the period concurred in affirming that slavery was potentially a "mine that would blow all of us up," according to Fernández de Castro.

Gómez deAvellaneda was not part of the Del Monte group. Her controversial novel, Sab, is an antislavery narrative whose ancestors are recognizably European.³¹ It is more than likely that the raging storm so important to the novel's plot development has its roots in a parallel episode in Chateaubriand's Atala. Another of the first European writers to present a black protagonist in an American setting was the Englishwoman Aphra Behn, whose novel Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave (1688)³² was known to Gómez de Avellaneda. Behn's text, like Chateaubriand's later Atala, abounds with descriptions of tropical American nature, and her cast of characters, such as white colonists, Indians, and black slaves, reflects the multiethnic nature of the Caribbean. The rebellion of the African prince sold into slavery,

Oroonoko, against his enslavement is also much like Sab's: "Reduced to the impotent of a plantation slave, he pits his personal code of honesty, honor, loyalty and fortitude against the social order that sanctions self-interest, arrogant power, and sadistic brutality" (Metzger 14). However, Oroonoko is a far more violent text than Sab, for the hero does in fact organize a slave rebellion, is defeated, and dies a ghastly death by dismemberment.

Hugo's Bug-Jargal (1826), a violent novel reflecting antislavery discourse, was in vogue in France just when Avellaneda arrived in Europe, and its influence on Sab is unmistakable. Hugo set the novel in St. Domingue and described events related to the slave uprising there in 1791. Like Oroonoko, Bug-Jargal is an African prince who leads a slave rebellion and is ultimately executed.

The topic of Sab's rage is an important one. European-authored Oroonoko and Bug-Jargal present black characters that lead bloody slave uprisings and do not hesitate to use violence to fight the enslavement of their minds and bodies. But in America, Sab, like Uncle Tom, refuses this course of action. This stance shows an ambiguity between the tone and the denouement of the novel, for given the forceful articulation of Sab's anger against society, his refusal to fight seems inconsistent, unless one recalls the perennial Cuban fear of slave uprisings, which made the rebellious slave a forbidden topic. As social convention dictated, black literary characters had to remain "non-threatening and acceptable to white readers" (Literary Bondage 53).³³

In the nineteenth century Brazil, Machado de Assis, a great-grandchild of slaves and a mulatto, approaches the topic of slavery along a line that is rather a profound and intellectual autopsy of slavery which weaves the entire toile de fond of the Brazilian social fabric (Dom Casmurro 6).³⁴ His look into the psychology of the economy binding slave owners and

slaves together in a racial society makes Machado de Assis a subtle and astonishingly subversive writer as capable of surprising us as of surprising his own contemporary readers, as Gledson points out in his Foreword to Dom Casmurro. However, though Machado's insight into the evil nature of slavery might have caused some examination of conscience in the Brazilian aristocracy, I think that his work falls short of a vision pragmatic enough to implement social change.

Cruz e Sousa, the father of Brazilian symbolism, treats slavery only at word level and contemplates no tangible course of action toward eradicating the social trauma it causes among blacks in Brazilian society. Afrânio Coutinho, in Cruz e Sousa, reveals Cruz e Sousa's psychological complex and frustration over not being white: "Cruz um poeta negro, 'o cisne negro,' era o negro ressentido por não ser branco, que exaltava as cores brancas, as alvas, puras, precisamente como uma compensação psicológica. Sonhava com mulheres brancas, que jamais poderia alcançar" (10).

It is my belief that the dehumanization and repression of human dignity that slavery exerted on the black in the New World was total. Many factors combined to produce the psychological trauma to which Manzano, Avellaneda, and Cruz e Sousa succumb at the end of their literary career. In Mulato, a nineteenth century Brazilian naturalist novel set in Maranhão, for instance, the positivist hero Raimundo is a thoroughly enlightened character. And Aluísio Azevedo, the author, repeatedly contrasts the protagonist's ideas with those of Maranhão's narrow-minded gentry, who still dwell mentally in an earlier era. Only Raimundo is well educated, atheistic, an experienced traveler, liberal, open-minded, and appalled at the treatment of blacks. Through this single character, Azevedo pursues several important naturalist themes. First among these is abolitionism itself, which can, in fact, be

subsumed under naturalism's characteristic nineteenth-century political philosophy: liberalism.

A second theme that appears in Brazil's naturalist novels of this period is anticlericalism. Even though this theme appears to be central in Mulato, it is somewhat weakened by its embodiment in one truly villainous character. For Azevedo's target is known to have been a particular contemporary priest of Maranhão, who Azevedo believed exercised a pernicious influence on the province. Whereas Eça de Queirós, in O Crime do Padre Amaro (1875), proposed that the corruption of the society as a whole resulted in a generalized clerical decadence, Azevedo, by contrast, suggests that one priest, Canon Diogo, single-handedly corrupts his office and his parishioners, who are part of a relatively innocent, if ignorant and pretentious, society.

Ridicule of the bourgeoisie that preys on the slave is a third naturalist theme prominent in Mulato. Manuel Pescada, the successful and prosperous merchant, emerges as a mercenary incapable of sentiment even toward his daughter. The upwardly mobile head clerk, Luís Dias, appears as a lout molded by a tedious commercial regimen. Many of the other characters in the novel are ridiculed for their crass ignorance, superstitious beliefs, provincialism, and bigotry, unsuccessfully concealed by their condescending and superior airs.

Antimonarchist, strongly abolitionist sentiment, also characteristic of novels of this period, is found in Mulato. In the early 1870, when the novel takes place, many Brazilians favored a Republic, as does Raimundo, reasoning that it would correct the political and social problems neglected by the Brazilian emperors. Maranhão, however, a bastion of an economy based on slavery, was staunchly pro-empire and looked on the Emperor Dom Pedro II not so

much as the ruler of Brazil but as a link with Portugal.

Finally, naturalist novels, in exposing the seamy sides of life, frequently favored the underdog, — like in Zapata Olivella's works, especially Changó, an intellectual masterpiece which totally breaks the mold that naturalism, realism, and positivism tended to impose on imagination and aesthetic — as is apparent in Mulato's antislavery attitude, thus bringing the two currents, naturalism and abolitionism full circle. Azevedo persistently exposes and attacks the cruelty of the slave owners. The presence of the bigoted and shrewish grandmother, Maria Bárbara, a symbol of intransigent racial hatred and prejudice, is one of Azevedo's contributions to the Brazilian abolition campaign. Many of the novel's details relate not only to racial attitudes, but to slavery as an institution and to the society it animates. Even stereotyped characters such as Mônica, the very model of a faithful, maternal black mammy, can be seen as an indictment of the fear and dependency provoked by slavery, for not only was manumission itself conditional, but freed slaves found few options available to them, especially in the agrarian north of Brazil, and many of them continued in their former occupations.

But it is above all through Azevedo's depiction of Raimundo, the mulatto, that the novel's representation of black oppression must be gauged. For Raimundo progresses from an arrogant and privileged young man whose European education endows him with a wholly traditional feeling of superiority to those around him, to an embittered and thwarted individual who discovers that he is defined, ultimately, by the stigma of his birth. Although he is repelled by the aptly named Maria Bárbara's barbarous treatment of her slaves (112), Raimundo, in his ignorance, initially dismisses slaves as of no relevance to his own life. Only after he learns his mother's identity does he engage in a genuine antislavery speech

(226-27). In many of the earlier scenes, he simply feels superior to the bigotry and malice he sees around him, whereas once the mystery of his birth vanishes, his bitterness and disillusionment threaten to permanently mar his hitherto unblemished character. Raimundo discovers that the word “mulatto,” like a parasitic idea he cannot free himself of, has altered his existence.

The clearest expression of the social construction of the black occurs when Raimundo, having discovered “who he is,” connects his personal past to Brazil’s history and considers the effect on his life of the label “mulatto”:

That simple word revealed all he had desired to know until then, and at the same time denied him everything; that cursed word swept away his doubts and cleared up his past, but also robbed him of any hope for happiness and wrenched from him his homeland and future family. That word told him brutally: Here you wretched, in this miserable land where you were born, you shall only love a Negress of your own sort! Your mother, remember it well, was a slave! And so were you!

“But,” retorted an inner voice, which he could scarcely hear within the storm of his despair, “nature did not create captives; you should not bear the least blame for what others have done. And yet you are punished and damned by the brothers of those very men who introduced slavery into Brazil!” (205)

In the same vein, considering the gulf that separates his birth from his education, Raimundo, whose taint is not even visible, begins to understand the words and categories in which he is enmeshed. He identifies what is happening to him as a maneuver to blame the victim. As a man in a liminal category, neither black nor white, through whose presence Azevedo explodes the myth of Brazil as a racial paradise in which miscegenation was widely accepted, Raimundo is uniquely situated to demonstrate the strength of choosing a “white black” as protagonist.

In his study of race relations in the United States and Brazil, Carl Degler asserts that observable physical differences can easily translate into intellectual and moral distinctions.³⁵ Such a view implies a biological basis for racial and sexual domination. Degler’s affirmation

cannot, however, explain the absence of domination when other perceptible physical differences exist — for example, in hair or eye color, body height or weight — nor can it help us understand why it is one particular group — whites rather than blacks, men rather than women — that dominates over and discriminates against the other. The white-black character in fiction, I contend, brings the debate to the level of social rather than biological constructs, for the absence of the characteristic “taint,” as Mulato shows, does not automatically alter status or life options. Instead, by their very presence that points to the arbitrariness of the dominant society’s rationale for exclusion Raimundo’s character calls attention to the real motive behind the attribution of inferiority to others: the protection of privilege, both material and psychological.

Brazil has a history of denying the existence of racial prejudice, embracing instead the category of class prejudice, wholly respectable within capitalism, as an explanation for the oppression of blacks. Indeed, racial categories in Brazil, as presented by Florestan Fernandes in The Negro in Brazilian Society (1969), are a highly ambiguous matter, worked out in detailed coding of hair color and texture, shape of nose and mouth, and skin tones.³⁶ This complex coding, which suggests extraordinary acuity regarding racial distinctions, rather than lack of awareness of them, seems to deflect attention from the social construction of racial meanings.

In Raimundo’s case, what is apparently objectionable is the social fact that his mother was a slave, and that he was born a black slave; these are the phrases that are repeated again and again. Raimundo, in the passage I cited earlier, objects precisely to the social stigma he suffers because of this fact. He resents, in other words, his society’s penchant for historical amnesia. Given such amnesia, when the enslaved or inferiorized person is visibly black, it is

more difficult to sort out the social from the biological characterization, for indeed, “black” and “slave” were largely coterminous for more than three centuries of Brazil’s history. The special identity of the two categories is further indicated in Portuguese by the use, in both cases, of the verb *ser*, expressing “to be” in an essential and permanent sense, as in to be human, to be male, to be female, to be black, to be a slave. This grammatical norm finds its complement in the verb *estar*, meaning “to be” in a contingent or temporary sense, as in: to be busy, to be sick, to be hungry, to be sad. “To be black” or “to be a slave,” then is to have imputed to one an essential and inherent quality. Such language affirms not the historical act of enslavement but the identity of “being a slave.”

Along Azevedo’s line of thought on race in Brazil, Nelson Rodrigues’s dramaturgy, “Anjo negro” in Teatro completo de Nelson Rodrigues: Peças míticas (1981), for instance, pointedly exposes the artificial categorization on which racial oppression depends, in which social and politically functional designations of race are passed off as having an inevitable “natural” — because ostensibly biological — base.

In “Anjo negro,” the problematic of the white-black protagonist is underscored by the subtlety of the tense, elusive thread of relations linking the well-off black husband, Ismael, and his white wife, Virginia, in Brazil’s racial society. “Anjo Negro” dramatizes the psychological struggling and suffering of race-conscious protagonists to point out the absurdity of biological stigma and racial essentialization of self and deconstruct the naturalness of their acceptance, not only in Brazil but everywhere racial discrimination is a way of life.

The white-black protagonist, then, can be viewed as a device for protesting against the self-evident quality of racial labels and the social categories ensuing from them in a

slaveholding society. Raimundo in Mulato and Ismael and Virginia in “Anjo negro” lay bare these labels as cultural categories lacking invariable biological referents. Furthermore, such characters make the important point, which found little theoretical articulation until our own day, that the meanings of racial or gender categories are socially created, and that these creations serve to sustain inequality, whether of race or gender, and justify the domination on which inequality must rest.³⁷ Balibar spoke on the subject of “Racism and Nationalism,” tracing the changing signification of the term “race” and demonstrating the politically, socially, and historically motivated attribution of a biological meaning to the term.

Miguel Barnet’s Biografía de un cimarrón (1968) shares the view of the absurdity of the biological essentialization of self. Furthermore, the work belongs to the literature that gave rise to the nonfiction novel or testimonial narrative, whose prime objective was to uncover the history of people without history. To counteract distorted views of history and in their place provide a more reasoned concept of national history, twentieth-century Cuban intellectuals have focused on neglected aspects of the island’s cultural and historical development. In his essay “Hacia una nueva historia de cuba,” written shortly after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Portuondo observed that “hasta aquí no hubo más historia entre nosotros que la que se dedicó a estudiar el ascenso y decadencia de la clase dominante: la burguesía insular” (26). For a new historicism on Cuba, and by extension, to all Latin America, it is Portuondo’s view in Crítica de la época y otros ensayos (1965) that “el proceso ascendente de las clases explotadas y de sus luchas constantes – rebeliones de esclavos y de trabajadores libres, la organización obrera, las huelgas,” (26) should be incorporated into Cuban historiography.

In Barnet’s Biografía de un cimarrón, the protagonist not only relates experiences that

belong to the unknown history which Portuondo mentions but also collaborates with Barnet, who stimulates his memory with questions whose answers form a national narration. Esteban Montejo, Barnet's protagonist and informant, was first a slave, then a maroon, then a fighter for freedom, and finally a salaried free person. What is interesting to us in connection with Manzano's text is Montejo's early decision to abandon his life of servitude forever: "Yo tenía un espíritu de cimarrón arriba de mí, que no se alejaba...era como una idea que no se iba nunca, y a veces hasta me mortificaba" (44). All the characters in Zapata Olivella's novel, including la Loba Blanca as the agent of biological essentialization of self, epitomize Montejo's spirit of liberty and make the desire to be free a consuming force in Changó.

The belief developed since the Moorish invasion of the Iberian Peninsula that dark-skinned people are synonymous with the devil, Christendom's worst enemy, while Whites are its very antithesis, is a metaphor to be found in early Spanish writings, as I have mentioned above. It is repeated again in Spanish-American works. The notion of Manichaeism is strongly expressed in metaphor in Martín Fierro, where Fierro tells a black woman, whose companion he will soon kill, that "A los blancos hizo Dios, /a los mulatos San Pedro, /a los negros hizo el diablo /para tizón del infierno" (1167-70). Sylvia Wynter explained the reason behind this thinking in the following words:

The Moor, "black as pitch," was not only the opposed religion; his color was the opposite of "white," symbol of Christianity. ...The relation of the black Moor, symbolically, to the Devil was a relation which sprang from a reality in which the Mohammedan was a dominant power. The "black as devil" concept sprang from an impulse which, as Lemuel Johnson points out, is similar to the twentieth-century black Moslem definition of the Westerner as "White devil." (11)

Wynter's explanation brings to mind what Fanon identifies as a type of alienation that estranges one man from another because of racial differences. This is best illustrated by the ethnicity-inspired conflicts one finds in The Wretched of the Earth, where the Algerian native

is no more than an animal that needs to be colonized. This perception of the other can be extended to the other victims of Euro-American prejudice, a group that includes Zapata Olivella fictional audience. So many of them feel they are aliens in the land they call home, that is, they “suffer from not being ... white,” because their White compatriots have “imposed discrimination” on them (Black Skin, White Masks 98) in virtue of the ambivalent concept of race orchestrated by myth and history through narrative discourse.

Changó actually illustrates “Manichaeism” in JanMohamed’s concept of the term. In “The Economy of Manichean Allegory,” JanMohamed defines the term as the practice whereby one group classifies another as totally worthless, as so hopeless that its members are literally beyond redemption. Their world, in JanMohamed’s words, is “perceived as uncontrollable, chaotic, unattainable, and ultimately evil” (64). A mechanism often used in colonized societies, its ideological function, according to JanMohamed, is to prolong the colonial system itself, to de-historicize the world it controls, to present the conditions it has generated as a metaphysical “fact of life” before which the colonizer himself is reduced to the role of a passive spectator in a mystery not of his making (68). A similar remark is made by Barthes in Mythologies (and by Val Plumwood in her work titled “Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism”), which I summarize in Barthes’s own words as: “The very principle of myth is to transform history into nature” (129). Barthes’s view may serve as a theoretical support to what Zapata Olivella means when los Negros in “Los Ancestros combatientes” de Changó express their historical reality against their definition by the racist landowners in Southern United States:

Nuestra decisión de trabajo sorprendió a los amos sureños que habían asegurado por siglos que el látigo es el único estímulo para sacudir la pereza innata de nosotros los Negros. ... Nunca antes en ninguna nación del mundo ni en la historia de la humanidad, ... se vio un pueblo tan decidido a participar voluntariamente en la

reconstrucción de un país. (494-95)

Manichaeism perpetuated by myth and history through literature bears down on miscegenation as well. Such concepts as “ethnic improvement” are important only among humans, the species that should know better than the others in view of its claims to a superior intelligence.³⁸ In a work titled The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, Davis writes: “It is an open question whether a society that sees every addition of White blood toward purification is more, or less, prejudiced than a society that sees any appreciable trace of Negro blood as a mark of degradation” (275). The problem here again is that dichotomous concept of purification against degradation. It has been echoed by contemporary black leaders like the Afro-Brazilian writer and civil rights activist Abdias do Nascimento and African-American filmmaker and director Spike Lee.

Do Nascimento first made his case in a speech titled “Genocide: The Social Lynching of Africans and Their Descendants in Brazil,” which was delivered at the Seminar For African World Alternatives in Dakar in 1976, and again at the University of Ile Ife in 1977. He then repeated it in his book, Brazil: Mixture or Massacre?, where he describes the policy as a “mystique whose target from the start has been the definitive disappearance of the African descendant, physically and spiritually, through the insidious process of whitening the ethnic and cultural composition of Brazilian society” (71). That is, black/white miscegenation is nothing more than suicide and should be prevented at all costs. In the same way, Spike Lee sees the phenomenon as something “unnatural” that “should be avoided as a matter of expediency” (In Search of the Fathers 52). Miscegenation and its racial implications are not new topics in Spanish America. In his political thesis on the modernization of Argentina in the nineteenth century, for instance, Domingo Sarmiento sees mixture of White, black, or indigenous blood as an impediment to modernization and civilization, while José

Vasconcelos's La Raza cósmica (1925) defines the superiority of Spanish America in the emerging human race through miscegenation.

Because historical themes predominate in Changó, Zapata Olivella is rewriting the history of his native Colombia, and indeed that of the New World, with the aim of addressing the imbalances and omissions that have traditionally characterized the official versions. Indeed, his intellectual endeavor aims to redeem the collective unconscious of the New World people. Changó is a revision that attempts to “disalienate” (as Zoggyie calls it in Search) and restore a sense of self-worth, the confidence of knowing that one too has contributed to the current grandeur of a continent regardless of what this contribution is perceived to be.

Psycho-Spiritual and Affective Anatomy of Enslavement of the Black³⁹

The most important source of estrangement suffered by colonized people at the hand of the colonizer is the exclusion of their language, religion, history, names, and cultures. These people are the victims of the European imperialist adventure initiated by Columbus in 1492, which climaxed with the partition of Africa and Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century. As a consequence of these events, and of the infamous trade in humans, New World blacks either totally lost their languages, their histories, and their overall cultural traditions, or had these deliberately trodden upon. But regardless of specific outcomes, the general result has been the same everywhere. In “Current Theories of Alienation” in his work on Changó and Chombo (by the Afro-Panamian writer Carlos Guillermo Wilson) titled In Search of the Fathers, Haakayoo N. Zoggyie defines this psychological phenomenon of alienation as “a near pathological reverence for these same identity markers as they are practiced by their victimizers and a concomitant disinterest in (if not an aversion toward)

what is left of their own” (14).

A serious tragedy among African victims, particularly those of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it is a peculiar kind of estrangement that finds its fullest articulation only in the works of the psychiatrist and political activist Frantz Fanon, who used categories to explain the ethnicity-derived conflicts that he developed in his works. And this Zoggyie expands interestingly well in his analysis.

The first category that explains the affective malaise and which Zoggyie mentions in his work is “self-doubt,” the feeling that one does not measure up to others because of the color of one’s skin. This category is well depicted in Black Skin, White Masks, and is presented in the inferiority complexes one finds throughout that text among black Martinicans vis-à-vis their white compatriots.

Prevalent in the same novel is what Hussein A. Bulhan, in his study of the phenomenon in Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression, calls “alienation from the significant other” (188), where victims find it difficult to relate to friends or members of their own families. They may be embarrassed to do things they once enjoyed doing with these people, or pretend not to recognize certain local objects anymore. An example Fanon gives of the first case is the refusal of returning Martinicans from France to speak Creole because it is nothing more than “divine gurgling,” “a halfway house between pidgin-nigger and French” (Black Skin, White Masks 20). This case is best exemplified by the story of the country boy who, after just six months in France, pretended not to recognize his father’s farm implement until the latter dropped it on his foot (21-22).

According to Zoggyie, Fanon identifies another Bulhan type of estrangement, “alienation from the general other,” (188) which is best illustrated by the ethnicity-inspired conflicts

found in The Wretched of the Earth. As Fanon tries to show in this work, the estrangement derives from the persistently Manichean manner in which the French settler perceives the native Algerian, the other.⁴⁰

Fanon depicts also the category of exclusion of language and culture in Black Skin, White Masks. In Zoggyie's synthesis, this supposedly happens when people learn a language that is considered to be culturally superior to their own. This critic asserts that because language is the most popular means by which each culture transmits its beliefs and biases to the rest of the world, a person who learns one thoroughly enough can end up internalizing whatever convictions and prejudices it conveys. If these happen to be directed against the learner's own ethnic group, he or she may resolve the resulting conflict by simply disavowing any connections to that group (In Search 17). This situation is well exemplified by the story of the black Martinicans who will not speak Creole, and in Black Skin, White Masks Fanon explains how such tragedies happen:

To speak means...to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. ... A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. ... Mastery of language affords remarkable power. Paul Valery knew this, for he called language "the god gone astray in the flesh. (18-19)

Fanon may have been alluding only to blacks in the West Indies, but the theory holds valid for Zapata Olivella's audience and indeed all formerly colonized peoples.

Fanon also identifies Bulhan "social praxis" category of alienation in Wretched of the Earth. It "concerns the denial and/or abdication of self-determining, socialized, and organized activity — the very foundation of the realization of human potential" (188). For most of the world's population, and especially for the New World Negro, alienation has more to do with participating in their own degradation by appropriating the biases of the languages

they now speak than it does with how fairly they are treated in the international labor market. It has rather more to do with being constantly on display because of the color of their skin, — “Look, a Negro! Look, a Negro!” Black Skin 111-14 — than with the pressures of modern technology. It has more to do with having their intellectual abilities under constant doubt (115-17) than it does with the pressures of the modern workplace. It is Zoggyie’s view, in consonance with Fanon’s ideas that the estrangement of the black “derives more from trying to live up to the social expectations of the Western world than it does from the pressures of technological advancement” (18).⁴¹

However, Fanon was not suggesting that technological estrangement did not affect people of color. The fact that he described the project of négritude as a “materialized Tower of the past” (Black Skin, White Skins 226) from which genuine seekers of disalienation should abstain vindicated his continuing faith in the world of technology. In his work, Fanon was forcefully making the point that manmade alienation was more immediate and devastating to these unfortunate groups of colonized people. Zapata Olivella can be said to be driven by similar motives; as he reports elsewhere, he has not only personally experienced the problems that Fanon talks about, he knows people who have as well.

Nonetheless, what prompted Zapata Olivella to write transcends the personal alienations he suffered. As he explained in an interview with Captain-Hidalgo, he wrote to “decir las cosas sentidas por muchos ileterados o semiliterados que, por no tener habilidad narrativa, no pueden decir lo que están sufriendo” (“Conversación” 29). Identifying these individuals as the “oppressed people” of all the ethnic groups, he then adds that he also wrote because he wanted to

Hacerme eco de ... las aspiraciones culturales, los ideales estéticos, religiosos, etc. de nuestros pueblos. Esta es una visión ausente en muchos escritores nuestros en el

pasado y en escritores contemporáneos. El pensar que solamente las preocupaciones de carácter económico o lucha contra la miseria, la enfermedad o el hambre son los objetos de nuestros pueblos y resulta que esto es una gran equivocación. (29)

For Zapata Olivella, narrative discourse thus appears to have a triple objective: to denounce social injustice on behalf of the voiceless; to act as cathartic outlet for the frustration of these people; and to propagate the minority legacies in the New World.

In doing this, Changó demonstrates Zapata Olivella's particular interest in African culture, especially its past, which separates the Afro-Colombian writer from Fanon. For while the latter refuses to "derive my basic purpose from the past of the peoples of color" and sees no need to "exalt the past at the expense of my present and my future" (Black Skin, White masks 226), Zapata Olivella would give importance to African history, religion, and culture in his works in general and particularly in Changó.

This novel forcefully reveals that Zapata Olivella does not believe modern and scientific theories alone can account for the ethnicity-inspired conflicts so in vogue in the Americas. An idea reminiscent of Senghorian négritude, it is the traditional African belief that all diseases are caused by an outraged god or ancestor, and that cure is only possible after the offended deity has been appeased through sacrifice. The estrangement of the New World negro can be similarly contemplated. Ethnicity-related prejudice and other forms of humiliation are the "disease." The gods or ancestors that must be consulted and appeased are the traditional African values that Zapata Olivella is advocating in Changó. The cure is a return to these values and their transvaluation in the actual context of blacks in the Americas. To achieve this objective, not only is Changó peopled with historical figures but also with those from the mythologies of various regions of the world, particularly African and African-American. Zapata Olivella also complements characterization with the invention of figures from his creative repertoire.

A sense of the epic and of the mythic realm is all-important to Zapata Olivella. Mythmaking removes characters from the role and place assigned to them by history, however true or false the recorded data may be. In Changó, the ancestors of each generation of African Americans are present in the actions of the living. This mythmaking endeavor to remedy the alienation of blacks in Americas allows time sequences and spatial representation to shift from prerecorded time to the present moment of the narration, which Captain-Hidalgo designates as “the explosive 1960s” (Culture of Fiction 160). In the novel, there is reverence for those who no longer exist in physical form but who nevertheless guide the living. The forefathers are protective angels of the living. Furthermore, each leader in the struggle of the present moment of narration is accompanied by a specific god who can most aid him in his task of liberating his people. For example, the protective and guiding shadow for King Christophe of Haiti is Mashona, ruler of the ancient kingdom of Zimbabwe. Both kings are known for their preoccupation with and skills for constructing forts and palaces to protect their people from invaders.

In Zapata Olivella’s quest for a solution to the estrangement of blacks in the Americas — the disease, — a primary factor in the development of a cure and in the transvaluation of values on both sides of the Atlantic is the use of water imagery. This literary technique is underscored by Captain-Hidalgo in Culture of Fiction (161) and supported by Zapata Olivella himself in Changó: “La idea de la novela río, caudalosa como el Amazonas, congregando en su corriente los raudales de muchas sangres, se fue perfilando como estructura literaria, sin que con ello quedara resuelto ninguno de los otros interrogantes” (Los ancestros combatientes 351). Because of the novel’s mythic nature, the traditional ways of telling a story are combined in a poetic form that respects no restrictions on the creative process.

Time, space, and overall human companionship exist in a constant “flowing of the present”⁴² in which transvaluation of values occur.

Beyond being a novel about a myriad of characters and complex issues, Changó uses water imagery as a metaphor for culture itself. In the form of rivers and oceans, water is a conduit of culture. It not only links the various regions of the Americas, but it also establishes a clear connection with mother Africa and other non-African-American cultures that it transvalues into new values and vision commensurate with the liberating struggles and contingencies of the oppressed people. In this sense, water connotes bloodlines. After all, the mother of Changó, Yemayá, is the river goddess. Although the Changó Muntu is born before he reaches the New World, his arrival on the shores of the Americas immediately after his birth suggests the idea of his coming into being after the baptism of the Middle Passage.

Transvaluation of values sets Changó in the New World in general. In tandem with the work’s focus on black culture in the Americas is the view that the ekobios or the muntu are the chosen group to save the world from a type of moral destruction. Accordingly, the entire struggle for liberation is not a racial one “where blacks are pitted against whites” (Culture of Fiction 161), but a battle against global oppression, although the narrative focus is the African American. This view is expressed by King Christophe of Haiti: “Todavía en la muerte sufro las mentiras de quienes intentarán vanamente de oscurecer las victorias del muntu. Nuestra lucha liberadora ha sido vilipendiada con el falso stigma de la Guerra de razas” (198). It is my belief that Changó elevates the ethnicity-driven conflicts in the Americas to a higher intellectual plane which transcends Manichaeism and Western scientific theories of oppositions. Through mythmaking and transvaluation of values, Zapata Olivella draws attention to the roots of alienation, humiliation, the “disease” of blacks and

downtrodden people in the Americas and the world at large.

In so doing, however, Zapata Olivella is not locked into Fanon's "definitive present" (Black Skin 226). While he cherishes the lessons of the African past, the Afro-Colombian writer knows that he lives in a social context and a historical moment that are substantively and ideologically different from that of the traditional African gods and ancestors that he is presenting in Changó. This is why some Western values are emphasized in the novel: Agne Brown's Western education; the intellectual dialogue on religion, culture, and anthropology between Agne Brown and her anthropology professor, Harrington; and the central social role of the organized Church. Zoggyie refers to these as "negotiations" between the Old World (Africa) and the New (Americas), and this is where Zapata Olivella appears to endorse Abiola Irele's interpretation of the mental, affective suffering of black.

In his work In Praise of Alienation, Irele challenges the thought that Africa's current identity crisis has its root in the incompatibility of the values and traditions that Europe imposed on that continent. In La révolte des romanciers noirs (1973), Jingiri J. Achiriga had already criticized this conception of alienation of Africans in such works as L'Enfant noir by Camara Laye and Une vie de boy by Ferdinand Oyono. A new school of thought as a challenge to the Manichean way négritude posits the relations between Africa and Europe was already gaining ground. In a broader perspective, Irele sees the problems underlined in the works that I have mentioned as deriving mainly from a serious misinterpretation of the concept of culture on the part of Africans and, indeed, some Europeans, as evidenced by the nationalist struggles in Europe that brought about two world wars. Irele has recourse to Burke's Reflections on the French Revolution and argues that the mistake lies in promoting culture as "an intrinsic value, bound to the natural environment of a people or race and,

therefore, determining a natural correspondence between a way of life and a collective identity” (15). We know with the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in Contrapunteo that cultures do not function this way, that they are fluid, constantly undergoing changes as they come into contact with new realities and other cultures.

To support his claims, Irele contends that as a result of the Greek and Roman military achievements on the European continent, many cultural groups lost their past languages and religions as they were absorbed into the conquering cultures. So today’s European civilization is a misnomer, given the myriads of non-European elements that were amalgamated into it. Irele concludes his analysis by saying: “If these disparate cultural entities succeeded in creating what we have come to know as Western Civilization, it is because they took the events referred to less as incompatible confusion than as challenges that had to be met on a higher intellectual plane. Yet, this is precisely what contemporary Africans have failed to do” (6-7).

These assertions do not mean that Irele is oblivious to the consequences of colonial experience in many parts of Africa. In some instances the disruption of traditional African life “was so severe as to have turned the drama of colonialism into pure tragedy” (8). However, the fact of the matter is that “colonial experience was not an interlude in our history, a storm that broke upon us, causing damage here and there but leaving us the possibility ... to pick up pieces” (15). It has come to stay, so the only logical alternative for Africans is to face up to it by redefining their concept of culture. This is necessary because the traditional way of life is “no longer a viable option” for their “continued existence and apprehension of the world” (15).

Irele also argues that Africans need to use science and technology more fully instead of

the prevalent trend of equating industrialization with transfer of technology. He is distressed by the literal manner in which many educated Africans have taken the claims of the négritude movement and those made by Cheikh Anta Diop regarding the greatness of African past. Instead of seeing these reports as “inspirational” tools for the building of a better future, many Africans regard them as an end in themselves and hence wind up indulging in what Irele describes as “cultural smugness” (22).

Irele comes close to Fanon here because they both want to situate their respective arguments only in the temporal frame that Homi Bhabha has described in The Location of Culture as the “beyond” or “the future on its hither side” (6). This is the “now” and whatever comes after it, as opposed to the “then” (the past — recent or remote). As a theory of cultural studies, it departs from the premise that all moments before the “now” are meaningless, that reliance on them only breeds what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., has called the “superior virtue of the oppressed” (22). This is the belief that someone else is responsible for our present distresses that we were not always like this and were indeed great in a past time. Schlesinger thinks that this attitude is often based more on myth than historical reality, and both Fanon and Irele reject it because it stops the victim from taking meaningful action to overturn the status quo.

The two theorists also converge in their views on white prejudice. Both regard the phenomenon as nothing more than a myth based either on European ignorance of their own history or an overinflation of their self-importance. But while Irele sees Western languages as the best means by which African students of Europe can acquire the “spirit” and “totality” of Western civilization, to Fanon, these languages are nothing more than “the tombs of world’s annihilated cultures” (Black Skin, White Masks 18).

Once again, Irele is not out to undermine African culture. His reason for such a stands derives from the awareness that “The colonial experience was not an interlude in our history” (15). It also stems from knowing that “the contribution of Africa ... to Western Civilization is far from negligible” (33). Irele bases his assertions on examples from works like Cheikh Anta Diop’s The African Origins of Western Civilization and his Civilization or Barbarism, Marin Bernal’s The Black Athena, and George James’s Stolen Legacy.⁴³ He concludes by pointing out that “if Africans accept the findings of these scholars, then they in fact reject themselves every time they spurn a Western practice on the grounds that it is alien” (29).

Irele’s argument is relevant to my analysis, for his contentions call into question the validity of terms like “African values,” “African identity,” and “African authenticity” which are at the core of Zapata Olivella’s works, especially Changó. Following Irele and Zoggyie, I confront the following questions in my work: Does the term “afro-” in Afro-Colombian, Zapata Olivella’s target audience, really set Negroes apart from their compatriots? In other words, what is “African” about them? And what is not? I believe Changó, as I demonstrated earlier, is an intellectual challenge to the concepts of fixed purity of African values, identity, and authenticity in the Americas.

It is my opinion that, to deconstruct the notion of purity of values and culture, the section of Changó “Las sangres encontradas,” for instance, focuses on the black world, especially people of mixed ethnicity in New Granada, now Colombia, and seems to suggest that individuals with white ancestors only tend to have a compromised sense of justice. To support his view on the important role of the other ethnic groups, particularly blacks, in the process of America’s redemptive miscegenation and hybridization based on transculturation and transvaluation of values, Changó confronts giant figures of the history of Americas —

Simón Bolívar, Father Alonso de Sandoval and Saint Peter Claver, Napoléon Bonaparte's imperialist adventure in the Caribbean, and Theodore Roosevelt, for example — with black historical figures of the continent, such as Admiral Padilla, El Babalao and Benko Biojos, Boucman, and the U.S. 25th Black Regiment, which rescued Roosevelt and his Rough Riders during the Spanish-American war over Cuba. In confronting these historical characters, blacks subvert the hegemonic posture of their white counterparts and position themselves as makers of the history of the Americas as well.

I also assume that Changó deconstructs the concept of cultural authenticity with episodes featuring the eighteenth-century Afro-Brazilian sculptor Aleijadinho, who becomes the reincarnation of Kanuri Mai in the New World, with all the human potential and revolutionary capabilities that the latter possessed at his time in Africa. Furthermore, the transformation of Gunga Zumbi, the founder of the famous Quilombo do Palmares, — the former freed slave colony in Bahía of Brazil — into Changó, and the conversion of a land mostly known for Indians and white Spaniards into one that literally resembles the African continent around one of the greatest revolutionaries of Mexico, Father José María Morelos y Pavón, seems to support the idea that culture is a fluid notion, one that responds to the demands and realities of given periods and specific geographic circumstances.

In this theoretical line, Hernández-Chioldes and Yoder base their scholarly work and translation of Cabrera's Cuentos Negros de Cubas (1940) on the latter's El Monte (1954), her seminal text that comprehensively examines Afro-Cuban culture and religions. The scholars use this functional guide to contextualize the rituals of Santería and the significance of different animals, symbols, and words within Afro-Cuban religious cosmology and daily life. Cabrera's short stories thematically and culturally complement négritude literature of the

1940s, such as Césaire's poem Cahier d'un retour (1939), which celebrates the African legacy in Martinique. Cabrera does not embrace a return to Africa as Césaire does, and the focus of her short stories is thematically and culturally more evolved. Like Fernando Ortiz, Cabrera asserts that Afro-Cuban identity and culture are the result of a transculturation and transvaluation process rooted in predominantly African traditions and highly charged with the imposition of European values. This model, however, is easily expanded for regional comparison: with its efforts to reveal the African cultural inheritance that had permeated the Antillean landscape and nearly all the social and racial distinctions within Caribbean culture, the Afro-Cuban mythology and cultural specificity of Cabrera's stories are marked as distinctly Caribbean.

In this regard, like Changó in Spanish America, Hernández-Chioldes and Yoder's translation Afro-Cuban Tales (2004) implicitly appropriates its relevance to the more contemporary field of Caribbean literature and theory that forges a regional identity based on cultural syncretism. Cabrera's work corresponds to the efforts of modern Caribbean literary figures and theorists such as Edouard Glissant, who sees African cultural inheritance, rather than language or race, as the potentially unifying element of the Caribbean region. Like Cabrera and Glissant, Zapata Olivella takes as his intellectual focus the evolution of African traditions in a new landscape. I will return to the development of the episodes on Bolívar and historical figures in Changó at the end of this chapter.

My questions reflect the contemporary African and African-American reality that Irele represents, which supports Cabrera and Glissant's theoretical views on African authenticity and identity in the Americas. Besides, a five-century time span and several thousand kilometers of physical separation dictate that Zapata Olivella engage in the "negotiations" of

his reconstruction of Africa and the Diaspora. Whatever form this takes, it cannot be devoid of the very specific realities of the environment in which the novelist lives and writes, which is not Africa but the Americas.

Afrocentricity to New Heights in Changó

Changó not only recreates a universe in which blacks can take pride, it also embellishes the project to a level never reached before in Hispanic fiction. It achieves this through a combination of narrative strategies, including the systematic exploitation of myth and fact to reclaim hitherto estranged spaces for the audience, a profound exploration of the living-dead relationship, an overall positive appraisal of autochthonous African traditions, a treatment of Diaspora African history that surpasses all earlier attempts at Afrocentricity, and a use of the Spanish language that subverts and subordinates it to the African counterparts that it appropriated, distorted, or obliterated.

The novel seems to be structured according to a strategy of melodrama. An impressive story, it is told by an equally impressive array of narrators. Although the principal one is Ngafúa, he recognizes, in typical African fashion, that he alone is not up to the task. He thus enlists the help of his dead father Kissi-Kama, the ancestors in general, and the entire pantheon of orichas or guides. As is to be expected, Kissi-Kama's part is the most active at this point of the story. It is he who must infuse Ngafúa's "kora" with "el valor / la belleza / la fuerza" and "la penetrante mirada de Silamaka capturando la serpiente de Galamani" (7) so that the latter can properly tell his tale. It is also Kissi-Kama who must provide "la palabra evocadora de la espada de Soundjata" (7), or the voice of the revolution to come. This role undoubtedly stems from the character's status as a member of the living dead. In this

capacity, he is considered to be closer to the minstrel than the other ancestral spirits, whose main advantage, it seems, is their ability to “conversar con los Orichas” (8). Kissi-Kama is also aided by regular beings who continue to exercise their role even after they have been killed, like Ngafúa himself will be later in the story.

These orichas are identified as the originless Odumarè, the “Supremo Dios omnipotente a quien jamás se invoca ni representa, pues siempre está presente” (Changó 524). His nature includes three different spirits: Baba Nkwa, “Espíritu luz que anda por los espacios siderales creando nuevos mundos,” Odumarè’s invisible light and thought; Olofi, “Proyección de Odumarè en la tierra, ordenador de la fuerza vital, las costumbres y las leyes,” Odumarè’s shadow; and Odumarè Nzame, “Principio creador de la vida y del universo. The rest are Legba, the keeper of the gate to the Spirit World (29); Orúnla, the knower of all destinies (18); Obatalá the son of Olofi; his wife, Odudúa; Aganyú, the very first human; his sister, Yemayá; their son, Orungán; and all the fourteen sons that the latter subsequently father with mother Yemayá: Changó, Omo Oba, Oshún, Oyá, Dada, Olokún, Olosa, Ochosí, Oricha-Oke, Orún, Ayé-Shaluga, Oke, Chankpana, and Ochú (11-15).

Married in turn to one another, each of these orishas is invoked for the special role they play in the Yoruba cosmovision from which the Changó myth emerges. A good example is Ochosí, who is characterized as the “oricha de las flechas y los arcos / perseguidor de jabalíes y panteras / en las oscuras y peligrosas selvas” (14). Another is Orúnla, who is also named as the “señor de la vida y de la muerte” (18). In such capacities, both deities come in handy in the struggle that is expected of the exiles, since the first will literally lead the charge, and the second will decide the number of fatalities the combatants suffer. These details confer on Changó Kete Asante’s sum total of the “codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and

circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data” (Amazing Connections 6).

So, on one side, Changó projects an elaborate cast of sub-Saharan African deities, among whom Changó, the god of lightning, war, and sexuality, is salient. Beginning with the European trans-Atlantic slave trade, the novel attempts an explanation of the reasons for this human tragedy. The general title “Los orígenes” reveals that it is the result of a curse from king Changó of Oyo, in retaliation for his overthrow by his own advisors. This is due to the monarch’s role in the death of a very popular general, Timi, at the hands of another, Gbonka. The two described by the narrator as Changó’s “más hábiles gladiadores” (17), are turned one against the other in a fierce battle “hasta la muerte” (18) thanks to a spell the latter had cast on them. The popularity of the two generals threatens to eclipse the king’s own renown as the intrepid ruler who brought together “los reinos del Níger...hasta donde las luces no alcanzan” (18). The curse specifies that Changó is censured by his subjects and sentenced to banishment by Odumarè, the supreme omnipotent deity. Infuriated by this humiliation, Changó takes vengeance on his children, the Muntu, condemning them to wander in exile and redeem themselves through suffering and bloodshed.⁴³

On the opposite side of the divide, as the narrative moves beyond “Los orígenes,” the story broadens in scope to encompass the events that the accursed exiles encounter upon their arrival at the first of their new homes — Cartagenas de Indias. Titled “El muntu americano,” this portion of Changó focuses on the resistance of the newly arrived slaves to the Catholic Church’s attempt to convert them to Christianity. Whereas the main representatives of this new faith are Father Alonso de Sandoval and Saint Peter Claver, historical figures of New Granada, backed by the Office of the Inquisition, those of the slaves are a diviner known only

as El Babalao, “Sacerdote del culto Vudú” (513), and a child called Benkos Biojo, who was born soon after the ship docked in Cartagena. Both characters are presented in ways that recall the life of Christ and his forerunner, John the Baptist. The Babalao is condemned to die at the stake for crowning Benkos as king of the slaves and for rejecting Christianity and inciting other Ekobios to do the same. Benkos Biojo’s emblem is the sign of Legba, an imprint of two serpents biting their own tails located on his umbilical chord.

While these parallels indeed signal Zapata Olivella’s intent to reinterpret the African-as-Devil image cultivated since the Medieval Hispanic literature “to an Afrocentric advantage” (Captain-Hidalgo, The Culture of Fiction 146), the rebellious attitude of the two bonded men further subverts another stereotype, that of the submissive slave, which has been propagated for an equally long time in the same literature.

We find the Catholic religion, with its numerous saints, its miracles and mysteries, its sacrifices and promised redemption. The Church was invoked whenever the conquest or colonial project was challenged. In myriad places and times in Changó — which spans five centuries and is set virtually all over the Western Hemisphere — the Church is called to task for the unspeakable atrocities committed in its name. Even liturgical Latin is criticized by a narrator as “oscuro trabalenguas” (79). Indoctrination into Christianity is represented as a failed veneer over a deeper, truer symphonic accompaniment of African deities. Furthermore, the Church is characterized as a sham designed to disguise imperialist, territorial, materialistic aims. Despite the injustice implicit in Changó’s wrathful vengeance, indicative of the tragic mode of the novel’s historical dimension, the false spirituality of Catholic conquest prevails, as an attempt among the slaves to storm the Holy Office at the end of Part One of the novel fails.

As repeated readings reveal, however, the simplicity of the Manichean structure eventually gives way to a more nuanced and complex set of relationships. For instance, Islam, too, is taken to task for the role of Muslim slave dealers in the trade in black Africans beginning in the sixteenth century. Organized religion in general is shown to be bankrupt and vacuous, whereas the pantheon of Yoruba and Bantu gods interact constantly and effectively with their living exiled children. In what sounds like an attempt at preaching True Religion, a deceased Congolese narrator reminds us that: “Desde siglos los ngalas de Mossanga hemos resistido a los dioses extraños” (133). As this quotation indicates, one of the most original aspects of *Changó* is the way in which it rewrites significant chapters of pan-African history within a spiritualized framework.

The defiance intensifies when the action moves from Cartagenas de Indias to Haiti. This part of the novel, entitled “La rebelión de los vodús,” deals exclusively with the Haitian revolution, and as Kenrick Mose notes, the novel’s affective perspective continues to be on the side of the African. By narrating scenes from beyond the grave, the novel recasts many familiar and legendary scenes and figures in a different light. This happens with such characters as Jean Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, Toussaint L’Ouverture, Mackandal, Bouckman, LeBaron Samedi — all outstanding participants in the Haitian historical uprising against Napoléon Bonaparte’s imperialist adventure in Haiti.

From the Caribbean, the novel takes us to New Granada, where the focus of the narrative is again the black world, especially the people of mixed ethnicity. In this section, appropriately called “Las sangres encontradas,” there is a suggestion that individuals with white ancestors somehow have a compromised sense of justice. This is certainly the case with Simón Bolívar, known to be of Spanish and Native American heritage, who refuses to

grant freedom to African slaves after using that promise to enlist their support for his independence struggle against Spanish domination.

In the Andean region, Bolívar's counterpoint is Admiral José Prudencio Padilla, an individual of African and Native American ancestry who is shown both within and outside Changó to be free of Bolívar's shortcomings. Padilla's alleged moral superiority over Bolívar can be traced to his connection with the African continent. Like Bouckman and the other reincarnated figures before him, Padilla's birth and destiny as his peoples' liberator have been predicted by the gods and the ancestors (240-41).

Given the fact that the historical Padilla was a naval officer, it comes as no surprise that his role models are Yemayá and Nagó. These are the Yoruba god of the seas and Changó's chosen captain of the slave ship, respectively. Therefore, they bring to the New World's son the benefits of several millennia of personal experience, which also invariably serves to link the geographical spaces into which they were each originally born.

In In Search, Zoggyie, explaining "Why Zapata Olivella portrays the Bolívar figure as shown in Changó," states: "It is my contention that this treatment is a reflection of the author's views of Whites. Much like Guillermo Wilson before him, the Afro-Colombian writer seems to believe that his white characters are morally incomplete unless they are mixed with other ethnic groups, especially black one" (103). Indeed, that Zapata Olivella may harbor this thought is vindicated by his interpretation of the Changó's curse. It is the novelist's view that the New Man envisioned by the deity, the one who would improve the peoples of the Americas, will ideally be a mixture of African, White, and Indian blood, and not the last two alone.

The same conviction motivates Zapata Olivella in successfully converting Mexico, a land

known mostly for Indians and white Spaniards, into one that literally resembles the African continent. In that universe, the revolutionary Father José María Morelos y Pavón prevails, surrounded by nearly the entire pantheon of African and Mexican gods, such as Quetzalcóatl, the Aztec equivalent of Changó.

Changó concludes with “Los Ancestros Combatientes.” The longest of the five parts into which the novel is divided, this portion of the story centers on the United States, specifically its black population. The main character here is Agne Brown, a purely fictional creation, who has been chosen by Changó and Legba to lead the fight for justice. She is aided in this task by such historical personalities as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. (Burghardt) Du Bois, Malcom X, Marcus Garvey, and Martin Luther King, Jr., all African-Americans of note who are given varying degrees of attention. These characters are recontextualized, newly surrounded by the fiery Changó and his relations, such as Yemayá, Ogún, Ngafúa, and Legba. Through the benign intermediation of their Ancestors, the living or once-living characters act following the guidance of these spirits. These deities are characterized as older and more authentic, although perhaps less cunning, than those of the White Wolf, the novel’s term for the fair-skinned Spanish, Portuguese, English, Dutch, and French colonizers.

Rather than advocate pure spirit over physical existence, as a simple binary opposition might have it, Changó posits a collaborative dynamic between the living and their ancestors, the dead who hover about the living and maintain a symbiotic relationship with them. And in another innovative twist to this novel, it is the Africans’ fated duty to liberate not only themselves but all of mankind from their fallen state, for none are deemed free until all are free. The Diaspora is thus recast as a necessary first step to the Muntu’s fanning out over the globe for the liberation of all. In this regard, Ancestor Ngafúa, from his tomb, reminds Agne

Brown that “Sólo rebelándonos los vivos y los muertos a través de todas las sangres cumpliremos la profecía de Changó” (347).

Zapata Olivella continues his method of reclaiming black space in the section dedicated to “El Aleijadinho,” the mulatto sculptor Antônio Francisco Lisboa (1730-1814) from Minas Gerais, Brazil. The title of the chapter in which El Aleijadinho figures —“donde quiera que tus manos sin dedos dejen la huella de tu espíritu” — is the only one in the text where the word “spirit” appears. And in many ways, this character functions as the emblem of a triumph of spirit over matter. The son of a Portuguese artist and an African slave woman with possible Native American mixed blood, this embodiment of mestizaje manages to overcome the agony of leprosy and achieve inner peace. Whereas in earlier episodes a representative of Africanity like Benkos Biojo is represented as clearly opposed to the Catholic Church and the priest Saint Pedro Claver, the relationship between the two spiritual forces here would appear to be that of a creative tension. In the refined blending of the Southern and the Western, where African orichas guide a human hand to allow mulatto Christian saints to emerge from stone, lies the realm of sublimity and beauty, of a victory of the spirit over a diseased body, of authentic religious fervor.

When at the end of his tortured life, El Mestre, as he is known, curls up on his bare boards to reconcile himself with death, he lets out one final utterance: “¡Quita esos clavos de ahí ..!” (462). Those final words give us to understand that, when faced with the choice between the Ancestor Kanuri Mai’s prophecy regarding the birth of a child shortly before El Mestre’s death and the supreme sacrifice implicit in Christ’s nails (clavos), it is the Yoruba worldview that ultimately prevails. Miscegenated saints may provide consolation for millions of displaced Muntu over the centuries, but they amount to no more than a stalling tactic in a

protracted struggle for freedom.

Zapata Olivella continues this singular reunification of Africa and Brazil by transforming Gunga Zumbi into Changó. Since the former is already on record as being a rebel (he is credited with founding the famous Quilombo do Palmares — the freed slave colony — in what is now the State of Bahía), his transformation, like that of Aleijadinho into Kanuri Mai, enables him to internationalize the struggle for black demarginalization by acting in unison with and through the blessings and cooperation of the African monarch turned god.

Corporality and spirituality, antipodes within Christian doctrine, relate in a different way in Changó's cosmology. The difference becomes apparent in considering the myth of the fiery oricha's obscene behavior and eventual banishment. Sensuality and sexuality are integral to both mankind and mankind's gods, especially this god of fertility. Moreover, procreation is the only weapon with which the Africans can counteract the murders perpetrated by the White Wolf. "Sins of the flesh," as they might otherwise be configured, are thus not sins at all, but blessed moments of vital contact with immortality.

Furthermore, there is a gendering of cosmology in the novel, wherein certain traits found in men and women on earth are attributed to their anthropomorphic or gynomorphic deities. The masculine orichas heavily outnumber their feminine counterparts, leaving the text open to accusations of celestial machismo. Female orichas include Yemayá, who is the procreator of the human species and oricha of the tides, rivers, and water in general. She is the daughter of Odudúa, the goddess of the Earth. Ochu, Yemayá's daughter, is the goddess of the moon. In addition to being outnumbered, these feminine deities are thus relegated to the traditional roles of giving birth and nurturing as in "Mother Earth" in the novel, as well as playing a secondary role in the cosmos. Gendered asymmetrically though it may be, the realm of the

spirit in Changó still depends on the living in a way that may be difficult to understand within a Judeo-Christian framework. In statements like “¡No hay Dios más poderoso que la familia del Muntu!” (512) and “Sólo rebelándonos los vivos y los muertos a través de todas las sangres cumpliremos la profecía de Changó” (507), it is clear that within Changó's textual system the spirit counts on the body, on history, and on human solidarity to realize its potential. Without the Muntu, the gods cannot be gods.

The spirit of rebellion and liberation of the downtrodden that prevails in Changó comes full circle when we take into account such statements as “mi padre era ya un difunto cuando me engendró con el mandato de que lo reviviera, libre, con mis guerras” (499). And even more emphatically, this spirit is supported by a secular free will affirmation: “Parace que existe un instante en que Orunlá olvidado de las Tablas de Ifá, permite que el Muntu cambie su destino. Momento de real libertad en que se puede elegir entre rehacerse a sí mismo o continuar siendo la imagen de barro pensada por Odumare” (338). If the living forget or never learn that the struggle for self-affirmation is destined to take place and triumph, if they never partake of the struggle, reaching the desired endpoint may be postponed forever. History, in Zapata Olivella's perspective, is neither a mirage nor a simulacrum. It is fated to be real, concrete, and open-ended. As such, it is also irreversible.

Orality is suggested in the countless neologisms and metaphors that litter Changó as well as the generally succinct manner in which Zapata Olivella expresses his ideas in even non-lyric sections of the novel. All examples of performative language as opposed to the scriptural type, their importance lies in their ability to create what Bill Ashcroft calls a “metonymic gap” in his discussion of contemporary postcolonial discourse. This is the situation in which meaning is no longer determined by the pre-established semantic values of

the contested words, but rather by the context in which they appear. In the specific case of Changó, the discrepancy is between the traditional African concepts that the author is attempting to recapture, suggested especially in the neologisms and metaphors, and the Spanish language in which he does this. Since I plan to explore this subject and the African tradition that finds great endorsement in Changó in the next chapter, namely, the relationship between the living and the dead, I conclude here that Changó is an Afrocentric, performative narrative taken to new heights in Latin American literature.

Notes

¹Said uses the term in Culture and Imperialism 210-16. I use it in my work following Said as part of a spatial metaphor of “overlapping territories” in which the resistant culture must “recover forms already established . . . by the culture of empire” (212). But, as Said sees it, this process is not necessarily tragic. In the instance where the object is to create a comprehensive historical narrative, re-inscription posits an incursion of the subaltern’s speech in the discursive territory of the colonizer. If this incursion repeatedly defines the subaltern in the terms of the colonizer’s discourse, it also erodes the coherence of that discourse to a breaking point where it must be reinvented and the parties of the dialogue (colonizer and subaltern) must reengage with new identities. It is my contention that Changó posits itself as such an experiment at reinventing historical discourse. The same view appears in Coundouriotis’s Claiming History.

²See “Egoism in German Philosophy” in Henry D. Aiken’s The Age of Ideology 51-70.

³See Soyinka’s view in “Ideology and the Social Vision (I)” in Myth, Literature 61-130.

⁴See Soyinka’s concept of “The Poet’s Famous Province” and the social significance of literature in “Ideology and the Social Vision (I)” in Myth, Literature 67.

⁵In Claiming History 20, Coundouriotis stretches Said’s concept of “resistance” in the latter’s Culture and Imperialism to Nawal El Saadawi’s notion of radical “Dissidence”: Resistance, which has been a dominant paradigm in postcolonial studies, often provides a useful entry into the historicity of texts. However, resistance has been theorized mostly in terms of the opposition between Europe and its others (Culture and Imperialism). In Claiming History, Coundouriotis suggests a different paradigm, one of dissidence rather than resistance. According to this critic, dissidence proclaims difference from within. It subverts from within. It orients our attention toward the internal dynamics of a community where it is most difficult to look.

⁶See Northrop Frye’s “Archetypal Theory” in Myth and Metaphor 1-3. See also Frye’s “The Koine of Myth: Myth as a Universally Intelligible Language” in Myth and Metaphor 3-17, which can be summarized as: word “myth” is used in such a variety of contexts that anyone talking about it has to say first of all what his chosen context is. Frye’s context is the one of literary criticism, and to him myth always means, first and primarily, “mythos,” story, plot, narrative. In Frye’s view, the words “story” and “history” were originally identical, but they are now distinguished, and the word “story” seems to lie along an axis extending from history to fantasy. In theory, we have at one extreme the “pure” history which is all “true,” in the sense of being a verbal structure that corresponds closely, or satisfactorily, with events that actually occurred. At the other extreme we have stories that are not intended to possess “truth,” but are “just stories,” which may be fantastic enough to be improbable or so far as we know impossible.

⁷Soyinka’s theory of “Literature of Social Vision” somewhat reflects Leon Trotsky’s view on the social function of literature in Literature and Revolution Trotsky’s principle is that literature written in a situation of revolutionary confrontation cannot but be imbued with the

spirit of social hatred. It cannot tear out of the future that historical component which can only develop as an inseparable part of it. Soyinka argues, however, that it is not necessary to go as far as accepting literature that conveys social hatred. Nonetheless, Soyinka thinks it is logical that literature which sets out to depict the realities of such a situation must reflect that social hatred in the components of the resolution. For Soyinka, literature of social vision is a creative concern which conceptualizes or extends actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions (Myth 66).

⁸A reference to Saussure's "diachronic linguistics," the historical development of words and grammatical structures. A diachronic look into the social situation of blacks in the Americas should be less interested in the meanings of these situations and more interested in how meanings are made possible out of these situations (Saussure's "Analyse diachronique" in Traité de linguistique générale (1916).

⁹See McQuillan's "What is a Narrative?" in The Narrative Reader 1-30.

¹⁰In Books that Changed the World, Robert B. Downs, from Ancient Times to Twentieth Century, did a brilliant examination of the great works that revolutionized our ideas about the universe and ourselves. See especially his "Ideas in the Flow of Civilization" 9-32 and the section "The Book of Books" 32-47.

¹¹See Downs "The Book of Books: The Bible" and "Epic Poet: Homer: Iliad, Odyssey" in Books that Changed the World 32-47.

¹²In introducción de La Araucana we read:

Las razones del renovado interés por el género de la poesía épica en el periodo áureo son ciertamente múltiples y complejas. La primera es la nueva difusión en el Renacimiento de las obras y los géneros practicados por las literaturas clásicas, a través de ediciones y comentarios modernos y de nuevas traducciones. La segunda, que es más bien el resultado de la primera, es la aparición en Italia de obras como el Orlando Furioso (1532) de Ariosto, que ofrecían nuevas posibilidades de renovación artísticas y temáticas para un género inmovilizado por el prestigio de las obras maestras grecolatinas. ... La propuesta presente en la obra de Ariosto no careció de controversia. En efecto, la polémica sobre Ariosto, previa a la publicación de La Araucana, se centró más bien alrededor de las características que la materia caballeresca otorgaba a esta nueva forma de la poesía. Estas novedades temáticas no se aplicaban a los poemas de corte histórico en general.

For more on the innovative meaning of the "controversia caballeresca" of Orlando Furioso on epic, see Weinberg's A History of Literary Criticism.

¹³See "Hegel, Dialectics and History: G. W. Hegel (1770-1831)" in The Age of Ideology 71-82. The analysis of Haakayoo N. Zoggyie titled "Setting The Records Straight" in In Search is an interesting criticism of Hegel's view on history in his Philosophy of History, published in 1856.

¹⁴See the aftermaths of Myth of the Metals in “Philosophic Perspectives: Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism” by Val Plumwood in Ecofeminism 327-52.

¹⁵See Captain-Hidalgo’s development on the New Critic, Russian formalism, Tel Quel group and its nouveau roman writers in “Social Realism Till the Bitter End?” in The Culture of Fiction 43-76.

¹⁶In “The Phenomenon of Changó,” Captain-Hidalgo demonstrates how the Yoruba deity Changó becomes “A New World Phenomenon” through transculturation and transvaluation of values. See Culture of Fiction 134-62.

¹⁷These are the whites who participated in and/or actively supported the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As Zapata Olivella himself says in “Los Ancestros Combatientes: Una Saga Afro-Americanas,” he used the term to distinguish this group of whites from “todos aquellos de sangre caucásica que superando los prejuicios de la raza se alían al africano en su lucha por liberarse” (55). See also In Search 94-95.

¹⁸Deity Oxalá is also called Obatalá. He is the god of creativity. See Zeljan’s “The story of Oxalá.”

¹⁹In Yoruba mythology, the supreme god is called Olorún or Olodumarè. The name Olorún, which is reported to be the most frequent in everyday use, can be translated as “the Owner of Heaven.” The exact meaning of Olodumarè is more difficult to establish, but it probably hints at the unique power and absolute perfection of the supreme god. See “The Myths — A Brief introduction to Yoruba Gods” by Larsen 21-35.

²⁰Quotation from Soyinka’s Myth 8-9.

²¹According to A.B. Ellis in The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa 38, Olorún or Olodumarè is by no means regarded as an omnipotent being, but merely as “the personally divine sky.” In this view, see also Samuel Johnson’s The History of the Yorubas 26, J. Olumide Lucas’s The Religion of the Yorubas 35-6, and J. Omosade Awolalu’s Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites 11.

²²Smart quotes from Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth 179.

²³In his book The Trickster in West Africa, Pelton discusses the origins of the trickster category and credits Daniel Brinton as being the first to use the term to designate this literary figure. See Brinton’s Myths of the New World. In Luisa Ossa’s work “There’s Nothing Underhanded about Liberation,” trickster refers also to the term “mother-fucker” as used by Captain-Hidalgo in Culture of Fiction 132.

²⁴Smart uses “baddest mother-fucker” for the title of his translation of Changó, el gran putas.

²⁵In “There’s Nothing Underhanded About Liberation: A Reevaluation of the Trickster Figure.” in Afro-Hispanic Review 1998, Luisa Ossa reevaluates the trickster figure in various novels by black authors. The trickster combines a number of characteristics into one figure including those that many may view as contradictory. This is what Pelton writes about

trickster: “Daniel Brinton seems to have been the first to give the name ‘trickster’ to the baffling figure of North American Indian mythology and folklore who was a gross deceiver, a crude prankster, a creator of the earth, a shaper of culture, and a fool caught in his own lies. In any event, by the end of the nineteenth century, the term had become standard” (The Trickster in West Africa 6-7).

²⁶Ossa’s “There’s Nothing Underhanded” is a relevant reference on “trickery and tricksterism.”

²⁷I am referring to the Cuban War of Independence, called in the US the Spanish-American War of 1898 in which the Americans allegedly blew up their own battleship, the Maine, as a pretext to declare war on Spain. In the same year, Spain lost Puerto Rico, the island of Guam, and the Philippines

²⁸Referring here to such groups as Africans, Native Americans, the Aborigines of the Pacific Rim, and some Asian peoples, Zoggyie alludes to the fact that, indeed, countries like Japan and the Koreans were never colonized by Europe. As such, these nations did not suffer being the object of Western colonial history. Therefore, their presentation through history is different in the West.

²⁹In the poem, one encounters the following:

Ví, debe de haber tres días, /en las gradas de San Pedro, una tenebrosa boda, /porque era de negros. /Parecía matrimonio /concertado en el infierno /negro esposo y negra esposa /y negro acompañamiento. ... Iban los dos de las manos /como pudieran dos cuervos; /otros dicen como grajos, /porque a grajos van oliendo. ... Llegaron al negro patio /donde está el negro aposento, /en donde la negra boda /ha de tener negro efecto. ... Trujeron muchas morcillas, /y hubo algunos que de miedo /no las comieron, pensando /se comían a sí mismos. ... Negra es la ventura /de aquel casado, /cuya novia es negra /y el dote en blanco. (242-43)

³⁰See Introduction to Gómez de Avellaneda’s Sab and Autobiography 6-21. It focuses on how history is made in colonial Cuba by systematic repression of the voices of the dispossessed in society.

³¹A possible Cuban source could be a long narrative poem, Espejo de paciencia (1608) by Silvestre de Balboa, a Spaniard who lived in Puerto Príncipe. In this poem, the first of known authorship to be composed in Cuba (Barreda 13-14), a courageous black African slave named Salvador saves a bishop from French pirates. Benítez Rojo underscores the importance of this text for the members of the Del Monte group. “The poem was subjected to a romantic reading by Cuban literary critics of the 1830s, who saw in it an opportunity to legitimize their own discourse” (25). By the time the Del Monte group republished the Espejo (1837-1838), however, Avellaneda was already in Spain.

³²See Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux’s El negro en la economía habanera del siglo XIX 11.

³³Other Cuban abolitionist works, such as Suárez y Romero’s Francisco (1835), have similarly submissive heroes. In Schulman’s opinion, this position of restraint corresponded

to the fact that these writers were reformers, not revolutionaries, and also had to deal with the severe censorship on the island, which would not permit a more radical stance.

³⁴In Neither Black nor White (1971), Degler suggests that the mulatto occupies a special place in Brazilian society, neither black nor white. This situation created a “mulatto escape hatch,” by which mulattoes, but not blacks, could rise in the social and economic hierarchy (109). Rejecting such a view, Nelson do Valle Silva’s “Updating the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil,” in Race, Class, and Power in Brazil (1985) 42-55, concludes, based on statistical analyses of racial income differentials in recent decades, that “to consider Blacks and mulattoes as composing a homogeneous ‘nonwhite’ racial group does no violence to reality” (42).

³⁵The “myth of racial democracy,” or the “prejudice of having no prejudice,” are terms used by Florestan Fernandes in The Negro in Brazilian Society (1969). In Black into White 26, Skidmore notes that the famous abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco subscribed to the popular view that Brazil should be “improving” itself eugenically; at the same time, his classic work O Abolicionismo (1883) expresses the idealized view of race relations in Brazil: “slavery, to our good fortune, never embittered the slave’s spirit toward the master, at least collectively, nor did it create between the races that mutual hate which naturally exists between oppressors and oppressed” (107).

³⁶This line of analysis draws on a lecture by Etienne Balibar at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in September 1988.

³⁷See “Poetics of Disalienation” in Zoggyie’s Search 51-52 about “ethnicity improvement.”

³⁸This sub-chapter title derives from my reading of Zoggyie’s analysis on theories of alienation and his own work on disalienation of black in Search of the Fathers, from Fanon’s work on the psychology of the black as a victim of colonization, (Black Skin, White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth), and from Irele’s In Praise of Alienation in which the scholar challenges both Fanon and Senghorian négritude stands on black identity. See also Zoggyie’s new representations of blackness as disalienation in “Antecedents and Successors in In Search 187-88.

³⁹See Val Plumwood’s work on the general concepts of “other” and “self” and the “mastery theory” in narratives in “Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism” 327-53.

⁴⁰ While Felix Geyer recognizes in his Theories of Alienation (1976) the general validity of these and the environment-only arguments in “Individual Alienation,” 189-226, he nonetheless advocates what he terms a “systems-theoretical approach to alienation.” In this theory, groups, processes, and institutions should be seen only as catalysts of the alienating process by virtue of being a part of the estranged person’s environment.

⁴¹See Captain-Hidalgo’s “El Espacio del tiempo,” in Ensayos de Literatura colombiana, ed. Williams 157-63. See also Zapata Olivella’s interesting thought on his own work, “Changó, el dios de la liberación,” in ¡Levántate mulato!, especially 345-46.

⁴²The same works are mentioned by Zoggyie in support of his Afrocentric orientation of In

Search of the Fathers.

⁴³Zapata Olivella defines the Bantu term Muntu in the index of terminologies at the end of Changó as “El concepto implícito en esta palabra trasciende la connotación de hombre, ya que incluye a los vivos y difuntos, así como a los animales, vegetales, minerales y cosas que le sirven. Más que entes o personas, materiales o físicos, alude a la fuerza que une en un sólo nudo al hombre con su ascendencia y descendencia inmersos en el universo presente, pasado, y futuro” (514).

CHAPTER III

NÉGRITUDE, AFRICAN DEITIES, AND THE ABYSS OF DISSOLUTION

In what follows, I shall attempt to show that Yoruba mythology has been an important source of inspiration for the narrative of Changó. Structurally speaking, the novel uses an epic framework, but it does this differently from Alonso de Ercilla's La Araucana or Luís de Camões' Os Lusíadas (both works known as archetypes of epic in Iberian and Latin-American fiction)¹, modifying the traditional form significantly. It is a revision of epic, which shifts the emphasis from birth, destiny, and oracles, from "a monument to a glorious past" to "a call to an historical future" (African Novels 75). This epic frees heroism from time and space because it incarnates the force and virtue of a people. Therefore, my objective is not to prove Changó's similarity to epic but rather to examine how the novel qualifies epic form, to see how the shape of heroism and social change are related to narrative form. I shall also attempt to show that Changó's social vision connects with other black narratives in the revision of epic writing, such as Sambène's Les bouts de bois de Dieu, Armah's Two Thousand Seasons, and Soyinka's The Swamp Dwellers.

Myth is defined as consisting of all its versions; or, to put it otherwise, a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such. An important consequence follows. If a myth is made up of all its variants, structural analysis should take all of them into account. Human society is structured according to a myth; the cosmology of that society reflects the structure of the same myth, and both of them are versions of this myth. Because the final outcome is that the structural law of the myth justifies the *raison-d'être* of the two versions, it is logical to assert

that social life validates cosmology by the latter's similarity of structure.² This is to say that the world of the living is but a visible manifestation of the universe of the dead, and vice versa. In consonance with the phenomenon of liminality and of a contact zone between these two worlds, Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and John Mbiti's explanation of African concept of the universe will serve as theoretical clarification for this part of my dissertation.

Négritude, the Gods, and Africa

Heroism and social vision set Changó apart from négritude because of the latter's lack of a clear and articulate social agenda. While African deities are active on stage in Changó and Two Thousand Seasons, and aim at higher communal goals in their interactions with the living, négritude narrative sings the praise of those deities backward, casting them in the glorious past of Africa. In so doing, the movement petrifies African cosmology with its gods, and, consciously or unconsciously, projects this cosmovision on modern Africa's quest for a social change. In African cosmovision, and particularly in Yoruba world view, the universe of the gods is not isolated from the world of the living community; furthermore, these deities are consulted in a collaborative endeavor to project — “to conceptualize or extend actuality beyond the purely narrative, making it reveal realities beyond the immediately attainable, a concern which upsets orthodox acceptances in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions” (Myth, Literature 66) — the world of the generations to come. For the gods to perform their social function, they are brought down to earth, to human conditions. These gods are not exempt from imperfection and are subject to human judgment, criticism, and, sometimes, to social condemnation, as is the case with the revered deity Changó in Yoruba mythology.

Communal rejection of gods who fail to meet the social requirements assigned to them is common, for instance, in Achebe's novels like Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, where the deities are brought to face the trial of the community before being disavowed. To this end, Soyinka writes in "Ideology and the Social vision (I)" in Myth: "In Achebe's work, the gods are made an expression of the political unity (and disunity) of the people. Their history or measure (or both) testifies to their subjection to secular consciousness. . . . We have learnt already how the people of Anita dealt with their deity when he failed them: carried him to the boundary between them and their neighbors and set fire to him" (94-95).

This is the kind of social action and criticism which solidifies the basis of the community toward a collective well being. Since the dawn of human civilization, God and gods are tools in the hand of man and constitute the source of myth and ritual that shape collective belief and unconsciousness. Négritude narrative blatantly fails to confront God and gods and the mythification of the social structure commensurate with their existence and function. Négritude simply allies itself with the Judeo-Christian praise-singing of God and, by the same token, emulates the singing of those refrains for African deities with the glorification of the past of the "Dark Continent,"³ in allegiance to the romantic prescription of the Western canon. Taking Senghor to task for such blind obedience, in Critical Perspective On Léopold Sédar Senghor, Ezekiel Mphahlele maintains the view that "If African culture is worth anything at all, it should not require myths to prop it up" (35). So the gods are left immune to criticism along with the social structure built around them, and this cosmivision is the one négritude narrative champions for its modern Africa and the Diaspora social vision, if any at all is clearly identified. Mphahlele goes on to remark:

What I do not accept is the way in which too much of the poetry inspired by *négritude* romanticizes Africa — as a symbol of innocence, purity, and artless

primitiveness. I feel insulted when some people imply that Africa is not also a violent, virile Continent. I am a violent person, and proud of it because it is often a healthy human state of mind. ... Don't you know that sometimes I kill to the rhythm of drums and cut the sinews of a baby to cure it of paralysis? (33)

This is only a dramatization of what Africa can do and is doing. The image of Africa consists of all these and others — violence, virility, aggressiveness, phallic erection, and Amazon-like feminine, socio-historical achievements⁴ — and négritude poetry pretends that they do not constitute the image of Africa and leaves them out. So we are told only half — often even a falsified half — of the story of the continent. Sheer romanticism that fails to see the large landscape of the personality of the African makes bad poetry. The omission of these elements of a continent in turmoil reflects a defective poetic vision. The greatest poetry of Senghor is that which portrays in himself the meeting point of Europe and Africa. This is the most realistic, honest, and meaningful symbol of Africa, an ambivalent continent searching for equilibrium. However, this synthesis of Europe and Africa does not necessarily reject the African-ness of Africa.

What have we to say about “benevolent dictatorship,” chauvinists, peasants who find that they have to change a way of life they have cherished for centuries and have to live in the twentieth century?⁵ An image of Africa that glosses over or dismisses these things is not a faithfully conceived one; it restricts black emotional and intellectual response. An image of Africa that only glorifies the ancestors and the gods and celebrates black “purity” and “innocence” is an image of Africa and its Diaspora waiting to be buried.

Négritude: Continuity and “Crise de conscience”

The literature and ideology of négritude were at the beginning historically revolutionary, or at the very least radical. Because they spring from a need to reverse an intolerable

situation, they are moved in the first instance by a negative principle.⁶ They are a challenge to the common lot which Western expansion had imposed on non-Western people, especially the Negro, whose experience — dispersal, subjugation, humiliation — illustrates the worst aspects of contact with the West. For black people had in common an experience which, in the word of James Baldwin, placed their widely dissimilar experience in the same context.

For this, Baldwin writes in Nobody Knows My Name:

What they held in common was their precarious, their unutterably painful reaction to the white world. What they held in common was the necessity to remake the world in their own image, to impose this image on the world, and no longer be controlled by the vision of the world, and of themselves, held by other people. What in sum black men held in common was their ache to come into the world as men. (29)

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that this “ache” should have sometimes developed into an intense collective neurosis, which has reached a paroxysm in movements like those of the Black Muslims in the United States and the Rastafarians in Jamaica.⁷ The dilemma in which history placed the black, and from which the intellectual movements could not escape, was that Negro nationalism of any kind was bound to be even more irrational than any other, for it was to a considerable degree a gesture of despair.

The refusal of Western political and cultural domination in the literature of négritude also represents an attempt to sever the bonds that tie the black to Western civilization. The corollary to this claim for freedom from the West is a search for new values. Revolt becomes not only self-affirmation but also an instrument of self-differentiation.

The quest for new values leads the black writer to self-definition in terms that are non-Western, and association between the black race and Africa acquires a new meaning: instead of being a source of shame, it becomes a source of pride. This is the ultimate end of négritude, and much of the literature is dedicated to a rehabilitation of Africa, a way of refurbishing the image of the black person. As well as being a counter to the Negro’s

inferiority complex, the psychological function of this is to permit an open and unashamed identification with the continent, a poetic sublimation of those associations in the Negro's mind which constitute a source of mental conflict in his/her relationship with Western culture: a process of self-avowal and self-recognition. This view of the movement is best justified by the writings of West Indians, whose collective repression of Africa has been the more painful, as reflected in Jacques Roumain's Bois d'ébène: "Afrique, j'ai préservé ta mémoire, Afrique / tu es en moi / comme un tesson dans une blessure / comme un totem dans le coeur d'un village" (5). In consequence, out of négritude a myth of Africa developed which involved a glorification of the African past and a nostalgia for the imaginary beauty and harmony of traditional African society, as in Camara Laye's evocation of his African childhood in L'Enfant noir (1953).

This strain in négritude is probably charged with the greatest emotional force. Senghor, for instance, infuses into his well-known love poem, Femme noire, a feeling that is more filial than erotic, due to his identification of the continent with the idea of woman, in a way that lends to the image of Africa the force of a mother figure, as sung in:

Femme nue, femme noire / Vêtue de ta couleur qui est vie, de ta forme qui est beauté! / J'ai grandi à ton ombre, la douceur de tes mains bandait mes yeux. / Et voilà qu'au Coeur de l'été et de midi, je te découvre terre promise du haut d'un haut col calciné / Et ta beauté me foudroie en plein coeur comme l'éclair d'un / Aigle.

Femme nue, femme noire! / Je chante ta beauté qui passe, forme que je fixe dans l'éternel / Avant que le destin jaloux ne te réduise en cendres pour nourrir les raciness de la vie. (151)

The negative aspect of the reaction of the black to white rule has left a mark on négritude, even in its development of positive perspectives. A contradiction, purely emotional in origin, bedevils the movement, which, in its crusade for the total emancipation of black people, has sought to comprise within a single cultural vision the different historical experiences of black

societies and nations. Baldwin criticizes this totalizing attitude of négritude when he remarks in a most moving essay in an issue of The New York Times (November 1962) that “the negro must solve his problem inside America, not by a romantic identification with Africa” (32).

Indeed, the terms of definition of négritude are, as Baldwin and Cheikh Anta Diop have remarked, precisely those of Gobineau,⁸ which denigrate the Negro as “la créature mélanienne dont l’art ne demande rien à la partie pensante du cerveau” (African Novels 8), with the difference that they are now seen as positive and essential to world humanism.⁹ Consciously or unconsciously, the Senghorian négritude essentializes the Negro. In so doing, it falls into the prevailing, deterministic categorization of black represented as endowed with the spirit of poetry and spontaneity, and as devoid of intelligence, rationality, and sense of synthetic analysis, an image of the Negro portrayed by Gobineau and anthropologists of racial determinism in the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly, as the anti-négritude writers have pointed out, precolonial Africa is in this view a happy world, a better world, a universe of a priori goodness and harmony, Senghor’s “kingdom of childhood” (Poèmes 12-13), where the black presumably lived with no alienation, happy in his village, out of contact with whites. Thus Senghor’s poems are studded with symbols of that world among which orality and sound, marks of négritude, are preeminent.

The point is not that Senghor and his followers are wrong to present the movement in their particular way. It is rather that their négritude only identifies the supposedly idyllic, true, pure nature of African life before the stain of colonialism. Thus the Dahomean philosopher Paulin Hountondji refers to the complicity in the 1930s and 1940s “between Third World nationalists and ‘progressive’ Western anthropologists. For years they will assist each other,

the former using the latter in support of their cultural claims, the latter using the former to buttress their pluralistic theses” (159).

It is ambiguous, even baffling, why Senghor and his generation of négritude intelligentsia, who were out to preach the revolt of black against the domination of the colonial power in order to liberate himself/herself, would create a discursive universe from which Africa’s phallic aggressiveness was totally obliterated for such effeminizing attributes as tenderness, gentleness, and dove beauty. Had Africa and socio-visionary goddesses of the caliber of Yemayá, Nagó, Iyáa, and Oyá, who people the African world of Changó, for instance, ever existed in the Senghorian négritude jeremiads co-opted and applauded in the imperialist ideological circles? At this juncture, a critical look into négritude reveals that the movement, pretending in its initial steps to be a responsive, cultural adjustment of the black to modern civilization, had quickly been appropriated, diverted from its liberationist trajectory, and inoculated with a myth that blinded the French-speaking black intelligentsia into accepting, de facto, Sartre’s thesis of white supremacy and black inferiority. The myth and the thesis found their way into a literary discourse in the form of poetry as opposed to the novel and, therefore, shaped the ideology of négritude, which obscured and mortgaged the emancipation of the black in Africa and sowed the germs of cultural and ideological confusion in the Diaspora. It is in this framework of criticism that we should understand Fanon’s stand vis-à-vis the movement in Les damnés de la terre and Peau noire, masques blancs.

In the same line of criticism, Sartre’s preface to Senghor’s Anthologie, titled “Orphée noir,” appears as a testimony to the naivety and market of dupe in which the colonial power (France) trapped the essence of the expression of the colonized people’s — the oppressed black’s, more precisely — will to liberation. Greek mythology has it that Orpheus could

even charm the most ferocious of beasts. But when he descended to the underworld to save Eurydice and bring her back to the world of the living, he failed in his mission and was killed by the angry Bacchantes. In the development of the preface, Sartre even concludes that négritude is not born to stay and that it will disappear in the process of the assimilation of the black racial consciousness into the world proletariat. So, since the fate of négritude was prophesied in such a bleak outlook, why did we accept Sartre's contribution to the foundation of négritude and his premonitory preface to the Anthologie? Is it a conscious or an unconscious acceptance of the definition of the destiny of the movement that pretended to be the canon of the black narrative, or a deliberate conniving of the Third World nationalists with the so-called metropolitan progressists toward the neo-colonialism that dawned on the Developing World right after Decolonization?

It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss the movement as a futile and sectarian obsession with self — a kind of black narcissism. In the larger context of black experience, négritude, in its initial form of négritude in the Americas, represents the ultimate and most stable point of self-awareness, as suggested by the history of black resistance to slavery and domination. For although its expression has sometimes been exaggerated, the movement has always had an intellectual content. In the African political context, its role as the ideological spear point of African nationalism has been sufficiently emphasized. But I will go along with Irele to state that the movement's significance in the cultural and social evolution of Africa and of the Diaspora is yet to be appreciated.

Négritude represents both an African "crise de conscience" and its most significant modern expression, studded with contradictions; it is the watershed that marks the emergence of a modern African consciousness. At times, the movement tends to blur its vision with

“messianism.” African messianism and négritude represent the ritualistic and the intellectual facet of the reaction to the same historical, social, and cultural situation. In African messianism, tradition remains the basis of social behavior, despite borrowings from western religion, which are absorbed only so far as they will fit in.¹⁰ The reverse is true of négritude: despite its championing of non-rational tradition, it remains rigidly rational. Senghor’s négritude, for example, is an anti-intellectualism mediated by the intellect, and the whole movement is expressed through a Western mold which absorbs African realities. In short, négritude is a break with African tradition: although African in content, it is Western in its formal expression, according to Irele.

African Deities and the Abyss of Dissolution

Black traditional art is not ideational but essential: it is not the idea (in religious arts) that is transmitted into wood or interpreted in music or movement, but a quintessence of inner being, a symbolic interaction of the many aspects of revelations with their moral and social apprehension.

The first actor in the abyss of dissolution in Yoruba cosmology — for he led the others — was Ogún, first suffering deity, creative energy, the first challenger, and conqueror of transition. In Yoruba mythology, the complementary drama of Obatala is the plastic resolution of Ogún’s tragic engagement in the social becoming’s journey and quest. This means that, for instance, referring to Soyinka’s view in Myth, the rebellion of Ogún is, as Obiechina also remarks in Culture (1975), a prerequisite for “the serene self-awareness of Obatala”¹⁰ to be able to exert its creative influence. Not until the tragic hero, Ogún, has made his sacrifice can harmony re-enter the world and Obatala’s creativity prosper.

The metaphysics of quiet, accommodating acceptance of the imposed social status quo and the collective determination to overthrow such an establishment and attempt to extend the boundaries of individual and social freedom of thought and action that we witness in Changó, Les bouts de bois de Dieu, Two Thousand Seasons, and The Swamp Dwellers, could only come after the passage of the god-like characters of these socio-visionary novels through the transitional gulf, or through a difficult rite of passage and self-sacrifice to their communities, in the image of Ogún, whose vicarious sufferings make him, in Soyinka's terms, "the explorer-god in the creative cauldron of cosmic powers" (Myth 145). Through his redemptive action, Ogún became the first symbol of the alliance of disparities when, from earth itself, he extracted elements for the subjugation of chthonic chaos. In social consciousness, the votary's psyche reaches out beyond the realm of nothingness, the spiritual chaos which is potentially destructive of human awareness, through blind energies into a ritual empathy with the gods, the eternal presence, who once preceded him in parallel awareness of their own incompleteness. Ritual anguish is therefore experienced as that primal transmission of the god's despair. That initial, Christ-like, redemptive experience cannot be captured in words. For the protagonist, there is only the certainty of the experience of the abyss—the hero plunges into it and is redeemed only by action, and yet in spite of it he is forever lost in the maul of a tragic tyranny.

Acting is therefore a contradiction of the creative spirit, yet it is also its complement, according to Soyinka. To act, the Promethean instinct of rebellion channels anguish into a creative purpose which releases man from a destructive despair, releasing from within him the most energetic, deeply combative inventions which bridge the infernal gulf with visionary hopes. Only the battle of the will is thus creative, and from its spiritual stress

springs the force that usurps the powers of the abyss. In Senghorian négritude narrative, African gods are locked up in their ivory towers and are sung for their black authenticity. I will try to demonstrate, in the comparative development that follows, how Changó shares its epic values with Sambène's Les bouts de bois, Soyinka's The Swamp Dwellers, and Armah's Two Thousand Seasons. I choose to parallel these narratives with Changó because they transcend time and space in their visions, and, like Changó, they are revisions of epic writing with a social concern.

Epics in the Tradition of African Deities and The Abyss of Transition

It is on the democratization of epic in these black novels that I will focus this chapter of my work. Changó, Les bouts de bois, Two Thousand Seasons, and The Swamp Dwellers attempt something more than most black novels. For a sense of oneness among people of African descent, Changó does for the whole of the Americas what Alex Haley's Roots accomplished for the United States and only indirectly achieved for the entire African Diaspora. In fact, Zapata Olivella states clearly, according to Captain-Hidalgo, that he needed to write a novel with the epic stature of Western works like The Divine Comedy, the Iliad, and The Lusiads to acknowledge the resilience and humanity of African Americans. While the idea of the epic had been present in this writer since the 1940s, it did not come to fruition until the 1980s.

In keeping with the idea of developing an epic, Changó treats on a large scale figures and events prominent in recorded history. In addition, the characters are heroic in a mythic sense, far beyond the capacities of mere human beings. Not only is the novel peopled with historical figures but also with those from the mythologies of various regions of the world,

particularly African and African-American. The author complements characterization with the invention of figures from his own creative repertoire.

There is also general agreement among readers and critics of African literature that Les bouts de bois and Two Thousand Seasons accomplished more than most African novels. In The Growth of the African Novel (1979), Palmer calls them “stories of ... epic proportions” (10). Soyinka says in Myth that these are works which reach beyond “mere narrative in their meticulous delineation of human strengths and weaknesses, heroism and communal solidarity, and they attain epic levels” (117). He goes on to write, “As with all good epics, humanity is recreated” (Myth 117). Soyinka’s disparaging comment on “mere narrative” notwithstanding, one may infer that he regards the novels as narratives whose focus is larger than the experience of the solitary individual.

This sense of something epic in Changó, Les bouts de bois, Two Thousand Seasons, and The Swamp Dwellers is rich in implications. First of all, genres of narrative are “logical” categories, and in any single narrative itself, categories may and do overlap. In this respect, Bakhtin argues that the novel is by definition that genre which incorporates and parodies other genres. Still more important, to signal an epic impulse — to assert something larger — in the novels is not necessarily to project them into a nostalgic past. Nor does it necessarily mean that narrative categories themselves are essentially of one culture or another. The epic self of Changó or of The Swamp Dwellers, for instance, does not suggest a particular Africanness, a cultural imperative, but rather the working out of a particular issue, revelation of subjugating forces in society and ideas about the liberation of individual and collective thought from these repressive, mythic elaborations. The fact that Zapata Olivella, Sambène, Armah, and Soyinka’s previous novels do not reveal epic structure and aspirations

substantiates this hypothesis. Their choice of design, regardless of their abilities or willingness to name it epic, is the consequence not of the hero's birth or the dictates of literary tradition, or even of chance, but of a particular sense of society and social transformation.¹¹

It will be recalled that narrative structures of legend and myth which predate historical events provide structures for understanding and enshrining those events; they accommodate new raw material. In this exchange, events take on, wrap themselves in the seemingly atemporal authority of myth and legend, which are transformed by the new conditions they obtain. And so the structures of myth and legend are perpetuated in new stories. The tradition lives on as it bends to new substance, and events are perceived in the context of a society's history and past, in continuity and harmony with its deepest, most resonant chords. This, in my view, is the case of Changó, Les bouts de bois, Two Thousand Seasons, and The Swamp Dwellers. These narratives appropriate and alter the structure of epic for their not-so-distant subjects: slavery and its aftermath in Changó and Two Thousand Seasons, corruption and socio-racial discrimination in Les bout de bois and The Swamp Dwellers. Considering the historical and the socio-visionary character of the 1947-48 strike of the Dakar-Bamako railway workers, Les bouts de bois and the other novels of my analysis stand against the Senghorian négritude narrative, the epic example of D. T. Niane's Soundjata and Laye's novel Maître de la parole, for instance.¹² Not implicitly nostalgic for past days of glory and authority, Changó, Two Thousand, The Swamp, and Les bouts de bois distinguish themselves from Soundjata epic; they are historical and socio-visionary. I want to reiterate the point that the reference to epic is an effective design for particular ends — ends which may be inferred from the text and not necessarily those “intended” by the author — and not a

necessary and purely “aesthetic” (that is, functionless) heritage from the traditional storyteller.

By Mohamadou Kane’s definition of the cluster of traits of the traditional tale — unity of action, linear progression, and the single protagonist — the novels under analysis cannot be characterized as being derived from traditional form. Yet, like the Soudjata epic, they depict, each in its own way, the battle of a society against an external aggressor, they focus on the hero and his helpers, and they herald the dawn of a new age and new visions. Let us examine these points of similarity and the novels’ modification of them.

Who Are Agne Brown, Bakayoko, Isanusi, and Igwezu?

Changó, Les bouts de bois, Two Thousand Seasons, and The Swamp Dwellers do not privilege origins and heritage: Agne Brown, Bakayoko, Inusa, and Igwezu’s grandeur is a grandeur of the soul. Their authorities are justified by neither birth nor nobility but rather by personal qualities of intelligence and vision. The basis of their authorities thus cannot be situated by the text either in a village or kingdom or in their ties to deity or in genealogy, as they are for a Soudjata; thus there can be no appeal to prophecy, no predictions of the protagonists’ power.

Agne Brown

Changó highlights the struggles of the African Americans from each historical moment of the Americas. Furthermore, an analysis of the last section of the novel, “¡Oye: los Orichas están furiosos!” (480-511) shows a narration adamantly dialogic about the concept of an African Diaspora. Unlike the prior segments of the novel, the people of the region in

question never become the sole focus point. In fact, what helps the novel achieve one long discursive comment on the Afro-Americas is the undergirding of that chapter with surprisingly minute historical details concerning the other regions. While the characters from the twentieth-century United States show impressive stature, their ancestors from the beginning of the United States, as well as from Latin America and the West Indies, remain with them to aid in their current struggle.

However, the uniqueness of the group from the United States is important in Changó, especially in its last portion. The novel's structure implies that a locale like Harlem was necessary to a true sense of the Diaspora. After all, it is in this final moment and place of the text that all prior narrations converge together. The protagonists of the previous sections lend dialogic support to those living in the present, particularly in Harlem. Finally, the character who receives the most focus in this last section is the embodied hope of that self-recognition, Agne Brown, to whom I will return in my analysis of the "Metonymic Ship" metaphor of the Black Atlantic at the end of this chapter. Ancestor Ngafúa, on behalf of the dead, living, and future generations, presents Agne Brown and her liberating assignment as follows: "Agne Brown, soy Ngafúa, mensajero de Changó. Te hablo con los ojos invisibles de tus Ancestros aquí presentes: Changó, entre todos los ekobios, te ha escogido a ti: mujer, hija, hermana y amante para que reunas la rota, perseguida, asesinada familia del Muntu en la gran caldera de todas las sangres (342).

Thus David, Salomon and other biblical character-like, Agne Brown is chosen by Changó to carry out his mission in North America. Through literary flashbacks, the spirit of Changó revisits the history of Africans in the United States beginning with slavery. It is through the instructional encounters with the historical ancestors that Agne is equipped for her task.

Thus, Agne becomes the channel through which the author fulfills his literary goal as she is transported through time by the spiritual messenger of Changó for the purpose of learning and preparation. As she prepares for the journey, through the abyss of transition, Agne is told to breathe the fresh air of the beginning of her new life, to forget the brand that white people put on her soul.¹³ This new life is one that is defined by a postmodern liberationist ideology as suggested by Lewis and Smart.

In Amazing Connections (1996), Smart proposes that Zapata Olivella's novelistic intent is to evoke the idea of liberationist literature. To this end, he states: "Zapata's creative intention is quite clear; his novel is meant to construct an African mythological framework that will explicate not merely his fictional universe but, more pertinently, the real world" (115). Smart clearly delineates the two focal points of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction: fiction and reality. He goes on to elaborate on Chango's reflexive nature by pointing out that it is "self-consciously liberationist" (115), highlighting the fact that the identity of the novel as a liberationist work was a predetermined motive of the author which draws attention to Chango's fictionality.

In the same line of thought, in Treading the Ebony Path (1987), Lewis devotes a chapter to "From Oppression to Liberation." In Lewis's opinion, a major thematic preoccupation of the literary aesthetic of Zapata Olivella is that of liberation: social, political, and economic. The two perspectives on Changó, offered by Smart and Lewis, echo the work's objective to fictionalize the historical journey of the African Diaspora in the Americas toward social liberation, which, following Tillis, I interpret in my work as a postmodern subversive aesthetic of Changó. Even in Culture of Fiction, Captain-Hidalgo supports the novel's

liberationist vision as she writes: “Changó ... through a narrative iteration manages to repeat in an engaging fashion the attempts of a people to win their freedom” (154).

In this vein, Agne Brown is instructed to “deconstruct” the oppressive mental strongholds with which the institution of slavery has imprisoned her soul and her people. She soon realizes that in order to acquire the freedom suggested by Changó, she must liberate herself through a process of self-reconstruction as she frees herself from the crippling negative memories of her own past and of her people. During this process of deconstructing in order to reconstruct, linear chronology is disrupted as the present unites with the past, creating an unbroken continuous present.

Defiance also marks the last quarter of Changó, which deals mostly with the twentieth-century United States, the decade of the sixties, to be precise. Agne Brown, who is the main protagonist here, tells a group of brothers and sisters:

Me dirijo a vosotros, ekobios que me escucháis. No a los Blancos sordos. No vengo a predicar paciencia ni resignación ni vanas esperanzas: les anuncio el culto de la Vida y las Sombras que inspiran la rebeldía que hay en nosotros los Negros. Más allá sólo perdura el eco de los sueños. Pero oídlo bien, vida y rebelión no existen sin la presencia de los muertos. Somos la fuerza de todo lo que fue y la fuente poderosa de todo lo que será. (346)

While the passage parodies such key tenets of the Judeo-Christian faith as Non-Violence and Paradise, it should be noted that Agne Brown has not been a follower of African traditional religion. Before Changó hand-picked her, she belonged to a Christian Church. Agne Brown can therefore be said to be the Babalao and Benkos Biojo reincarnated. She carries on the tradition they so proudly followed in the days of the Inquisition, that of preserving traditional African spirituality in the New World. Her dedication to this mission is intimated in the statement she makes to Dr. Harrington, her former professor of anthropology, soon after giving the speech cited above:

No puedo negarle que tengo razones para preferir la tradición afriacana a la anglosajona, primordialmente, porque soy una Negra Americana. Nos afirmamos en la hermandad del Muntú preconizada por los Orichas africanos y en las luchas de nuestros Ancestros en las plantaciones, en los slums, en las fábricas, donde quiera que Changó encienda su rebelión. (349)

Agne Brown is not alone in this revolt against Christianity. She is aided by hundreds of other black Americans, among them a single mother of five called Dorothy Wright, who is charged along with Brown with spreading a false and dangerous religion. This is, of course, the “Cult of Life and the Shadows” that the latter announced earlier.

It is hardly an accident that Zapata Olivella’s choice for such a huge task as the cultural liberation of American blacks should fall on women. Zapata has been at the forefront of the fight for the equality and dignity of women in general and that of black woman in particular. We see this in his characterization of women in his other so-called black works: He visto la noche (1953), Chambacú, corral de negros (1967), and ¡Levántate mulato! “Por mi raza hablará el espíritu” (1990). In all these texts, Zapata Olivella consistently, presents women as indispensable for the survival and progress of the communities in which they live. Here are some words in which Captain-Hidalgo depicts Agne Brown in Literatura y Cultura: “Agne Brown, de Changó, el gran putas, es la representación máxima de la mujer involucrada en las luchas de la diáspora negra en el contexto de la obra de Zapata Olivella. Su creación está basada en la figura histórica de Ángela Davis. A diferencia de los líderes anteriores, Agne comprende bien la situación que afronta; es capaz de alcanzar sus metas” (161-62).

The defense of black identity in Changó comes in the form of the anti-slavery and anti-Christianity struggles in which the female characters engage. Starting with the revolts aboard the metonymic slave ship through the inquisitional trials in Cartagenas to the anti-slavery and civil rights struggles in the United States, these women defend their ethnicity by responding

to the call to preserve the African heritage as well as secure justice for blacks. Agne epitomizes historical female figures such as Harriet Tubman, well known for her Moses mission¹⁴ for the emancipation of black slaves starting with herself, and Sojourner Truth,¹⁵ who is counted among the founding mothers of the contemporary American feminist movement. As the twentieth-century equivalent of the two women, Agne Brown pursues the fight for justice in both the political and cultural arenas. Politically, she engages in the wars that Changó has ordered, and culturally, she promotes the African religious revivals, missions she inherited from Dorothy Wright and Harriet Tubman.

Throughout Changó, one notes a conscious attempt to rewrite Diaspora Africans back into the history of the Americas. Long ignored by mainstream historians because of the Hegelian definition of who or what makes legitimate history, these individuals and their achievements are aggressively showcased in the narrative, mainly as a way of forcing the majority non-black cultures to acknowledge this component of the New World population. This effort finds concrete expression in Benkos Biojo's unusual knowledge of Catholic Scripture and the personal achievements of people like José Prudencio Padilla, Father María Morelos y Pavón, General Antonio Maceo, Jean Jacques Desalines, Henri Christophe, Toussaint L'Ouverutre, Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcom X, and the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals and artists who populate Changó.

Along these lines are W.E.B. Du Bois and Harriet Tubman's renditions of American history to Agne Brown, designed not only to show the often-elided African players to his non-black audience but also to rewrite these blacks back into existence, into visibility. This explains why Zapata Olivella has the Tubman character, in particular, repeatedly tell Agne

Brown: “Es preciso que te cuente estas cosas ...para que puedas comprender lo que pasó en Fort Pillow” (445, 447).¹⁶

The case Agne Brown represents is for the “negotiations” that Homi Bhabha advocates with regard to the construction of identity in a multiethnic and multicultural society, where Brown adopts a “culturally-in-between” approach to the lost self. The sense of the liminal manifests itself in Agne Brown as an interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area which distinguishes the liminal from the more definite word “limit” to which it is related. Projected in this post-colonial line of thought, Agne Brown represents the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal selfhood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states. As such, Agne Brown’s effort of self-identification cannot simply be a movement from one identity to another. It is a constant process of engagement, contestation, and appropriation.

Also, Agne’s critical look into the social fabric of the United States epitomizes Zapata Olivella’s stand on the situation of the oppressed minorities as a universal experience and not a uniquely black problem. This is articulated in statements like : “La Loba Blanca ha querido identificar el alma del Negro con el color de nuestra piel, pero se equivoca, el rostro del Muntú refleja el alma de todos los seres humanos, como hermanos son todos los que se alimentan de nuestro espíritu” (460); and “No habrá América, ni África, ni ninguna parte del mundo libre, mientras en nuestro país haya un solo Negro, Indio o Blanco oprimido” (479). Appearing, as they do, in a novel that gives so much centrality to Diaspora Africans and their ancestral heritage, the question that comes to mind is why Zapata Olivella should care at all about the issues raised in them.

The answer comes from the author himself. In an interview he granted Mardella Harris on March 1, 1991, he had this to say about the question of cultural identity, which is, after all, the central thesis of Changó:

Para mí la identidad cultural no es una simple historia de hechos, de acontecimientos, heredados o impuestos de la cultura que en un determinado momento forman un marco de referencia determinado que identifican a sí mismo como si mirara en un espejo. Para mí la identidad es un fenómeno dinámico. Es una forma viva que está reaccionando permanentemente frente a los fenómenos de la naturaleza y de la sociedad. Por lo tanto, esa identidad cultural es cambiante. (59)

Allegorically, Agne Brown is Zapata Olivella's metonymic mouthpiece of the fluid notion of cultural identity, one that responds to the demands and realities of given historical periods and specific geographic circumstances. Consequently, a monolithic representation of Diaspora Africans would have negated this basic truism and constituted what Homi Bhabha calls "the ultimate misrecognition of Man" in his discussion of the theme of alienation in the works of Fanon (The Location of Culture 43).

Agne Brown is a more spiritual, more intellectual, and symbolic conceptualization of a liberation struggle than Bakayoko in God's Bits of Wood, Inusa in Two Thousand Seasons, and Igwezu in The Swamp Dwellers. In other words, Agne Brown personifies Zapata Olivella's dialogue on identity that does not simply demand "a change of cultural contents and symbols, but which is a radical revision of the social temporality in which emergent histories may be written, the rearticulation of the 'sign' in which cultural identities may be inscribed" (Bhabha, The Location of Cultures 171).

Bakayoko

Like in Changó, it is paradoxically the absence of Bakayoko in the first two thirds of the story that accords him his extraordinary power over the other strikers and the reader of Les

bouts de bois. Since Bakayoko cannot be depicted as he who is destined to be great, he is made such instead by the voice of other characters from Thiès to Bamako to Dakar — a fitting measure in a novel of social transformation such as Les bouts de bois — since it is the esteem of his people which elevates Bakayoko and not a specious birthright. He is made present to all in the reiteration of his words, which, like new “proverbs,” punctuate the narrative and legitimize the other characters’ decisions and actions. In the novel, Keita states: “Il y a quelque temps Ibrahima Bakayoko me disait: ‘Non seulement nous ferons le grand brassage dans ce pays, mais encore nous le ferons avec ceux de l’autre bord du grand fleuve’” (154). In the same vein, Samba says: “Bakayoko a dit: ‘Ce ne sont pas ceux qui sont pris par force, enchaînés et vendus comme esclaves qui sont les vrais esclaves, ce sont ceux qui acceptent moralement et physiquement de l’être’” (45).

Bakayoko is the point of reference, the buoy in the ocean of ideas that now dominates the strikers’ lives and thoughts. He is present in the rumors of his vision and moral bravery that circulate endlessly among his admirers. We understand this in Daouda’s summary as: “Quel était donc ce Bakayoko, on aurait dit que son ombre était sur chaque chose, dans chaque maison; dans les phrases des autres, on retrouvait ses phrases, dans leurs idées ses idées à lui, et mon [sic] nom même se répétait partout comme un écho” (110). Absent physically, he is all the more present and powerful because he dominates the moral vision of the strikers.

A further consequence of Bakayoko’s physical absence during most of the story is a sense of suspense and expectation on the part of characters and the readers by which his stature and talents can be gauged; when he finally appears, an air of enigma surrounds him. There is a lack of emphasis on the private detail of his life, and there is an insistence instead on Bakayoko’s singularity of purpose and vision, a treatment that is perplexing. And it is this

enigmatic personality which contributes to Bakayoko's stature as an epic hero. But we know that individuals make up the popular movement in Sambène's story. And to say that Bakayoko or any other character is an individual, and even more a hero, is not to deny the force of collectivity. Clearly, there could be no strike, no change, without the people, nor can Bakayoko's particularity and role in the narrative be ignored or wished away. Bakayoko should be viewed as being, on the one hand, in a special relationship to his people, and, on the other hand, distinctive, full of determination and vision. Soyinka describes these two dimensions of Bakayoko in the story in this way:

Bakayoko is a Promethean creation. ... Amoral in the mundane sense of the word, Bakayoko appears to be sculpted out of pure intellect and omniscience. ... Because Bakayoko is portrayed as understanding and controlling the future ... he supersedes all existing moral authority. The portraiture ... is somewhat romanticized — necessarily so. He is a man of mystery ... and dominating to all. He represents a gifted world. ... He tends to the poetic, and his perception of the world takes from his own innate grandeur. ... Thus, the world and his people are constantly transformed with his own reflective glow. (117)

Unlike Agne Brown, Bakayoko shows a singularity atypical in fiction of epic kind, and Northrop Frye's distinctions help to demonstrate why. The protagonist of most realistic fiction — the novels under analysis in this chapter are realistic narratives — according to Frye, is “superior neither to other men nor to his environment but is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand...the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience” (33). Bakayoko, on the other hand, is the protagonist who is “superior in degree to other men but not to his natural environment...a leader. He has authority, passions, and powers of expression far greater than ours, but what he does is subject both to social criticism and to the order of nature.” This, Frye contends, is the hero of most epic and tragedy (33-34). Because the hero heralds the dawn of a new age, and because that transformation requires an agent of vision, ability, and great appeal to those around him,

he must be magnetic, charismatic, to forge the many wills and destinies into one. Bakayoko is thus like the hero of the epic and takes us by surprise in a novel such as Les bout de bois that is epic in its own way.

I agree with Soyinka that Bakayoko is not a “cloud-treading deity” (Myth 117); his strength lies in a realistic location within an embattled humanity. His touches on traditional mores and relationships are subtle but telling; they never harbor a suspicion of the exotic but emerge naturally from the actualities that surround him. This is why, at a crucial rally in Dakar, just before he mounts the platform, an old woman comes up to him and asks if he still has a mother. Bakayoko says he has none. “From today on, then” she says simply, “I will be your mother. ...If you stay in Dakar, my son, come to live with me. There will always be a place for you” (317-18).

It is once again neither birth nor blood lineage but the baptism by fire in collective action that forges and extends familial bonds. Fatou Wade’s symbolic adoption of Bakayoko suggests that this protagonist belongs to the people, whose desire and will he embodies. Bakayoko’s moral vision is the promise of their future.

Isanusi’s Performance

In Two Thousand Seasons, fortunately, Ayi Kwei Armah has an antidote for the misdeeds of the likes of Kamuzu, Bradford George, Koranche, and the Otumfurs of Africa and the Diaspora,¹⁷ and it lies in the teachings of the character Isanusi and the revolt of the youth whom he inspires. Isanusi is not just a character — an individual — but an image, “a metaphor for hidden leadership qualities gorgeously amplified,” as Ode Ogede asserts in Ayi Kwei Armah: Radical Iconoclast (105).

Having first emerged to speak against the evils of lust, when King Koranche had attempted to force Idawa into a marriage she did not want with him, Isanusi is ostracized from the community and forced into exile, from where he continues to pursue the liberation effort by raising the consciousness of the society against colonialism. The meeting of the younger generation of Africans, who seek out Isanusi in his hideout in the sacred grove after their successful revolt against enslavement, is the coming to fruition of a big dream.

In the sacred forest, Isanusi is bathing in the beautiful water of Anoa, accompanied by Idawa, who has rendered herself worthy of his company through the vision she displayed by rejecting King Koranche and the obscene glamour of the court. Radiating a beauty matched only by the spiritual force he embodies, Isanusi's brief disappearance from the sight of Idawa and the young people who accompanied her, however, indicates that they are not yet worthy of his company. Thus, when the protagonists drink of the cleansing water of Anoa, in which Isanusi swims, they, by so doing, achieve their spiritual cleansing, and Isanusi reemerges with Idawa and the revolutionaries reunite.

Like Zapata Olivella, Sambène, and Soyinka, Armah is concerned primarily with a communal event, and the names of his revolutionaries, who are chosen from all parts of Africa, from myth and history — in the vein of Changó — reflect the originality of this writer's vision: the pan-Africanist formation he wishes to promote, and his inventiveness. The names of the protagonists allow their partition into two generations of African liberation fighters. The second generation, according to Okpewho are “all names that have great symbolic value in contemporary African life” (African Oral Literature 13). Noteworthy is the fact that it is the meeting of the two generations that enables the older fighters to pass on

their knowledge of military warfare to the younger people, and that validates Armah's belief in the value of cooperation.

In the novel, there is a clear acknowledgement of the importance of good leadership, and it is Isanusi who plays this role with the greatest amount of integrity. Before he exhausts his usefulness, Isanusi restates the main objectives of the revolution as follows:

It is our destiny not to flee the predator's thrust, not to seek hiding places from destroyers left triumphant; but to turn against the destroyers, and bending all our soul against their thrust, turning every stratagem of the destroyers against themselves, destroy them. That is our destiny: to end destruction — utterly; to begin the highest, the profoundest work of creation, the work that is inseparable from our way, the way. (157)

Through the repeated call that Isanusi makes to traditional gallantry and his determination to underline the significance of unceasing vigilance in the continuing war of liberation, this protagonist emerges as Armah's image of the ideal leader. As the narrator informs us, "All his thinking led him again and again to the realization there was nothing he could do against destruction as long as he remained alone. ... Meanwhile Isanusi thought and thought for the headlong progress of destruction raised in his mind an infinity of questions about what went wrong, where, when, how, why; about what people could do against destruction, where and when" (104). Conveyed in this passage is Armah's primary quality for successful leadership: genuine concern to tackle the daily troubles of life that ordinary people experience. Because Armah insists that the real material for leadership is neither exceptional birth (or origin) nor superman qualities, but a determination, such as Isanusi demonstrates, to confront the petty anxieties, worries, and difficulties of daily living, his is an original and iconoclastic perception that challenges conventional notions of leadership.

Igwezu

The Swamp Dwellers is a one-act play performed in London in 1958, with the author, Soyinka, himself in the role of Igwezu. For a better understanding of who Igwezu is, I will first summarize the plot of the play:

In a hut on an island in a swamp, an old couple, Alu and Makuri, are waiting for their son Igwezu, who, having just returned from the city where he went to seek fortune, has hurried off to his plot of land to inspect his harvest; the harvest has been destroyed by a flood. Alu gets worried when her son does not show up. She wants Makuri to go out and look for him, but he refuses. Suddenly, a visitor arrives, a blind beggar, who has traveled a long way down the river, and who wants a plot of land to cultivate. He is denied his request, for the Swamp is sacred to a deity called “the Serpent of the Swamps”. A while later, the village priest, the Kadiye, and his train enter the hut. Makuri, who is the village barber, gets ready to shave the Kadiye, but the priest, saying that he would prefer to be shaved by Igwezu, leaves the hut to return later. Just as the beggar is giving a vivid description of the drought up north, Igwezu enters. He reports that everything he had sown has been ruined by the flood. He is bitter; he feels betrayed by the soil, from which he had hoped for so much, and by “the Serpent of the Swamps,” to which he had sacrificed in order to get a good harvest. At this point, the Kadiye and his train re-enter. Igwezu shaves the Kadiye, and while doing so, attacks him with bitter rancor, accusing him of feathering his own nest at the expense of the villagers. After such an insult to the most sacred person in the village, Igwezu cannot possibly remain; he leaves the village. The blind beggar, who calls himself Igwezu’s bondsman, offers to go with him, but Igwezu tells him to stay on and cultivate the land.

There are no explicit references to the Yoruba or their gods in The Swamp Dwellers. Some writers have argued that there is reason to assume that the swamp in this play is situated in the Niger delta, which means that most of the ‘dramatis personae’ are probably Ijaw.¹⁸ In any case, there is nothing in the text to indicate that we are in Yoruba territory, nor are any Yoruba gods mentioned. On the other hand, there are certain indications that the blind beggar might be intended as a sort of Christ-like savior-figure. I venture to say that some knowledge of Yoruba myths, and of the ways in which Soyinka interprets them, might facilitate the understanding of this play considerably.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that it was Ogún who cut a path for the other divinities when they wished to go down to earth to live and work among men.¹⁹ As we can see, Ogún, to Soyinka’s mind, is the archetype of the strong, rebellious, and active individual who sacrifices himself for his society, a cultural hero who risks his own life in order to make progress possible for the group to which he belongs. It seems quite proper to use the word “sacrifice” in this context, for as Soyinka interprets the myth of Ogún, the pioneer god experienced both pain, anguish, and mortal danger as he bridged the gulf between the actual and the possible.

In his essay “The Fourth Stage,” Soyinka discusses the relationship between Ogún and Obatala in Yoruba traditional-ritual drama. He explains that the protagonist in Yoruba tragedy represents Ogún, while the rest of the participants in this sort of ritual play represent what he refers to as “the transitional abyss” (Myth 142). The actor, like Ogún before him, enters this abyss, where he has to put a fight against tremendous forces that threaten to annihilate him. After this ordeal, the actor appears before those on whose behalf he is acting, and then, as a mouthpiece for the god he represents, he describes and interprets the

incomprehensible power that dwells within the transitional gulf. “Only later,” writes Soyinka, “in the evenness of release from the tragic climax, does the serene self-awareness of Obatala reassert its creative control” (152). Obatala, writes Soyinka, stands for “patience, suffering, peacebleness, all the imperatives of harmony in the universe, the essence of quietude and forbearance” (151). A little later in the same text, he writes:

The Yoruba metaphysics of accommodation and resolution could only come after the passage of the gods through the transitional gulf, after the demonic test of the self-will of Ogun the explorer-god in the creative Cauldron of cosmic powers. Only after such testing could the harmonious Yoruba world be born, a harmonious will which accommodates every alien material or abstract phenomenon within its infinitely stressed spirituality. (152)

Let us bring the mythical figures mentioned above down to a level of existence closer to our own. Let us imagine Igwezu and the blind beggar as earthly representatives of Ogún and Obatala, respectively. Igwezu is willing to try the new without definitively turning his back on the old. He leaves the environment where he has grown up and goes to the big city to seek his fortune, but he still retains the plot of land that he owns in his native village, and he faithfully keeps his promise to his ageing father to send him a modern swivel chair for his customers to sit in while he shaves them. This attitude on the part of Igwezu allows us to regard him as a representative of the group to which he belongs.

The climax of The Swamp Dwellers is the scene in which Igwezu attacks and accuses the well-fed, self-satisfied Kadiye. Is it possible to assume that, in this scene, Igwezu acts on behalf of the group to which he belongs, in the sense that he does something that many of the villagers want to, but dare not do? Let us for a moment consider Makuri’s relation to the Kadiye. Makuri’s behavior toward him is always very polite, even servile, and when his son and the blind beggar express themselves in a manner indicative of a lack of respect for the holy man, and for the deity whose deputy he is, Makuri’s reaction is one of agitation and

alarm. This, however, is not the whole truth, for in one passage, Makuri speaks of the village priest just as disrespectfully as do Igwezu and the beggar. This occurs soon after the Kadiye's first visit to the hut. When the Kadiye leaves the hut, and is out of earshot, but not before, Makuri exclaims: "The pot-bellied pig! So I am too old to shave him now, am I? Too old! Why he's nearly as old as the Serpent himself ... Bah!" (The Swamp Dwellers 11) It would probably never occur to Makuri to say such a thing straight to the Kadiye's face; this would require a more undaunted spirit. It would seem, then, that Igwezu, the man who finally challenges the authority of the Kadiye, does so not only on his own behalf, but also for his people. By openly questioning the village priest's power, by showing that it is possible to think the unthinkable and to speak the unspeakable, he enables the other villagers to abandon the road of quiet accommodating acceptance and to attempt to extend the boundaries of individual freedom of thought and action. Igwezu gives the other villagers a chance to make progress, spiritual as well as material. At the end of the play, progress is far from certain, but at least conceivable, thanks to the fact that a representative of the group — the villagers — has dared to defy an antiquated and stifling religious tradition.

We can also observe that like Agne Brown in Changó, Bakayoko in Les bout de bois, and Isanusi in Two Thousand Seasons, Igwezu's defiance puts him in a situation characterized by both anguish and physical danger. Though these protagonists rally the support and collaboration of their people, their anguish is one of absolute loneliness, of total alienation in the gulf of transition. As we have already seen, Igwezu's unprecedented behavior toward the Kadiye makes it impossible for him to remain in his native village; he has to leave. The view that Igwezu has sacrificed himself would appear to be amply justified.

The Swamp Dwellers: From Helpers to Heroes

It will be recalled that in many tales and epics, the hero achieves his objective with the assistance of “helpers.” These may be human, animals, or objects. In the Soundjata epic, for example, the future emperor is helped principally by his brother Manding Bory, his griot Balla Fasseké, and his sister Nana Triban. There are, in addition, spiritual forces, magic objects, and a cast of kind hosts, valiant allies, and soothsayers. The chief characteristic of the human helpers is obviously their devotion to the hero. They facilitate his triumphs and contribute to his glory, which ultimately — so the tradition would have it — accrues to the whole people.

In this line of ideas, in The Swamp Dwellers, for example, something important should be said about the relationship of the blind beggar to Obatala, who gave earth its present appearance by transforming the great swamp into cultivable land. This is exactly what the beggar wishes to achieve — making marshy ground cultivable. Obatala stands for peace and harmony, which are also distinguishing features of the beggar’s personality,²⁰ in spite of all his sufferings and bitter disappointments. In this connection, we might recall Soyinka’s words about Obatala as the genius of patient endurance. All through The Swamp Dwellers, the beggar retains his sublime calm, with the exception of a short passage where he shows some signs of eagerness and excitement, namely, the passage in which, by posing some rather provocative questions, he adds fuel to Igwezu’s bitterness towards the Kadiye. The beggar’s eagerness in this particular passage might become more easily understandable to us if we think of him as an earthly representative of Obatala. Obatala demands a high moral standard, and if we take a closer look at the beggar’s questions to Igwezu concerning the Kadiye and the “Serpent,” we find that the purpose of several of them is precisely to question

the morals of the village priest. Here is an example: “Is he fat, master? When he spoke, I detected a certain bulk in his voice. ... I know that the Serpent has his share, but not who sets the boundaries. ... Is it the priest, or is it the master?” (21-22). These questions would seem to insinuate that the Kadiye is corrupt, and it is obvious that a priest, a holy man, who abuses his position to obtain material advantages at the expense of his people must appear as an abomination to a deity who, more than any other, is the guardian of morals.

In Soyinka’s view, the rebellion of Ogún is a prerequisite for “the serene self-awareness of Obatala” to be able to exert its creative influence. Not until the tragic hero has made his sacrifice can harmony re-enter the world. This, on a small scale, is exactly what happens in The Swamp Dwellers. Igwezu commits himself to the common cause, he leaves the only place where he really feels at home, while the blind man stays on to cultivate Igwezu’s land.

In The Swamp Dwellers, therefore, Soyinka addresses himself to modern Africans and the Diaspora Africans, on par with Zapata Olivella on black cultural issues, calling upon the blacks to take a critical view of age-old African traditions. What he is saying is that anti-progressive traditions, taboos that, if observed, will give rise to spiritual and material stagnation, should be cleared away, whereas it is important to learn from such mythical figures as Ogún and Obatala, who strive to attain change, progress, and justice in their cosmology.

Les bouts de bois de Dieu

In this novel, there is a significant modification of the dynamic between hero and helpers, for the latter are no longer mere extensions of the hero. Bakayoko himself is not personally aggrandized by the actions of the strikers. They are not simply joining him in his quest; they

themselves demand and are transformed into heroes in the process, for the enterprise that they undertake is collective, and they are no longer in a supporting role. The vision of the future is not simply shared but is instead reworked as each and every one grows in understanding and awareness. The text is explicit on this point, as in the following passage in which the narrator describes Tiémoko's sense of accomplishment at having persuaded his comrades of the need to bring Diara to trial:

Tout en marchant, il mettait son plan au point tandis qu'une puissante exaltation s'emparait de lui. Pour la première fois de sa vie, une idée de lui allait mettre en jeu le destin de centaines de milliers d'êtres humains. Ce n'était pas l'orgueil qui était en lui, simplement il venait de découvrir sa valeur d'homme. Tout ragallardi, il entonna à pleine voix Soundjata. (147)

Bakayoko's initial absence necessitates such initiative and reflection on the part of the strikers. The text thus envisions a role for leadership, as is the case in Two Thousand Seasons, but does not conceive of heroism as the exclusive quality of designated leaders. Indeed, it cannot be, for if the struggle in Soundjata and other epics is frequently a physical battle, a show of prowess, then in Les bouts de bois it has become moral strength, wisdom, endurance, solidarity, a test which knows no gender, neither in Sambène's narrative nor, as I have pointed out earlier, in Zapata Olivella's fiction. The virgin Idawa shares heroism with the foreseer Isanusi and with the youths, as together they assert their liberation journey through the grove in Two Thousand Seasons. Given these extended parameters, women also cease to be mere helpers or extensions of masculine identity and purpose, as they necessarily are in traditional epics.

Apart from Bakayoko's vision, the other great force for truth and therefore for heroism is the "machine," as the train is known. It lays bare the lie of discrimination. Of race, class, and wealth it has no experience, and it cannot be tutored, as people are, in such ideologies and social constructions: "la machine ... elle, n'a ni langage, ni race" (127). Thus the text

insists on distinguishing between technology as a catalyst for new vision and change, a source of beauty and of human power, on the one hand, and, on the other, the racism, class and economic interests that pervade its use. Those passages isolating the tool from the web of social bias, from its use in exploiting other peoples' resources, are among the most brilliant and the most beautiful:

Une fois par semaine seulement la "Fumée de la savane" courait à travers la brousse, conduite par des Européens. Alors les grévistes tendaient leurs oreilles, tels des lièvres surpris par un bruit insolite. Pendant un instant, le passage de la locomotive apaisait le drame qui se jouait dans leur coeur, car leur communion avec la machine était profonde et forte, plus forte que les barrières qui les séparaient de leurs employeurs, plus forte que cet obstacle jusqu'alors infranchissable: la couleur de leur peau. Puis, la fumée disparue, le silence ou le vent s'installait de nouveau. (128)

The train diffuses the cloud of contradictions and illogic that dominates the strikers' lives. Regardless of social constructions of class and race, the strikers are drawn to the train, and its simple "unschooled machinery confirms their conviction that status and color do not matter ontologically. That the train and the workers usher in a new age hardly needs insistence. More than that, past and present come together in this historical event "pour féconder un nouveau type d'homme" (127), as the narrator states; at the trial of Diara, the participants are struck by "la nouveauté d'avoir à prendre eux-mêmes une décision de ce genre" (132). It is thus not the uprightness and magnetism of Bakayoko but also the power of a collective vision and enterprise that constitute the epic dimension of Les bouts de bois. Sambène enlarges the definition of heroic action and the very notion of hero. As in Changó, The Swamp Dwellers, and Two Thousand Seasons, people become the agents of their own destiny.

Two Thousand Seasons

In this novel, Armah not only shows exceptional interest in the collective trauma of captive existence, his observations bear out some of the views of other black writers such as Soyinka and Zapata Olivella, who, like the theorists S. E Ogunde and Zoggyie, argue that no other issue has affected, and continues to affect, the existence of the black person as slavery does.²¹

In Two Thousand Seasons, the action of the heroic youths who make good their escape from a slave ship on high seas offers a model of the patriotic determination championed by Armah. Their action is a supreme act of self-empowerment and a demonstration of the profitability of the lessons Isanusi teaches. The enslavement of the youths had been aided by the alcohol which King Koranche used to render the group vulnerable to the white slave raiders, but the youths realize that individually they are “impotent, strapped, our spirits heavier than our bodies, our minds blanked out with the overwhelming reality of capture” (112). Aware of this, they act like one, and by working together, the members of the community achieve their liberation.

Within his formulation on slavery as a continental and pan-diasporic calamity, nothing evokes the suffering of the race as much as the physical toll, and we witness the worst form of it in the scene of the fire-branding at Poano. In fact, in this depiction of violence, Armah shows a close affinity with the temper of the African-American author Frederick Douglass. Like Douglass, he not only demonstrates the physical pain of being marched like animals through jungles, rocks, and rivers, he highlights the role of John, the mulatto assistant slave-driver, whose actions illustrate the divisive tactics used by the white slavers to ensure the Africans’ enslavement.²² As Judith R. Berzon argues, “The mulatto is the only-too obvious

badge of the white abuse of the Negro, of the hidden anguish of the system of slavery, of the continuing hypocrisy in racial attitude” (53). Ironically, then, the mulatto — the bastard offspring of the illegitimate union between whites and blacks, who is also the worst victim of colonial atrocity — becomes the most inhuman agent of the very system that degrades him. This characterization of the mulatto John is meant to foreground the nobility of the action of liberation undertaken by Isanusi along with Idawa and the youths.

When it is remembered that it is the same tested slave-ship tactics that the youths use in dethroning the post-independence dictator Kamuzu in Two Thousand Seasons, then the timeless relevance of their high moral idealism, vision, and pragmatism will be best appreciated. Because Kamuzu’s wastefulness and inflated sense of self-importance demonstrate clearly how local saboteurs who disguise themselves as nationalists can easily fritter away the gains of the struggle and use the revolution for their self-serving ends, his overthrow represents a major victory for Africa and the Diaspora at large.

We are told by the narrator that as a strategy to contain him, from “the first day” the protagonists resolve to remove powder, guns, and bullets from Kamuzu’s palace to their own “half circle of hidden places” (170). They invent false titles and “lull Kamuzu’s spirit,” calling him “Osagyefo,” “Kontamanto,” Kabiyesi,” “Sense,” “Mwenyenguvu,” and “Otumfuo” (171). With these tactics they buy themselves time, and when Kamuzu’s dictatorship becomes unbearable, the protagonists depose him. Their attitude contrasts sharply with the feeble opposition Ghanaians posed to Nkrumah’s more objectionable policies and the blatant hypocrisy for which Armah indicts them.

Like all the other novels of my analysis in this chapter, perhaps the most compelling aspect of Two Thousand Seasons is that there is no escape into romanticism, which is the

striking feature of the Senghorian, Francophone négritude. For example, the renewed work of reconstruction in the novel is not without its drawbacks, such as Dovi's apostasy, against which Isanusi had long ago warned. However, supremacy resides with the community, and it not only survives but ultimately prevails. Thus the best legacy of the revolution is enunciated by its guiding principles, whose tenets the youths constantly restate:

We do not offer praise of arms. The praise of arms is the praise of things, and what shall we call the soul crawling so low, soul so hollow it finds fulfillment in the praising of mere things? It is not things we praise in our utterance, not arms we praise but the living relationship itself of those united in the use of all things against the white sway of death, for creation's life. The beauty of the seer's vision, that alone is music to the hearer's ear. (205)

The attractive power of this quotation resides in its musicality and rhythm, produced through the skillful use of repetition, parallelism, rhetorical questions, and apt symbolism. The narrator's rejection of European materialism, calibrated to the affirmation of African humanism and the use of the combined language of traditional dirges and griots, produces a new set of meanings, incantative patterns, and myths.

Two Thousand Seasons, on par with Changó, The Swamp Dwellers, and Les bouts de bois, demonstrates the ways in which myth can be made part and parcel of the decolonization, the liberation struggle, for, while imitating the rhetorical structures of oral traditions, Armah, like the other peer visionary writers (Soyinka, Sambène, and Zapata Olivella), rejects the ideological subterfuges of tradition and rewrites African history from a pan-African perspective through a process of revision that results in a work which reflects on the African and the Diaspora-African liberation struggle.

Changó: Alliance of Agne with the Enduring Vital Forces of Society

In Changó, it is important to note that spirituality and corporality, always contraries within Christian doctrine, interact differently within the cosmology of the novel. In this sense, Agne Brown interacts harmoniously with the ancestors in the humanistic project of the liberation struggle of the downtrodden symbolized by the black in the Americas. In my work, I base my analysis of the complexity and the depth of Agne's project's spiritual dimension on Bakhtin's notion of dialogism and on Mbiti's concept of God and the living-dead in African cosmovision.²³

Bakhtin places much emphasis on otherness in his works, and on otherness defined precisely as other values. In this respect, community plays an enormous role in the thought of Bakhtin, whose analysis "must be called philosophical mainly because of what it is not: it is not a linguistic, philosophical, literary or any other particular kind of analysis, but a study which moves in spheres that are liminal, i.e., on the borders of all the aforementioned disciplines, at their junctures and points of intersection" (Estetika 281). It is about dialogue.

Dialogism is, among other things, an exercise in social theory dominated by a "drive to meaning" (Dialogism 23), where meaning is understood as something still in the process of creation, something still bending toward the future as opposed to that which is already completed. At a very basic level, then, dialogism is the name not just for a dualism, but for a necessary multiplicity in human perception. This multiplicity manifests itself as a series of distinctions between categories appropriate to the perceiver, on the one hand, and categories appropriate to whatever is being perceived, on the other. This way of conceiving things is not, as it might first appear to be, one binarism, for in addition to these poles dialogism

enlists the additional factors of situation and relation that make any specific instance of them more than a mere opposition of categories.

In such a theoretical framework, in reading Changó, for instance, dialogism's drive to meaning should not be confused with the Hegelian impulse toward a single state of higher consciousness in the future. In Changó as in Bakhtin, there is no one meaning being striven for: the world of the novel is a "vast congeries of contesting meanings, a heteroglossia so varied that no single term capable of unifying its diversifying energies is possible" (24). For my dialogic approach to this chapter of my work, and in a broader postmodern and postcolonial analytical focus on Changó, I find the following words of Bakhtin very pertinent:

There is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, but these will be recalled again at a given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival. (Estetica 373)

In Changó, in their collaboration with Agne Brown, the narrators-protagonists are gods, servants, horses, and generals. They are brought together in a common subaltern status. Moreover, quite often the narrators are spirits, or what we might call the "talking dead" (179). And even when they are not represented as such, the narrators speak from within a context of being in intimate relationships with their Ancestors and gods. This first being with their sustaining vital forces lends to their discourse a timeless, spiritually grounded force that contrasts sharply with the anguished utterances of more cosmopolitan discourses.

In the novel, concluding "Los ancestros combatientes," Agne Brown, a purely fictional creation, is aided in her fight for justice by such historical personalities as Nat Turner, Harriet

Tubman, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcom X.

Their participation ranges from entire stories to mere mentions in some cases. This bias in treatment, according to E. A. Mose, derives from the extent to which each character participated in the struggle of his or her day. The more radical an individual was, the more is said about him or her. It is also Mose's contention that this explains why King's contributions to the Civil Rights struggle, including his "I Have A Dream" speech, are given such low prominence in black radical circles in the United States, such as the Black Panthers (In Search of the Fathers 105). The latter detail, for instance, is left out altogether. Since this is the most memorable of King's legacies, Mose surmises that "the omission may have been due to his pacifist approach to the ethnicity-inspired violence that rocked the United States at his time (47).

Mose's view on King's Civil Rights legacy foregrounds Fanon's, which called for revolutionary action and opposed positive action such as passive resistance preached by Gandhi. The truth is that human history has demonstrated that freedom is never offered to the subjugated on a silver platter. It requires sacrifice of blood and lives. However, in Changó, Agne Brown encompasses the sum total of intellectual and spiritual approaches to racial problems in a social melting pot generated by violent contact between racial groups brought together by history. The paradox of Changó stems from Agne Brown's being a female fictional creation of high intellect and spirituality, on the one hand, and, on the other, the channel through which the spirits of the Ancestors — spear-headed by Changó and the god of action Ogún — discharge their fierce determination in helping the Muntu and the ekobios in their liberation fight. This phenomenon of Changó and of the deity whose name

the narrative bears highlights clearly the postmodern mood of simultaneous contrast and complementarity prevailing in the novel.²⁴ Thus Changó is the converging point of my analysis of the protagonists' liberating accomplishments in The Swamp Dwellers, Les bouts de bois de Dieu, and Two Thousand Seasons. Though all these novels project a vision of the African, and of Diaspora African freedom, human dignity, and self-assertiveness, based on the symbolic, pioneering action of Ogún and emulated by his followers in Yoruba mythology, Igwezu, in The Swamp Dwellers, is more physical and more material than Agne Brown in Changó, in the sense that we see Igwezu in his interaction with the protagonists-helpers directly confronting the Kadiye and his train. So is Bakayoko, whose materiality in Les bouts de bois owes much to the realistic painting of the historical railway workers' strike of 1947 in the colonial Senegalese-French Sudanese Federation. Isanusi, in Two Thousand Seasons, is surrounded by the spiritual and virgin Adewa, with whom he performed the symbolic cleansing in the Anoa river, and by the youths whom he initiates into the traditional rites of passage to manhood. It is noteworthy how Isanusi's traditional rituals of self-assertiveness empower the protagonists in the whole communal liberation struggle against the invaders.

Spirituality and action combine more appropriately in Two Thousand Seasons than they do in Changó, in which Agne Brown instead epitomizes a profound spiritual expression of the psychological struggle of a people caught up in the vortex of materialism imposed upon them by an alienating social structure, on the one hand, and their relentless determination to liberate themselves from debasing human conditions, on the other hand. In this regard, in discussing the aftermath of the U. S . Civil War, Burghardt Du Bois explains to the ingénue Agne Brown that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation delivered blacks from slavery only

to mire them in slavery of wages. This learned affirmation, never contradicted within the text, leaves the reader to ponder the polyfaceted rapport between socialism and spiritualism. Perhaps, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, with the mestizo Christian saints, socialism would appear to embody a stalling technique, a gambit through which to buy time while the struggle builds up toward its inevitable climax.

Confronted with a world ruled by white, black is always presumed guilty, according to Fanon. But black's guilt is never a guilt which he accepts; it is rather a kind of curse, a sort of sword of Damocles, for, in his innermost spirit, black admits no accusation. He is overpowered but not tamed; he is treated as an inferior but is not convinced of his inferiority. He is patiently waiting until the oppressor is off his guard to fly at him. De Lima Reis expresses well the strategy of the stalling technique by the black in Pos-colonialismo, referring to Fanon: "Fanon destaca a importância do ritual como uma forma de afirmação da cultura nativa e da solidariedade do grupo, mas considera-o também uma maneira de canalizar a violência. Assim, o ritual só adquire sentido como ponto de partida para a ação violenta e a instalação do socialismo" (263). At this point of my analysis, I come to the conclusion that, in Changó as well as in the other three epic novels I mentioned in this work, socialism and spirituality are complementary approaches to freedom fighting stalling technique, as adopted by the mestizo Christian saints in Changó and as viewed by Fanon and de Lima Reis in black's strategies for liberation. Spiritualism and socialism are in a dialogic relationship throughout Changó.

If the relationship between heroes and protagonists-helpers is altered from that of epic in Changó, Two Thousand Seasons, The Swamp Dwellers, and Les bouts de bois de Dieu, so is the connection between the telling/reading of the story and the attitude toward the past.

These novels are not nostalgic, complacent tributes to the past; to the contrary, they seem to aim at building a future. For this reason, all the four narratives appear to propose a view of epic and novel similar to that of Bakhtin, whose dialogic thought on narrative characterizes the epic universe of the works as belonging to no absolute past and constructed with an open-endedness. The four novels, on the other hand, use every means available to stress inconclusion, dynamism, and possibility, as would, say, Eileen Julien in African Novels: “An as yet imperfect, that is, unfinished future” (78).

Though claims for the open-endedness of Changó and Two Thousand Seasons, the implication of an uncompleted future, may seem sound in light of Zapata Olivella and Armah’s intellectual and spiritual projection of their narratives, such claims may appear doubtful regarding Soyinka’s dedication in The Swamp Dwellers and Sambène’s in Les bouts de bois de Dieu. For instance, Sambène writes: “Les hommes et les femmes qui, du 10 octobre 1947 au 19 mars 1948, engagèrent cette lutte pour une vie meilleure ne doivent rien à personne: ni à aucune ‘mission civilisatrice,’ ni à un notable, ni à un parlementaire. Leur exemple ne fut pas vain: depuis, l’Afrique progresse” (8) The dedication can leave no question about who the victors will be and where the narrative will go. But if this note suggests to the reader that it is the destiny of the people to succeed in their strike, this is the knowledge of hindsight. It is my contention that like the other texts, Les bouts de bois de Dieu itself undermines the notion of destiny, as it should, for if the strike and its revolution were ideas whose time had come, it became obvious to us only once they were ended. There are no reliable predictors of destiny (birth, nobility, oracles) in this narrative. Victory is not taken for granted, nor is it the consequence of a predetermined order, for at the moment in which the events occurred, their outcome was not known. From the perspective of the

present, past historical events may seem to have been destined to happen, but I think that such a view beforehand may be a mere fantasy.

Taking Soundjata as négritude's yardstick of epic, Changó, Two Thousand Seasons, The Swamp Dwellers, and Les bouts de bois de Dieu do not present themselves as narratives of inexorable destiny. In Soundjata, in which the hero's and the narrative's destination is already fixed, the path already indicated, only the details are left to the imagination of the reader before the text fills them in. The novels do not propose a necessary evolution, in which the past is viewed only from the vantage point of the present. Rather, the authors undo the view of history as progressing mechanically.

In the larger stories, the narratives stress history in the making. The shaking and questioning of the social structure, the pan-African revolution, the denunciation of retrograde traditional religions, the strike, and the transformation they all bring about are dynamic events created organically by the presence of the slave ship in Changó, the slave ship, plantation and mining lands in Two Thousand Seasons, the presence of religion and land in The Swamp Dwellers, by the ostentation of the train, French colonial bureaucracy, racism, and financial interests in Les bouts de bois de Dieu, and by the needs and experiences of the impoverished individual lives and of their nations in the oppressed world. This complexity of history is manifest in Armah, Soyinka, Sambène, and Zapata Olivella's dynamic, multivoiced narrations, which shift from place to place, from memories to current actions, which give the perspective of each and every actor. Particularity and interdependence, both in the sense of mutual reliance and random interplay, are the elements of which history is made. Obviously, slavery and the social structure it generated are themselves the best

expression of the dynamic narrative, binding individual lives and acts together across the Americas in Changó.

The protagonists in the four novels, the writers' "men of Ogún," offer no definitive solutions to the social, historical, and metaphysical problems with which they wrestle — they merely make solutions possible. What Armah, Sambène, Armah, and Zapata Olivella want to say is that it is possible to find positive solutions to the problems dealt with in their texts, but that the prerequisite for this to happen is the presence of strong, self-dependent, and tenacious individuals who dare "clear a path" for the less enterprising majority. Still, not even the existence of such individuals is a guarantee of a better future — they merely make it possible. Within the framework of Changó, Ogún and his followers can be said to represent an optimistic view of the future — but the optimism is very guarded.

From the above analysis, and before I proceed on to chapter 4 of my dissertation, I want to draw the reader's attention to the word "center" and stress along with Bakhtin that it be understood as a relative rather than an absolute term, and, as such, one with no claim to absolute privilege, least of all one with transcendent ambitions. This last point is particularly important, for certain of the terms crucial to Bakhtin's thought, such as "self" and "other," have so often been used as masked claims to privilege. Before I further specify the roles played by these terms in next chapter, the simple yet all-important fact should be stressed again that they enact a drama containing more than one actor.

Bakhtin is suspicious of the old conviction that the individual subject is the seat of certainty, whether the subject so conceived was named God, the soul, the author, or the self. And he attacks such claims at their root, in the self itself, which is why for him "self" can never be a self-sufficient construct. It cannot be stressed enough that for Bakhtin "self" is

dialogic, a relationship. And because it is so fundamental a relationship, dialogue can help us understand how other relationships work, relationships such as signifier/signified, text/context, system/history, rhetoric/language, and speaking/writing.

I shall explore the couple speaking/writing in chapter 4 of this dissertation as “Secondary Orality, Secondary Literature: Inventive and Innovative Cultural Writing” not as a binary opposition, but as an asymmetric dualism. But first, we must begin by recognizing that for Bakhtin, the key to understanding all such artificially isolated dualisms is the dialogue between self and other.

Notes

¹ See Emanuel Paulo Ramos's "O irreal mítico" in "Introdução literária" in Os Lusíadas de Luís de Camões 12-27. In Ramos's account, for Camões, the good humanist, "Na realidade, ... os deuses são ... com os seus caprichos, a sua agitação, os seus planos e manhas, os verdadeiros homens" (49). See also História da literatura portuguesa (59) by Prof. Doutor A. J. Saraiva. Camões contrasts with de Ercilla in his humanism in the way the former brings the ancient gods down to earth by endowing them with human qualities and flaws, as those deities appear in Yoruba mythology and African cosmology at large. According to Ramos, "Camões era soldado pobre" (28) narrating Portuguese explorative adventure to "Oriente da Ásia," while for Isaías Lerner, Alonso de Ercilla "paje del príncipe Felipe" (La Araucana 13) is an aristocrat presenting the Spanish conquest of Chile and of the southernmost cone of the Western Hemisphere. The social classes of the two Iberian Renaissance writers influence their epic narratives. So the black authors of the narratives of this chapter tend to approach the gods, like Camões, in a more materialistic perspective, asking the deities to intervene in the people's daily struggle for survival.

² See Lévi-Strauss's Structural Anthropology 213-19, 229-30.

³ See Négritude, Eurocentrism, and irony in Soyinka's "Ideology and the Social Vision" in Myth 108. See also "Two Visions in Heart of Darkness" in Said's Culture and Imperialism 19-31.

⁴ According to Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa (Dicionário Editora 8ª edição), "A amazona era mulher varonil; mulher que monta a cavalo; mulher guerreira; era membro de um povo fabuloso composto de mulheres guerreiras, que, Segundo os antigos, habitavam a Capadócia e mutilavam o seio direito para melhor manejarem o arco." In the kingdom of Dahomey, kings Glèlèlè and Gbèhinhazin had such brave women enrolled and ranking in their armies, and those women-soldiers were well-known to French General Dodds's conquering army as 'les Amazones du Dahomey.' Along with their men and king Gbèhinhazin, they resisted fiercely in front before the advancement of colonial French troops in the kingdom by the turn of the nineteenth century. The bravery of such women explains the matrilineal system adopted by the Akan people of today's Ghana and Ivory Coast following the historical leadership of queen Ablah Opoku, who sacrificed her only son to help her people cross the Bandama river and escape from the tyranny of their enemies of Kumase-Asante in the seventeenth century. These historical female accomplishments for society are barely mentioned in Senghorian négritude.

⁵ In Two Thousand Seasons, for instance, Ayi Kwei Armah's Kamuzu or Osageyifo is nobody else but the first president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah, who fought fiercely for the liberation of the then Gold Coast from British domination. According to Armah, Nkrumah liberated the people of the Gold Coast from one form of enslavement to subjugate them to a new one known as neo-colonialism. If we compare Nkrumah's political philosophy with the one prevailing in French-speaking Africa, such as in Côte d'Ivoire, Sénégal, Gabon, and the Congo of those days, some of the scathing criticism leveled at socio-visionary and revolutionary leaders like Nkrumah needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. Houphouët Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, was ranked farmer number one of his country during

all his 40-year reign as the political leader of his people and one of the wealthiest men in the world. For more on “benevolent dictatorship, chauvinists, and peasants who change a way of life they have cherished ...” see René Dumont’s L’Afrique noire est mal partie; see also Soyinka’s The Interpreters

⁶ This stems from a Hegelianism which, according to G. Dennis O’Brien, bears on the radical Alienations and disruptions which marked Hegel’s “view” of history; it postulated inevitable revolutions, perhaps a final revolution which would solve the conflicts of human society.

⁷ The Black Muslims, a U.S. black separatist movement founded in 1930, were hostile to the integration of the black into American society, claiming self-differentiation. Ras Tafari was Haile Selassie’s nickname. It designates a mystical, political, and cultural movement of the black race which includes blacks in Jamaica and the West Indies. These black movements have no sound social agenda. In Zapata Olivella’s words in Changó, es “Movimiento religioso entre los negros de Jamaica que acepta la reencarnación. Se opone al redentismo protestante y en general al misionerismo de los blancos. Predica el regreso del pueblo Negro Americano a Etiopía, la tierra del Rey Salomón y la reina Saba. Adoran al Ras-Tafari, dios viviente y al Negus de Etiopía. Se considera que el precursor del movimiento fue Marcus Garvey en sus discursos y artículos desde 1920” (520).

⁸ Read briefly about Gobineau’s condescension to the African, “this hater of races of color, who, on the wretched head of the Negro, places the crown of poetry” (Cendrars’ European Attitudes Toward African Music and Poetry 100). See Cheikh Anta, 54-57, and also Hountondji, 224.

⁹ Soyinka, along with Said, Bhabha, and Ortiz, dealt with the dynamism of culture through the phenomenon of “Transculturation.” See “Ideology and the Social Vision” in Soyinka’s Myth and “El fenómeno social de la transculturación y su importancia” in Ortiz’s Contrapunteo cubano 101.

¹⁰ I mentioned that, in Soyinka’s view, the rebellion of Ogún is a prerequisite for the serene self-awareness of Obatala to be able to exert its creative influence. See more development on Obatala’s socio-mythic function among the Yoruba people in E. Obiechina’s Culture, Tradition 115.

¹¹ I base my argumentation on the anthropological-structural view that although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology (the unseen world of the gods) by its similarity of structure. Senghor, Mbiti, Soyinka, Zapata Olivella, etc., espouse the same view in their writings and criticism. See Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology. Also see McQuillan’s “Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Structural Study of Myth” (75-81).

¹² Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism serves as the basis for my argumentation. I expand the concept toward the end of the chapter. See Soyinka’s view on ‘literature of social vision’ in “Ideology and the Social Vision” in Myth 1. Also see “Existence as Dialogue” in Holquist’s Dialogism 14-39.

¹³ Les bouts de bois de Dieu and the other novels do not present themselves as narratives of inexorable destiny, as do the Sundiata epic, Hampâté Bâ’s L’Etrange destin, and Laye’s

Maître de la parole in which the hero's and the narrative's destination is already fixed, the path already indicated.

¹⁴ Changó emphasizes the importance of education. In so doing, a flashback into the history of education in the United States is also a critical look into the shameful practice of racial segregation, both in denominational and secular circles. But the positive intellectual dialogue between Agne Brown and her anthropology professor, Dr. Harrington, seems to suggest the importance of education, social criticism, and dialogue as a solution to the racial problems in the United States.

¹⁵ See for instance, Sarah Bradford's Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People; see also Deborah H. Barnes' review of the Tubman's life (738-39).

¹⁶ See Jacqueline Bernard's Journey Toward Freedom: The Story of Sojourner Truth, which first appeared in 1967 and was reprinted in 1990. See especially pp. 163-216. Another useful source is Truth's own account of her life, titled The Narrative of Sojourner Truth, which she published herself in 1850 with the help of a Connecticut abolitionist secretary called Olive Gilbert.

¹⁷ What Tubman is referring to is the death and maiming of hundreds of thousands of Union soldiers in one of the decisive battles of the American Civil War. Although a good number of these casualties were black, that fact was not known to many White Americans until only recently, when TV stations like PBS ran documentaries on the All Black Regiment that served alongside the Union Army. Before then, many Americans did not even know African-Americans participated in the conflict at, let alone died in the course of doing so. For more, see the edition of the "Tony Brown Journal" of October 10, 1998, sponsored by PBS.

¹⁸ These characters represent the evil social forces that connive with the invaders during slavery time and now seek to perpetuate the predator's domination over Africa and the Diaspora. In Armah's epic writing strategy, these villains' deeds foreground Isanusi's social vision through the forging of a liberating leadership by reviewing the history of the contacts of Africa with the world of the invaders (Arabs and Europeans alike) in Two Thousand Seasons.

¹⁹ Soyinka, The Writer in a Modern African State 21.

²⁰ See about Ogún in Larsen's A Writer and His Gods 41-42.

²¹ See Ogunba's The Movement of Transition 51, 134.

²² In "Current Theories of Alienation" and in "The Poetics of Disalienation" in In Search of the Fathers 9-91, Zoggyie explores vividly the psychological impacts of slavery on blacks, especially, in the Americas.

²³ The term "mulatto" and the socio-literary problem it raises is quite controversial in the Black Atlantic. See developments on this in Armah's Two Thousand Seasons, Zoggyie's

Search. See socio-cultural criticism of “mulatto” in Degler’s Neither Black nor White 207-08 and in Nelson do Valle Silva’s in Race, Class, and Power in Brazil 42-55.

²⁴ According to Zoggyie’s In Search of the Fathers 67-68, the term “living dead” was first coined by John Mbiti in African Religions and Philosophy to describe the recently deceased in Africa, those whose death is so recent that some members of the family still remember them either personally or through the stories older relatives tell about them. Its opposite is what the renowned Ugandan writer calls the “completely dead.” These are those who have been dead for so long that no one remembers them anymore. While the terms themselves appear in an introductory discussion of death and dying in Africa, on pp 24 through 26 of Chapter 3, the subject is more fully addressed in Chapter 14.

CHAPTER IV

INNOVATIVE CULTURAL WRITING IN SECONDARY ORALITY, SECONDARY WRITING

This section of my dissertation will center on orality and literacy. My research endeavor here is to reconsider facts already at our disposal on discourse on orality and literacy and the way elements of literary or cultural theory and their criticism are perceived. The details I bring on the narrative style and structure of Changó are not new to creative aesthetics; they are instead an attempt to propose alternative view of the black novel, for the issue of orality and literacy and black novel is not a relationship left out of critical studies, but one I think is misapprehended.

For many scholars of black literature and criticism, “continuity” has meant most often a search for a heritage from oral traditions to the new literatures written in European languages, “the passage from orality to writing” (African Novels 4).¹ Orality is a complex concept to which we shall give considerable attention, but here let us note simply that practitioners of written black literature have generally looked for the origins of continuity in those genres which existed centuries before the colonial period and the rise of the novel: poetry, proverbs, riddles, narratives, epics articulated and performed orally — the so-called indigenous and authentic genres.

It is important, for the purposes of this analysis, to distinguish between the concrete conditions in which black verbal arts are produced and the way in which those conditions are represented in critical discourse. The primarily oral character of traditional black verbal art

is of the first order. It is a fact, but it is a fact whose significance and implications are, I believe, often misrepresented. My study treats the issue of how that fact has been discussed and written about, how that treatment affects the way we think, how it enables us to see only certain things. The issue at hand, then, is not the orality of Africa and the Diaspora but rather the intellectual categories of orality and writing that we construct and use. The discourse on orality has been articulated both by the West and by Africans. We must consider how the category of “black orality” permeates literary criticism, how it is subject to ideological pressures, and how it has come to define and confine the scope of our interest in and perception of black writing.

Walter J. Ong’s theoretical view in Orality and Literacy (1988) is an important critical line along which I will deal with the subject of orality and literacy. Ong pulls together works by himself and other critics on linguistic anthropology and the differences between primary oral cultures — those that do not have a system of writing, — and chirographic (writing) cultures to look at how the shift from an oral-based stage of consciousness to one dominated by writing and print changes the way humans think. His approach to the subject of orality/literacy is both synchronic, in that he looks at cultures that coexist at a certain point in time, and diachronic, in that he discusses the change in Western society from being oral-based to chirographic, which began with the appearance of script. In addition to pinpointing fundamental differences in the thought processes of the two types of culture, Ong comments on the current emergence in the West of what he calls a “second orality,” which, dominated by electronic modes of communication — television and telephones, — incorporates elements from the chirographic mode and the orality pattern which have subordinated each other for some time. This communicative interrelation and interconnectedness between

orality and literacy are complementary processes in discourse production in a given linguistic and cultural context, in a creative and inventive textual space, such as Changó.

As Bakhtin writes, the novel is a genre “in the making.” It is this aspect of the Afro-Hispanic text Changó which I will explore and stress: its dynamism, creativity, and process. In this perspective, this chapter subscribes to the thread of thought on African and diasporic literatures that culminates in a critical look at the links between the oral traditions of Africa and the African novel, the heritage as it is often described, owed by the written discourse to the tale or epic. As a search for the aesthetic origins of the black novel centered on Changó, this section of my dissertation will stretch from what seems a deterministic, evolutionary approach to black writing to a more open-ended examination of how aesthetic, cultural, and social demands are met by reference to and imitation or parodying of the structures of oral genres. Thus the question is no longer the extent to which the black novel is derivative of oral traditions, but rather the extent to which such references hold the means of imaginative solutions to problems of aesthetic and ideological dimensions. Because this approach gives writers more freedom and assumes they are thinking architects rather than prisoners of a cultural heritage, it permits richer and more complex interpretations of aesthetic works.

Cast in this pluralistic, dialogic context, with the interconnectedness of orality and literacy, I think that Silviano Santiago and Arnold Jabor’s metaphors of “ingestão” and “estética da vontade de comer” in Pós-colonialismo (177) help underscore the liminality and complementarity of orality and literacy in discursive paradigms. The Brazilian critics write: “Nada há mais original, nada mais intrínseco a si que se alimentar dos *outros*. É preciso, porém digeri-los. O leão é feito de carneiros assimilados.”² These metaphors are reminiscent of the Andradean cultural concept of “canibalismo” and “antropofagia” prevalent

in Brazilian transcultural attitude in “O modernismo brasileiro.”³ Going over the gamut of humanistic studies can also allow us to see the protean shapes that the discourse of orality and literacy assumes.

I analyze Changó as “texto liminar,” to use the words of de Lima Reis in Pós-Colonialismo based on Bhabha’s concept of liminality.⁴ Bhabha quotes the art historian Renee Green’s characterization of a stairwell as a “liminal space, a pathway between upper and lower areas, each of which was annotated with plaques referring to blackness and whiteness” to indicate how the liminal can become a space of symbolic interaction (Bhabha, 1994: 4). That is, the stairwell, the liminal, prevents identities from polarizing between such arbitrary designations as “upper” and “lower,” “black” and “white.” In a sense, one could say that post-colonial discourse itself consistently inhabits this liminal space, for the polarities of imperial rhetoric, on the one hand, and national or racial characterization, on the other, are continually questioned and problematized, just as my work does with discourse on the orality/literacy dichotomy.

For Bhabha, the liminal is important because liminality and hybridity go hand in hand. This “interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (1994: 4). Liminality also shows that postmodernity and postcoloniality are meaningless if the “post” simply means “after.” Each of these concepts represents a liminal space of contestation and change, at the edges of the presumed monolithic culture but never completely “beyond culture.” In this conceptual framework the present can no longer be envisaged as a break or a bonding with the past or future. Literacy and Orality are two modes of language which, like speech/listening and writing/reading, are discontinuous, complementary, and interconnected.

The development that follows focuses on some thoughts on orality/literacy and shows that Changó is par excellence, a liminal, textual space of orality and literacy, as well as of inventiveness and innovation.

Orality/Literacy: Accidental Fact, Essentialist Myth

As late as 1960, the activity of writing in Africa — and especially serious, sustained writing — was generally assumed in the popular Western view and even by Africanists to have begun with the arrival of Europeans on the continent. Janheinz Jahn, a pioneer of African studies, who problematized terms such as “African literature” and “black literature” in Manuel (1969), could declare nonetheless with regard to orality and writing that “une littérature qui ne témoigne d’aucune influence européenne et qui donc n’est pas écrite n’appartient pas à la littérature néo-africaine mais à la littérature traditionnelle. La frontière entre les deux est facile à tracer: c’est la frontière entre littérature orale et littérature écrite” (16).

The fact that writing did exist in Africa before the arrival of the first Europeans and had no connection with the Roman alphabet is a matter of record with which we are now familiar, owing to the research of a number of scholars.⁵ Along with Eileen Julien, I will say that the point, however, is neither that oral language and art were not dominant in Africa nor that modes of language do not affect social and cultural mores. What is striking above all is that Jahn, like many others, equates an accidental phenomenon, mode of language, with essence: writing is White, orality is Black.

The critical reception of black poetry and narrative in the West reveals the contours of this assumption. In Judeo-Christian thought from Romanticism through Surrealism, poetry is the

manifestation of a state of trance. The poet is moved to create by inspiration, intuition, or the power of the unconscious. Written poetry by blacks, then — even, it might be argued, that of the modernist Soyinka and Sambène, and of the postmodernist Zapata Olivella — does little to challenge the discourse in which Africa and the Diaspora are assumed to be ontologically oral. This is because poetry is perceived as perfectly compatible with the category of “oral,” which connotes spontaneity and intimacy with being and the spiritual, as in this comment by Senghor in “Comme les lamantins”: “Le Nègre singulièrement ... est d’un monde où la parole se fait spontanément rythme dès que l’homme est ému, rendu à lui-même, à son authenticité. Oui la parole se fait poème” (154). Such allusions to the instinctive poetry of black are commonplace, and they pose the problem of evaluation and interpretation in literary and cultural criticism.

Examining the Senghorian essentialist equation “poetry = orality” empowers an inquiry into literature as writing or speech not elevated to pure art but, rather, remaining open to the same social entanglements and limitations that condition all writing. This position contests the formalist or New Critical emphasis on the appreciation of literature in purely aesthetic terms, as writing that lifts us out of history — out of ourselves, finally — into a timeless and universal realm of beauty and truth. Consciously or unconsciously, Senghorian and Francophone négritude tends to align itself with this view of literature as a mode of aesthetic representation and communication of black experience.

Senghor’s essentialization of the black text is in allegiance with the West. Following Thomas McLaughlin’s thoughts on literary theory, I affirm that Francophone négritude reads against evaluation and interpretation which remind us that value and meaning are the outcomes of an active process, and that the process always occurs within a specific cultural

and political context. It is the reader who produces meaning, but only by participating in a complex of socially constructed and enforced practices. Value and meaning do not transcend history and culture, just as literature does not. Interpretation — the process of producing textual meaning — is therefore rhetorical. It does not live in a realm of certain truths; it lives in a world where only constructions of the truth are possible, where competing interpretations “argue for supremacy,” in a context in which the premise is that “no single correct interpretation” is possible. Since interpretation is rhetorical, we find that value and meaning serve the function of shaping our reading process and of enforcing the rhetorical power of the writing that comes out of that reading. “Value and meaning wield power in an open interpretive field” (McLaughlin, Critical Terms 7).

Value and meaning of the text also suggest the participation of literature in culture and politics. Literature is a formation within language, which is the prime instance of the cultural system. The production of literature always occurs within a complex cultural situation, and its reception is similarly situated. Authors and readers are defined inside systems of gender, class, and race. They operate inside specific institutions that shape their practice. They have been brought up inside powerful systems of value, especially powerful because these systems present values as inevitable rather than ideological. As a result, acts of reading are always culturally placed, angled at the text from a specific point of view. So reading relies too much on the values and habits of mind that culture ratifies to claim an anthropological objectivity. In a similar line of ideas, in Tristes tropiques, Lévi-Strauss reflects on the “sur-moi” sociaux, stating that no society is all good or all bad. In addition, the perspective from which one makes such judgments is, of course, not neutral, as he warns in his earlier Race et Histoire (43-44).

Based on this theoretical account of meaning, value, and interpretation, what seems to be missing in Senghor's assessments of black music and poetry appears to be consideration of their context and material conditions and reference to traditions of poetic practice. Presented abstractly, with no reference to their context, "accidental" attributes take on the force of essentialist, ontological truths. Just as it has seemed not only plausible but altogether natural that African-Americans should express themselves in spirituals, blues, and jazz music, it was deemed inevitable that Africans and their descendants should express themselves in poetry. Apart from questions of natural talent, African-American musical expressions may seem singularly prominent because of the lesser participation of black Americans in other less accessible realms, such as politics, science, or otherwise.

In debates on the novel — the only genre, according to Bakhtin, to come into existence since writing and the book — the assumption of black orality can be readily perceived. It is surely one of the reasons for many perennial controversies surrounding the black novel: there has been an unspoken belief that novels were not for blacks, because oral forms were, and that black writers needed guidance in perfecting this craft, or, alternately, that truly black novels are and in fact need to be "oral" in some fashion. In this regard Roscoe writes in Mother is Gold: "The novel has no history in Africa, is not a fact of the African past. The African child is faced in school with a written literary form imposed on him. He may acquire a taste for the novel; but his life, his society's history — in a word, his culture — pre-disposes him naturally to the story (75-76).

Since the discourse on orality and writing has a life of its own, apart from the evidence, the argument set forth by Roscoe cannot be dismissed simply by pointing out that there are myriads of black novels. I think Roscoe's problem lies elsewhere. Maybe the fact that

blacks can and do write and read novels does not challenge his assumption that novels are inappropriate for them because writing is imposed and because the novel is not natural in the black world.⁶ He argues that regardless of what they actually write, those black writers should be writing short stories. Roscoe's shortsightedness becomes obvious, then, when one asks rhetorically, does the absence or presence of a literary form in one's past determine the extent to which it might exist in one's present and future? Roscoe espouses an essentialist view, both of the concept "African, black" and of the concept "novel" as well as of their supposed opposites and their dichotomic treatment.

Paradoxically, the assumption of the profoundly oral nature of black life and art is expressed more subtly in the expectation that, according to Julien, "novels be leavened with the appropriate African yeast of orality" (10). Along similar lines, Mohammadou Kane states in "Sur les formes": "Il est donc opportun de montrer que l'originalité du roman africain doit être cherchée plus particulièrement dans ses rapports avec les formes de la littérature orale de l'Afrique Noire" (537). Indeed, black novels could be studied profitably in their relationship to all other African verbal, plastic, and performance arts. But to assert this is not to say that the originality of black novels is determined by the extent to which they echo African oral traditions. The implication is that the novel is European until it inscribes orality and thereby becomes black.

This bias, I think, reveals again that an African essence can be found in, and indeed is bound to, orality. In fact, it is not a hidden assumption and is stated forthrightly, as in Honorat Aguessy's essay "Visions et perceptions traditionnelles," where he remarks that "l'une des caractéristiques des cultures noires traditionnelles, leur caractéristique essentielle, même à certains égards, c'est l'oralité" (162). The question here, as in many instances, is

how to isolate particularity without losing sight of common ground and how to identify the accidental without its becoming essential. Aguessy tempers his statement by adding that orality in black culture is “a dominant characteristic” and not “an exclusive one” (163). In general, such nuances are lost in criticism and orality becomes a metonymy for African and black.

Writing: Beauty, Ambiguity, the Beast or a Polyvalent Symbol?

Essentialist views distinguish two attitudes in relation to “African” and “the novel,” the comparative studies of oral and written forms and arises the problematic of what might be called “the civilization quotient” or “moral” connotations of oral traditions and of the novel.

If we consider two opposing attitudes toward orality and, by implication, oral societies and art, each interferes with our ability to apprehend the relationship of oral and written texts to each other, or of speech to writing. The first attitude, which I challenge strenuously in my work, holds oral societies to be impoverished. The other holds them to be exemplary. That is, at certain moments in Western social and intellectual history and depending on the orientation of the critic, the same phenomena are seen as vindication of either the superiority or fall of European civilization and, concomitantly, of the inferiority or wholesomeness of non-European cultures. The reversibility of this assessment is a noticeable point of the impact of the critic’s intentions and presence on what s/he is able to observe and on the conclusions which might be drawn from those observations. The important remark, however, is that these biases are often at work in Western perception of writing and orality in the West as much as of black literatures and that they touch on the questions the critics ask and the conclusions they draw on aesthetic works.

To understand how black works were received in criticism, we must recall that it was anthropology more than history or political science or other disciplines of human sciences which dominated the study of African cultures. Thus anthropological assumptions and paradigms led the way in the European appraisal of African life and art.⁷ Evolutionist theories, whose origins, as Lévi-Strauss tells us in Race et Histoire (14-15), can be found especially in the philosophers of the eighteenth century, formed the premise of studies such as Lévy-Bruhl's La mentalité primitive and Taylor's Primitive Culture. Said's work on intellectual history teaches why such theories took on new relevance and force in the imperialist nineteenth century. Contemporary Europe epitomized the adult stage of civilization, while non-European cultures exemplified the elementary stage, the historical childhood through which Europe had previously passed. Thus Hegel observed: "The Negro exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. ...What we properly understand by Africa is the unhistorical, underdeveloped spirit, involved in the conditions of mere nature, and only on the threshold of the World's History" (93, 99).

In the face of such assumptions about the black world, Ruth Finnegan hypothesizes that evolutionist orientations manifested themselves in the very selection of oral materials made by collectors, in the kinds of thematic interpretations that poems and tales were given, in the lack of attention to literary qualities and effectiveness, and in the preoccupation with "traditional" tales as opposed to "new," innovative, or idiosyncratic ones that would have challenged the view of oral art as communally created. Written literature was an implicit norm against which oral literature was judged. The latter was seen as simple, uncrafted, and generally the product of the communal mind,⁸ whereas written literature, especially the novel, was held to be at the opposite and final end of the developmental process: it was

complex, deliberate, and the work of a single author. Finnegan criticizes this assumption by writing, “African institutions and artifacts were purely functional and served to maintain a social order” (38). Finnegan goes on to remark that “Unlike its counterpart in societies deemed advanced, oral literature was therefore devoid of aesthetic principles and concerns” (38). H. L. Gates has referred to these assumptions, which plague studies of African-American literature and art, as the “collective and functional” fallacies.⁹

Simplistic thoughts such as these and their evolutionist foundations are, of course, contestable. We sometimes now encounter a more subtle attitude in vehement claims for oral literature. Whether in an attempt to rectify prejudiced views of oral traditions or for other reasons, what was once treated as the primitive nature of oral literature and viewed as deficient is now proclaimed as pure and virtuous, as in Paul Zumthor’s broad and provocative work Introduction à la poésie orale (1983). Zumthor observes in his study:

L’Europe s’est répandue sur le monde comme un cancer. A chaque jour qui passe, plusieurs langues au monde disparaissent avec le dernier vieillard, voix vierge d’écriture, fenêtre jadis grandes ouvertes sur le réel. L’un des symptômes du mal fut sans doute la littérature, l’une des plus vastes dimensions de l’homme. ... Il s’agit de renoncer à privilégier l’écriture. Peut-être l’Afrique ... se trouve-t-elle plus près du but, parce que moins gravement touchée par l’écriture. (282-84)

These words support the view that, for many reasons, written literature established itself in the West as the yardstick of verbal art and devalues oral forms to such a point that their potential for aesthetic expression was, until recently, virtually ignored. Thus Zumthor’s work is a significant touchstone for the process of reevaluating oral art.

However, Julien’s view of Zumthor’s contribution to orality deserves attention. According to this critic, Zumthor mythologizes and mystifies orality, as do other scholars. He equates orality with Africa, passive female, the victim of writing, Europe, the male and virile aggressor. Zumthor thus bemoans the plight of orality: suffocated virgin voices, pure

defenseless memory, suppressed by literature that has prospered to the detriment of orality. As Julien remarks, “It is perhaps not surprising that Zumthor — in a remarkable echo of Senghor — hopes for Africa’s ‘oral’ redemption of Europe” (13).

The other aspect of orality manifest in African literary criticism assumes orality to be morally superior to writing. This interpretation goes unquestioned and is, of course, equally challengeable. Changó, Les bouts de bois, The Swamp Dwellers, and Two Thousand Seasons are contrapuntal texts to D. T. Niane’s Soundjata and Laye’s Maître de la parole. The structure of the latter two illuminates the former four, not implicit nostalgias for past days of glory and authority. In their dialogue with the Soundjata epic, the texts distinguish themselves and make that point clear. I will state again with Julien that “the reference to epic is an effective design for particular ends (ends which may be inferred from the text and not necessarily those ‘intended’ by the author) and not a necessary and purely ‘aesthetic’ (that is, functionless) heritage from the traditional storyteller” (70-71).

In Soundjata, Niane recounts the Soundjata epic as told him by the griot (a traditional narrator and praise-singer of tribal chiefs in Mandingo society of West Africa) Kouyaté. At an interesting textual juncture between the moment in which Soumaoro, enchanted by Fasseké’s balafong (a Sahelian African popular music wood percussion instrument), decides to steal the griot and that moment in which Soundjata’s kingly destiny becomes manifest, Kouyaté digresses to comment on kings, history, and griot. In so doing, he offers his view of speech and writing:

D’autres peuples se servent de l’écriture pour fixer le passé; mais cette invention a tué la mémoire chez eux; ils ne sentent plus le passé car l’écriture n’a pas la chaleur de la voix humaine. Chez eux tout le monde croit connaître alors que le savoir doit être un secret ...; les prophètes n’ont pas écrit et leur parole n’en a été que plus vivante. Quelle piètre connaissance que la connaissance qui est figée dans les livres muets. (78-79)¹⁰

Given his life, work, and family history, Kouyaté views speech and writing as antithetical modes of language and vehicles of communication, representation, and learning. There is nothing surprising in Kouyaté's antagonism toward writing. He insists with passion that speech can be filled with the fervor of voice; it is vivid, it requires and therefore encourages memory, it assures the exclusivity of knowledge and brings with it a guarantee of truth from the one who speaks.

We may be tempted to agree with Kouyaté's presentation of speech as we tend to assess oral tradition as a valuable mode of communication and learning and not as impoverished as it is described by so many critics. Our analytical endeavor here aims to show the liminal rapport between the two modes of communicating human experience. To this end, Kouyaté's attempt to establish a hierarchy between speech and writing is fallacious, because it is based on the intrinsic qualities of these categories imbued with cultural biases. Speech and writing are often similar in their capacities and consequences, and they are also often dissimilar. The prophet's words, which Kouyaté finds forceful and eloquent because they are delivered by the human voice, were nonetheless transmitted to Manding society and West Africa in general through written texts, and they are still learned in many areas with the assistance of tablets in Koranic schools.

We tend to think of oral traditions as universally egalitarian because every human being is endowed with voice and because writing and printing are technologies that require special training and resources, but in fact, as Kouyaté himself points out, the griot is in a position of power, "le savoir doit être un secret" (79). His message is proffered when and to whom he wishes to and is designed to satisfy the needs of the authority he serves. Thus, Kouyaté

privileges orality because of the cultural traditions that he embodies, which confer on him a certain authority.

The issue of aesthetic representation of human experience through speech and writing is complex, and it is easy for the critic to fall into one of these two polarities of mode of communication. In their critical perspectives, Irele along with Lévi-Strauss adopt the juste-milieu position and conciliate orality and literacy in their communicative objective. I tend to agree with their intellectual approaches. However, Lévi-Strauss seems to suggest that writing culture lacks something authentic and fundamental in communicating and representing human experience which is intrinsic to orality. He elaborates on this point in

Anthropologie structurelle:

Nos relations avec autrui ne sont plus, que de façon occasionnelle et fragmentaire, fondée sur cette expérience globale, cette appréhension concrète d'un sujet par un autre. Elles résultent, pour une large part, de reconstructions indirectes, à travers des documents écrits. Nous sommes reliés à notre passé, non plus par une tradition orale qui implique un contact vécu avec des personnes — conteurs, prêtres, sages ou anciens — mais par des livres entassés dans des bibliothèques et à travers lesquels la critique s'évertue — avec quelles difficultés — à reconstituer le visage de leurs auteurs. Et sur tout le plan du présent, nous communiquons avec l'immense majorité de nos contemporains par toutes sortes d'intermédiaires — documents écrits ou mécanismes administratifs — qui élargissent sans doute immensément nos contacts, mais leur confèrent en même temps un caractère d'inauthenticité. ... Il est indispensable de se rendre compte que *l'invention de l'écriture* a retiré à l'humanité quelque chose d'essentiel, en même temps qu'elle lui apportait tant de bienfaits. (425-26)

In an interview with Georges Charbonnier, Lévi-Strauss ranks orality and writing on the basis of the authenticity of the societies in which they occur. He defines authenticity by “le caractère concret de la connaissance que les individus ont les uns des autres” (Entretiens avec Lévi-Strauss 64). In a nutshell, for this French anthropologist, writing is “un mal nécessaire.” His interpretation represents a position of cultural relativity in anthropology, and Irele praises this view as he writes: “The idea of Western culture as a universal norm began to be abandoned by those anthropologists whose direct experience of other cultures

had impressed them with the range of possibilities of human adaptation to the natural environment and of human potential for cultural creation. ... Anthropology now offered a new and positive evaluation of non-Western cultures” (14).

However, Lévi-Strauss’s assessment of orality and writing is born out of certain disillusionment (Tristes Tropiques 466). It is precisely for reasons such as Levi-Strauss’s equating of oral cultures with “authentic” living and his simultaneous admission of the self-interested origins of anthropology in Western remorse that Jacques Derrida challenges his view.

In 1967, Derrida published three major books devoted to the question of writing: Écriture et différence, De la Grammatologie, and Discours et phénomènes. Derrida’s project in these writings is to reevaluate the structuring principles of Western metaphysics. Western philosophy, writes Derrida, has analyzed the world in terms of binary oppositions: mind vs. body, good vs. evil, man vs. woman, presence vs. absence. Each of these pairs is organized hierarchically: the first term is seen as higher, better than the second. According to Derrida, the opposition between speech and writing has been structured similarly: speech is seen as immediacy, presence, life, and identity whereas writing is viewed as deferment, absence, death, and difference. Speech is primary; writing secondary.

In these three volumes of 1967, Derrida gives rigorous attention to the paradox that Western tradition — the “Great Books” — is filled with writings that privilege speech. By closely analyzing those writings, this French critic attempts to uncover the ways in which the Great Books rebel against their own stated intention to say that speech is better than writing. What his analyses reveal is that even when a text tries to privilege speech as immediacy, it cannot completely eliminate the fact that speech, like writing, is based on a différance, a

Derridean neologism meaning both “deferment” and “difference” between signifier and signified inherent in the sign (Barbara Johnson, Critical Terms 43). Speakers do not beam meanings directly from one mind to another. Immediacy is an illusion. Properties normally associated with writing inevitably creep into a discussion designed to privilege speech. Thus, for instance, although Saussure wishes to treat speech as primary and writing as secondary for an understanding of language, he describes language as a “dictionary in the head” or as “linear” according to Johnson in Critical Terms (43) — a spatial term more applicable to writing than to speech. Or, to take another example mentioned by Johnson in the same work, when Socrates tells Phaedrus that proper teaching must take place orally rather than in writing, he nevertheless ends up describing the truths such teaching is supposed to reach as being “inscribed in the soul” (43). Both terms, “dictionary” and “inscribe,” imply writing. Because heterogeneity and distance is fundamental to the structure of language, Derrida sees speech as being ultimately structured like writing. This emphasis on writing as the more originary category is designed to counter the history of logocentrism of speech and to track the functioning of différance or deferment in structures of signification.

Many literary texts, ancient or modern, seem in fact to stage some versions of this encounter between the search for spoken immediacy or identity and the resource to writing and difference.

Through a spiritual/material blending, Changó attempts to make human value both derive from and coincide with divine value, to eliminate the space of difference or distance between the human and the divine. Such liminality, parades through Changó in various forms, as will be seen.

The logic of writing is a double logic: writing is called upon as a necessary remedy for différance, but at the same time is the very différance for which a remedy must be sought. In Derrida's analyses of writing, this logic is called the logic of the supplément. In French, the word supplément means both an "addition" and a "substitute" (Critical Terms 45). Addition and substitution are not exactly contradictory, but neither can they be combined in the additional logic of identity.

This theoretical development validates the fact that the questioning of the pairs speech/writing, orality/literacy, and culture/nature have no entirely acceptable responses.¹² Even when we judge another culture to be good or superior in a certain domain, our position as observer is present in that assessment, as Lévi-Strauss warns in Race et Histoire. The question, then, is, how do we understand and evaluate superlative judgments of oral traditions, such as Lévi-Strauss's and Zumthor's, when our own prejudices are operative? To what extent do we exaggerate this degree of intimacy? For one who is highly literate and probably quite prosperous in an affluent society, the view that "pure" orality is more wholesome than writing is self-indulgent, born out of some remorse. Here again we come to a paradox, for in the current global situation, those who write are more nearly masters of their environment; they are privileged and are perceived as such. The individuals or groups who are illiterate or nonliterate are disenfranchised. Even were the issues of alterity and perspective resolved, there would remain the question of whether oral and written modes of language are mere correlatives of intimacy and fragmentation or factors thereof.

If Kouyaté's praise-singing of speech is understandable, and if the mystification of orality in European discourse originates, according to Derrida, in the desire to find the "hidden good nature," we cannot fail to ask the question whence comes its appeal to black writers and to

readers of African literature. Why have many writers and critiques mystified orality as the metonymy of a happy, or at least unstained, time? Julien, for instance, is of the opinion that to subscribe to this view is to assert a certain authenticity for African culture vis-à-vis the West. It is no coincidence that a particular reverence for the oral character of Africa should mark the writings of the négritude writers and other pan-Africanists, who have looked to cultural origins as a way of differentiating and shoring up the identity of Africa vis-à-vis the West. Thus adherence to thought on orality as distinctively African complements the tenets of négritude. Senghor and Zumthor share the view that emotion, spontaneity, nature, and orality will serve to “leaven” rationality, artifice, culture, and writing. Senghor presents this argument not only in rational discourse and essay but also in poetry, a far more powerful instrument of mythmaking and one that is still more impervious to debate.¹³

Anthropology and Dichotomizing Orality and Literacy

Even when evolutionist views are left aside, comparative works on oral and written texts still fall prey to notions of progress and linear thinking. The two modes of communication are seen not only as exclusive fields but as chronological moments. Thus there often persists a view of two opposing worlds in struggle, as in the passage from Zumthor: the “first” and frequently “naïve” oral world, meeting defeat from the “later” and “sophisticated” universe of writing. Chevrier does not think like Zumthor or like Roscoe, but he suggests nonetheless a conflict between monolithic, closed domains: “A une civilisation de l’oralité se substitue donc progressivement une civilisation de l’écriture dont l’émergence est attestée par l’apparition d’une littérature négro-africaine en langue française” (7). Chevrier’s assertion epitomizes the premises operative in many comparative studies. Innocent as it may appear,

this assertion contains many false emphases: the presumption of an old civilization and then a new one, of a given, necessary sequentiality, and of the role that French is assumed to play. We return back to the classical dichotomy that sees Africa as essentially oral and writing, European. The paradigm of rupture ignores the lessons of history and of cultural syncretism; it gives the West too much importance and Africa too little.

Abdul JanMohamed, whose Marxist reading of African texts distinguishes it in significant ways from most African literary criticism, also seems to adhere to this view of progressive civilizations. He is of the view that “the origin of the African novel lies in the transformation of indigenous oral cultures into literate ones” (2). He subscribes to “the development of historical consciousness,” which is said to develop with writing¹⁴ and which, by many accounts, favors the rise of the novel (9, 280-83).

I have already argued against the assumptions that writing is not indigenous, that it is foreign, that indigenous oral cultures have been uprooted and supplanted by new systems. Following Irele and Julien’s views on the interconnectedness of cultures, it is my belief that they are neither entirely and exclusively oral nor singularly literate. Terms like “transformation” and “substitution,” even more than “transition” and “passage,” tend to obscure the coexistence and reciprocity of oral and written cultures and languages that characterize most societies, regardless of their degree of technology.

Moreover, JanMohamed’s view of the transformation of civilizations and, consequently, of narrative forms implies that the novel is an inherently superior form, another problematic assumption that is nearly inevitable whenever oral cultures are said to be transformed into literate ones and verbal art is assumed to pass necessarily from orality to writing. In the face

of such reflections, Julien thinks that “Orality is a precious good threatened by writing, but one that nonetheless will be or must be distilled and preserved inside it” (22).

On another theoretical plane, the writings of Western male authorities have often encoded the silence, denigration, or idealization not only of women but also of other “others.” Said, in Orientalism (1978), for instance, analyzes the discursive fields of scholarship, art, and politics in which the “Oriental” is projected as the “other” of the West. By reading against the grain of the writers’ intentions, Said shows how European men of reason and benevolence could inscribe a rationale for oppression and exploitation within their very discourse of Enlightenment. In Derridean and Saidean text exploration, reading has acquired new meanings and functions.

Thus, reading for Derrida, involves following the “other” logics of structures of signification inscribed in writing that may or may not be in conformity with traditional logics of meaning, identity, consciousness, or intention. It involves taking seriously the elements that a standard reading disregards, overlooks, or edits out. Just as Freud rendered dreams and slips of the tongue readable rather than dismissing them as mere nonsense or error, so Derrida sees signifying force in the gaps, margins, figures, echoes, digressions, discontinuities, contradictions, and ambiguities of a text.

The possibility of reading materiality, silence, space, and conflict within texts has opened up extremely productive ways of studying the politics of language. According to Johnson, in “Writing,” “if each text is seen as presenting a major claim that attempts to dominate, erase, or distort various ‘other’ claims, whose traces nevertheless remain detectable to a reader who goes against the grain of dominant claim, then ‘reading’ in its extended sense is deeply involved in questions of authority and power, ... a reading that takes full advantage of

writing's capacity to preserve that which cannot yet, perhaps, be deciphered" (Critical Terms 46-47).

While the critique of logocentrism undertaken by Derrida implies that Western patriarchal culture has always privileged the presence, immediacy, and ideality of speech over the distance and materiality of writing, this privilege has never, in fact, been unambiguous. An equal but more covert privileging of writing has also been operative in Western culture. One of the ways in which colonial powers succeeded in imposing their domination over other people was precisely through writing. Western civilization functioned with great effectiveness by remote control. And indeed, when comparing itself to other cultures, the West has always seen its own form of literacy as a sign of superiority. The hidden but ineradicable importance of writing that Derrida uncovers in his readings of logocentric texts in fact reflects an unacknowledged or repressed "graphocentrism."¹⁵ In this regard, Barbara Johnson writes, I think somewhat sarcastically, "It may well be that it is only in a text-centered culture that one can privilege speech in a logocentric way" (47). She goes on to remark, "The 'speech' privileged in logocentrism is not literal but is a figure of speech: a figure, ultimately, of God" (47).

In the same vein, recent work by H. L. Gates, Jr., and others attempts to combine Derrida's critique of logocentrism with an equal critique of the way in which European graphocentrism has functioned historically to oppress and exploit non-European peoples. If Western culture had ever unambiguously privileged speech and denigrated writing, there would have been no reason, for instance, to forbid American slaves to read and write. The following passage from Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845), an American slave's narrative written by Douglass himself, should be juxtaposed to Lévi-Strauss's

suggestion in Tristes tropiques that the function of writing is to enslave. Douglass does not stop there:

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. To use his own words, further, he said, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master — to do as he is told to do. Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. Now," said he, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy." These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty — to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom. (49)

Douglass's thought on the white male and his manipulation of reading and writing to subjugate the "other" is unequivocal. I agree with Johnson that "what enslaves is not writing per se but control of writing, and writing as control" (48). What is needed is not less writing but more consciousness of how it works. If, as Derrida claims, the importance of writing has been "repressed" by the dominant culture of Western tradition, it is because writing can always pass into the hands of the "other," that can always learn to read the mechanism of his or her own oppression. "The desire to repress writing is thus a desire to repress the fact of the repression of the 'other,'" as Johnson maintains in her argument (48).

Following Johnson, Derrida, and Douglass's views on the anatomy of the ambivalence speech/writing, I return to poetry, as it is assumed to be the essence of négritude. Although attitudes on the part of Europeans toward the musicality and poetic talents of blacks have ranged from Gobineau's condescension — "parmi tous les arts que la creature mélanienne

préfère, la musique tient la première place, en tant qu'elle caresse son oreille ... et qu'elle ne demande rien à la partie pensante de son cerveau. Le nègre l'aime beaucoup, il en jouit avec excès" (474) — to Cendrars's admiration — "L'esprit souffle où il veut et n'est-ce pas le théoricien et le fondateur du racisme aryen, le comte de Gobineau ... qui, sur la tête maudite du Nègre pose la couronne de la poésie" (100) — the flattering view that blacks are born to poetry tends to escape critical examination. It is perhaps a view espoused by all, and above all, there may be tacit consensus about the usefulness of oral rhythms, metaphor, and personification in the creation of poetry. Thus, in discussions of written black poetry, the assumption of an underlying orality is so commonplace as to go unarticulated. And when it is articulated, it is hailed enthusiastically because of the consensus that holds it to be useful to poetic practice.

If Kouyaté's glorification of oral language in Soundjata is comprehensible, and if the mystification of orality in Western discourse originates, as Derrida says, in the desire to find "the hidden good Nature" (168), we cannot fail to ask whence comes its appeal to African writers and readers of African literature. Why have many writers and critics mystified orality as the metonymy of a happy, or at least unstained, time? I believe that an answer to this question may be found in Paulin Hountondji's reference in African Philosophy (1983) to the complicity in the 1930s and 1940s "between Third World nationalists and 'progressive' Western anthropologists, who, for years, will assist each other, the former using the latter in support of their cultural claims, the latter using the former to buttress their pluralistic theses" (159).

What is at stake in the dichotomization of orality and literacy, of speech and writing, is the very structure of authority, of power itself. Whether writing is seen as the instance of the

law, the loss of immediacy, or the subversion of the master discourse, whether it opens up a stance of domination, a space of exile, or the pathway to freedom, one thing, at least, is clear: the story of the role and nature of writing in Western culture is still in the process of being written. And the future of that story may be quite unforeseeable “as we pass from the age of the book to the age of the byte,” to quote Barbara Johnson from Critical Terms (49).

Changó: Dissidence and Inventiveness in Orality/Literacy Archetypes

The popularity of the terms “orality” and “literacy” in many branches of humanistic studies is due to Walter Ong. His work Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (1982) marks a significant stage in the conceptual study of oral tradition, and especially of its relation to other traditions of communication and signification. The binarism represented by the contrast of the two terms transcends the question of alternative media or modes of communication. Ong’s arguments hinge on the cultural differences that arise from and are symbolized by these two communicative orders. For this reason, it is useful to sketch the terminological history of orality and literacy as a binary complex. Binarism is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian monolithic worldview. In the framework of free, dissenting, aesthetic creativity, Zapata Olivella constructs Changó on a structural and thematic basis which challenges the classical orality/literacy Manichaeism so prevalent in literary and cultural theories and criticism in the West.

Central to Ong’s argument, and correspondingly more contentious, is the claim that since oral cultures have no fixed texts, they organize and transmit knowledge and information in a unique way. Oral thought proceeds, Ong argues, “in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary

expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's 'helper,' and so on), in proverbs, or other mnemonic form" (Orality and Literacy 34). In other words, at the basis of oral thought and style is memory. As Havelock puts it, "the secrets of orality, then, lie not in the behavior of language as it is exchanged in the give and take context of conversation but in the language used for information storage in the memory" (24). To serve this mnemonic purpose, language must be rhythmic and narrativized.

This mode of codifying and structuring knowledge can only lead to a certain type of discourse, a traditionalist and conservative one that demands continuity and stasis and eschews experimentation. This resistance to innovation of method is at one with the content of the discourse that confines itself to what is concrete and familiar in the human life environment. Thus, whatever is conceptualized becomes formalized in existential terms, and skill and knowledge are passed on by way of personal participation and practice. In this manner, the categories of thought are appropriated in the immediacy of person-to-person communication and interiorized as communal knowledge (Ong, Orality and Literacy 41-57).

It is my contention that Changó reaches beyond Ong's simplistic and reductionist view on orality and straddles the Manichean gulf between oral and written discourse and dialogues with the pluralistic essence of the text. Changó provides an apposite reference to black writing as it constitutes an instance of postmodern and postcolonial bases of the painful pulse and liberationist nature of black Atlantic discourse over the medium of transmission, language, oral or written. Since oral cultures are assumed to have no written texts, they are not enslaved and confined to writing; they are open-ended, dynamic, and, therefore, more prone to eclecticism and innovation. Beyond that, I think that a work structured in the style of Changó is elaborated on a communicative basis aimed at reinstating the aesthetic and

creative value of orality. For instance, in the opening section of Changó, “Los Orígenes,” are free verse epic poems with no written textual antecedents, African or diasporic. It is an oral intertextuality which features tales and stories told about African gods reinvented by a socio-conscious author, to answer his aesthetic aspiration toward addressing black existential problems in America. More than that, it is, I believe, an aesthetic endeavor to close the psychological gap of suspicion caused by the bitterness of slavery between the two shores of Black Atlantic. I think that Ong’s theory on oral thought and knowledge transmission, at least as far as African worldview is concerned, is too restrictive a definition and application of pedagogy to a non-literate society.¹⁶

Where society lives in a close interrelation with nature, it regulates its existence by natural phenomena within the observable processes of continuity — ebb and rise, waxing and waning of the moon, rain and drought, planting and harvest — the highest moral order is seen as that which guarantees a parallel continuity of the species. This morality belongs to the domain of the “metaphysics of the irreducible” which, according to Soyinka is: “knowledge of birth and death as the human cycle; the wind as a moving, felling, cleansing, destroying, winnowing force; ... earth and sun as life-sustaining verities, and so on. These serve as matrices within which mores, personal relationships, even communal economics are formulated and reviewed” (53).

In the structure of Changó — in which the world of the Ancestors, nature, interconnects and even overlaps with the world of the living, society — the communicative modes of expressing such a worldview cannot be continuous, stagnant, and unidimensional. This may seem a surprising assertion to those who consider that the kind of society which has emerged from Ong’s definition of orality fits rather into the classical primitive blueprint for the

modern totalitarian world. I think that Ong's limited knowledge of the societies which he attempts to ease into the constructed circle of the West may be taken to task by texts like Changó, which bridge the split and establish dialogic interferences between the oral structure of "Los Orígenes" and the mixed oral and written orders of communication in the remaining part of Changó. Ong's fundamental assumptions on native thought and knowledge transmission bypass the code on which black worldview is based, the continuing evolution of tribal wisdom through an acceptance of the elastic nature of knowledge as its reality, as signifying no more than reflections of the original coming-into-being of a manifestly complex reality.

According to Soyinka, this is indeed the unifying rationale of the Ifa (Yoruba Divination) corpus. In Changó, Zapata Olivella presents Ifá-Fa as "Orichas del destino, imparcial, cuya emanación está grabada en sus Tablas Sagradas donde permanecen inscritos los destinos pasados, presentes y futuros de las personas y del universo. Se le representa con 16 ojos, habitualmente cerrados, los que sólo puede abrir Elegba, mensajero de los Orichas. Los adivinos o bokonós interpretan el destino de las personas mediante 16 mitades de nueces de cola o palma, una por cada ojo. También suelen emplearse cauríes, campanillas, copas o platillos, considerados sagrados" (520).

Western scholars have always betrayed to accept the myth, the lore, social techniques of imparting knowledge or stabilizing society as evidence of orthodox rigidity or hierarchy. Yet the opposite, an attitude of philosophic accommodation, is constantly demonstrated in the attributes accorded most black deities, which deny the existence of impurities or foreign matter in the god's concept and conceptualization. Experiences which, until the foregrounding event, lie outside the community's cognition are absorbed through the god's

agency, are converted into yet another piece of social armory in the community's struggle for existence, and enter the lore of the tribe.

Those who cannot appreciate black experiences through aesthetic creativity may think of the evocation of a hermetic world, autonomous, cohesive, and neutral to exterior mores and values; yet it is a rich and persuasive evocation achieved through the felicitous plurality of words and idioms, a stylistic appropriation which both intimates of black cultures and outsiders share equally. As Changó begins with "Los Orígenes" in a re-creationist mode, speaking into existence the creation of the universe using gods of African religiosity, a code of meanings is established through rhythm, repetition, alliteration, and language-specific harmonies which instantly create their own territory of reality. The reader knows that even the paraphernalia of the protagonists is endowed with significant meanings, social and myth-referential. Even the outsider of black cultures senses this with equal appreciation and, while s/he necessarily loses something of the cultural specificity, s/he can create with ease a parallel scale of reference, since s/he views it all in the framework of mental motion and stylized conflict, all obeying a finely regulated rhythm of relationships. Intelligence and sensibility respond to the fact that the reader or the outsider is a participant in an integral matrix of cultural forces, that the tragic unfolding of the reign of the deity Changó is not merely an interesting episode in the annals of a people's history but the spiritual consolidation of the race through immersion in the discourse of origin.

In a postmodern perspective, in chapter 3 of this dissertation, I drew attention to Changó's challenge to the idea of exclusivity between history and literature as "branches from the same tree of learning" (Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism 105). In this chapter, I assess the commonalities between orality and literacy following Hutcheon's argument on the teachings

of historiographic metafiction and I conclude that: Orality and literacy as literature have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. As literature does not escape interfacing with history, and history with myth, in discourse production, neither does orality with literacy; rather, the two modes of communication complement each other at times.

On similar grounds, I challenge Captain-Hidalgo's statement that "basically, Changó is a plotless 'tale' that through a type of extended, narrative iteration manages to repeat in an engaging fashion the attempts of a people to win their freedom" (154). If we consider plot to be the plan or outline of the events of a story, especially of a novel, as it is explained in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, then the plot of Changó, the outline of the story or of the tale of deity Changó, to my mind, is the repetitious, the recurrent struggle of diasporic Africans to liberate themselves from racial bondage as enunciated by ancestor Ngafúa in the initial, prelude epic poem "Los Orígenes." This plan for liberation, the leitmotif of Changó, is fleshed out in multiple forms throughout the work as "it is subsumed under a narrative, space, process of meanings at work, meanings which are observed not as finished, closed product, but as a production in progress, plugged in to other texts, other codes, and thereby articulated with society and history in ways which are not determinist but citational" (McQuillan, The Narrative Reader 130).

It is my conviction that Changó also challenges the dichotomy text/story, as its textual structure blends oral and written forms of narrative to recount the tale of androgynous deity

Changó — “¡Changó! Descansa tu *descomunal falo* / tu *gran útero*” (26) — into a liberationist written narrative, in which dead and living, past and future, both sides of the Atlantic interconnect in the present in their struggle for freedom. As such, Changó provides an explanation of individual fate as well as of group destiny, the unity of a self as well as of the nature of a collectivity. By showing that disparate situations and events compose one signifying structure and, more specifically, by giving its own form of order and coherence to a possible reality, Changó supplies models for that reality’s transformation, for its redescription, and mediates between the law of what is and the human desire for what may be. Above all, perhaps, by instituting different moments in time and establishing links between them, by finding significant patterns in temporal sequences, by pointing to an end already partly contained in the beginning and to a beginning already partly contained in the end, by exposing the meaning of time and suggesting new meaning on it, Changó deciphers time and teaches how to read it.

Indeed, the epic poem “Los Orígenes,” in its different subtitles, signifies the journey of a race through a fragmented time and space, through history, toward a destiny which that race is struggling to come to terms with, to decipher and propose a meaning to. The same theme and plot of liberation of the self and the burning desire of the group to be the master of its own destiny are sung repeatedly through the poem. A similar theme and plot are replicated throughout the novel, from “La Trata” to the last chapter “¡Oye: los Orichas están furiosos!”

Still I make the point that Changó is not a plotless tale, since the tale could lend itself to other versions of itself, and it does so by metamorphosing into a well structured written narrative whose theme and plot emphasize the leitmotif of the seminal poem, “Los Orígenes.” To this end, a parallel can be drawn between the two conjugated ends of the

novel: the end of the tale of deity Changó “los Orígenes” (6-34) and the end of the written narrative “La Trata — ¡Oye: los Orichas están furiosos!” (35-511). Elegba’s positions and significations summarize both texts. “Despedida de las mil cien tribus” concludes the tale with emphasis on unity among the hundreds of tribes and the gate-keeper function of Elegba between the realm of the departed, the living, and the not-yet-born, the connecting agent of broken space; between the past, the present, and the future and fractured sequences of historic time: “Estamos aquí convocados / para darte adiós en la partida / unidos por la palabra / por los hilos de Elegba / abridor de las tumbas / llave de los pactos y las puertas / solo él sabe el punto / donde se Cruzan la hora y el camino / el magara y el buzima / de los vivos y los muertos./ ¡Escucha la despedida, / las ofrendas, los himnos / de las mil cien tribus / para despedirte unidas! (34).¹⁷ This oral conclusion underscores the hybrid setting in which Zapata Olivella envisions the ideal universe for mankind’s happiness. It is striking how extremities and antipodes are brought to connect together so easily: for instance, “la palabra” and “los hilos de Elegba” that unite all the disparate tribes; in vocative case, Elegba functions apostrophed as “abridor, llave, sabio del punto donde se Cruzan la hora y el camino / donde se Cruzan el magara y el buzima¹⁸ / donde se cruzan los vivos y los muertos.”

I believe that Changó exposes the social reality of blacks in the Americas, a mosaic of truths which need to be brought together to bear on the meaning of the struggle of the diaspora African’s liberation. This idea concludes Changó as free repetitions, developments, and complements of the theme, plot, and structure of the seminal tale “Los Orígenes.” The social function and signification of Elegba are depicted clearly at the end of the novel when he turns to the Muntu and addresses them at the wake of Malcolm:

Difuntos que podéis mirar de cerca las sombras de los Ancestros, comparad vuestros insignificantes actos con las hazañas de nuestros Antepasados y encontraréis justificada

la furia de los Orichas. ¡Desde que Changó condenó al Muntu a sufrir el yugo de los extraños en extrañas tierras, hasta hoy, se suman los siglos sin que vuestros puños hayan dado cumplimiento a su mandato de haceros libres!

¡Ya es hora que comprendáis que el tiempo para los vivos no es inagotable! (511)

The world of the ancestors in the seminal poem is duplicated at Malcolm's funeral. But the two universes are not etymologically exactly the same. "Las mil cien tribus" come to "la partida" united and cognizant of the uniting presence of Elegba among them and their departed ones. Zapata Olivella constructs the world of "Los Orígenes" with its human flaws and strengths incarnated in the deity Changó. It is a world of natural balance and harmony, with its own intrinsic, internal, and sociological problems, that Zapata Olivella tries to reflect upon. By fictionalizing this universe, he invites the Afro-Colombian, the diaspora African, the African, and all the dispossessed of the world to cast a critical look at history and envision a humanity in terms of "No hay Dios más poderoso que la familia del Muntu...La familia de los vivos y los muertos que cumplirá la profecía de Changó a través de todas las sangres" (507). The materialization of this task needs pedagogy. In this regard, the words of the two-world-connecting Elegba to Muntu are didactic, exhorting, and sententious at the same time.

My view on Changó, which is critical of Ong's theory on orality and of Captain-Hidalgo's assessment of the novel as a narrative iteration of a plotless tale, comes full circle. Following Hernstein Smith's argument in The Narrative Reader, I maintain that "for any particular narrative, there is no single basically basic story subsisting beneath it but, rather, an unlimited number of other narratives that can be constructed in response to it or perceived as related to it" (144). This is what appears to happen in Changó as many other narratives are constructed, developed, and perceived to be related to the seminal poem "Los Orígenes." It is striking how the work blends orality and writing so harmoniously to express the silenced

reality of a group of people through history. So the written development of the novel reconstructs, in various narrative forms, themes and plots that seem to be related to the creationist and liberationist initial poem narrated in the work.

Based on the example of Changó, it is safe to state with Smith that among the narratives that can be constructed in response to a given discourse are not only those that we commonly refer to as “versions” of it but also those retellings that we call “plot summaries,” “interpretations,” and, sometimes, “basic stories” (144). None of these retellings, however, is more absolutely basic than any of the others. I will go further and assert that, in this perspective, orality and literacy can cooperate on equal footing in the production of text, narrative, and discourse as is the case in Changó, where manifestation of orality in the forms of Ngafúa and Elegba’s voices in the seminal poem blends harmoniously with the remaining of the novel in the form of written discourse, such as the reflection of professor Harrington on anthropology.

For any given narrative, there are always multiple basic stories that can be constructed in response to it, because “‘basic-ness’ is always arrived at by the exercise of some set of operations, in accord with some set of principles, that reflect some set of interests, all of which are, by nature, variable and thus multiple” (144). Whenever we start to cut back, peel off, strip away, lay bare, we always do so in accord with certain assumptions and purposes which, in turn, create hierarchies of relevance and centrality; and it is in terms of these hierarchies that we will distinguish certain elements and relations as being central or peripheral, more important or less important, and more basic or less basic.

The form and features of any version of a narrative will be a function of, among other things, the particular motives that elicited it and the particular interests and functions it was

designed to serve. To this end, for instance, to serve the adamant communicative desire of a group of people who want to voice their long-repressed history, Changó is dialogic par excellence. As Tittler remarks, “The narrators are gods, servants, musicians, horses, coachmen, generals, and nannies, to name a few. Sometimes they narrate in the first person, sometimes in the second, and sometimes in the third, with no discernible pattern. . . . Moreover, quite often, the narrators are spirits, or what we might call the talking dead” (3). When a slave ship arrives at Cartagena de Indias, the narrator declares that “las joyas, los trajes, los zapatos de los vivos sólo sirven a nosotros los muertos” (178). Tittler concludes his view on Changó’s dialogism by remarking that “much as the narrating living and the narrating dead flow in and out of each other, lending each other their wisdom and their different perspectives, time and timelessness alternate or interpenetrate each other, projecting an alien, other-worldly quality” (3). These people spare no means, forms, and ways of communication to express their subjectivity which Changó communicates so correctly.

With Changó, we can also affirm that among any array of narratives — tales or tellings — in the universe, there is an unlimited number of potentially perceptible relations which may be of many different kinds and orders, including formal and thematic, synchronic and diachronic, and causal and non-causal. Whenever these potentially perceptible relations become actually perceived, it is by virtue of some set of interests on the part of the perceiver: thus different relations among narratives will be perceived by anthropologists and anthologists, theologians and folklorists, literary historians and narratologists. Since new sets of interests can emerge at any time and do emerge continuously, there can be no ultimately basic sets of relations among narratives, and thus also no natural genres or essential types and

no limit to the number or nature of narratives that may sometime be seen as versions or variants of each other (The Narrative Reader 144).

In Changó, genres, styles, and types manifest themselves freely within narrative forms. For instance, even when they are not represented as dead, the narrators speak from within a context of being in intimate contact with their Ancestors and Orichas. This primordial being with their sustaining vital forces lends their discourse a timeless, spiritually grounded quality that contrasts sharply with the angst-filled utterances of more cosmopolitan narrations. Both in contact with their mortality and with their immortality, Changó's narrators systematically work at the dematerialization of the text. In order to break down the prejudice we share with regard to time, which Western thought tends to divide into the three realms of past, present, and future, Changó proffers sentences like the following: "Elegba probó el vino y se limpia los ojos para no perder palabra de lo que les había dictado en un futuro que recuerda sin haberlo pensado todavía" (119). In one sentence, which evokes a future remembered before it has been thought of, most basic tenses — preterit, present, past perfect, infinitive perfect — are employed to show that the ancestors, the living, and the yet-to-come are all bound together in time and space.

To understand Changó is to comprehend its genesis. In writing Changó, Zapata Olivella is translating from many sources. A "mestizo" Colombian of indigenous, European, and African ancestry, Zapata Olivella has constructed Changó from information he has gathered through experience close to home as well as readings about and travels in Africa. He is not just African or Afro-Hispanic but has rather chosen to identify most strongly with the African bloodstream within him. In addition to projecting himself back in time over the past four centuries, he has imagined what an African spiritual realm would be like, and he has

rendered that realm in Spanish. This creates the possibility for the world to come into contact with the hybridized Western/Creole/African, written/oral, historical/mythical worldview of Changó. And expressing that realm resistantly, Zapata Olivella's "act of resistance to globalism, to homogenization, to the Disneyfication of the planet adds to the text's afterlife, its participation in memory" (4).¹⁸

Blacks have been silenced throughout history, particularly in the New World. As a consequence, the expression of their sufferings assumes varied forms as these downtrodden people fight their way to the status of historical subjects who are writing their own accounts of history. Such a project needs more than a monolithic means of communication and representation. The plan or outline of the events characteristic of black history in America cannot adopt a one-dimensional form of plot. In Changó, multifarious events conjugate and are included in the plot, to which the Western scholars apply the restrictive, classical definition to judge the other's aesthetic work. Changó is plural, inclusive, dialogic, and it embraces many areas of the humanities, the anthropological and existential issues of blacks, and this, unfortunately, might have escaped Captain-Hidalgo in her criticism of Changó.

Tillis's makes a remark in Afro-Hispanic which is relevant to Changó's eclecticism: "It can be stated definitively that Zapata Olivella's works of fiction (Changó) purposefully construct a historical reality that is often not represented in canonical Latin American fiction" (1). He goes on to say: "As a postmodern text, Changó de-centers, disrupts and de-mythifies Eurocentric accounts of the literary representations presented in the work while focusing attention on the fictionalization of actual, social, political, and historical realities in an 'Africanized' context" (1). I think that this presentation of Changó casts the work in the broad spectrum of aesthetic representations which are the creative interest of Zapata Olivella.

I think it is safe to state that, for Western critics, at least till recently black literature is one stable, unitary formation, transmissible from generation to generation. But the very nature of oral literature and the structure of its communication make this eminently impossible. Every oral performance is in many ways a unique performance. Literary forms in oral tradition, as in written, have no eternal existence, but live and die, are resurrected and transformed in various ways. Genre and performance traditions as well as styles are as multiple, possibly more varied than in written tradition. The idea of an essential black oral tradition is more than a pious myth. It greatly impoverishes apprehending literature from the black world.

In the field of oral literature itself, certain literary elements have commonly been held as characteristically oral. Of all the features of oral poetry, the one held to be most distinctive by many scholars is repetition. As Finnegan notes in Oral Poetry, some scholars “unequivocally regard repetition, including parallelism and formulaic expression, as characteristic of oral literature and even the yardstick by which oral can definitively be distinguished from written literature” (127). Undoubtedly, as Isidore Okpewho’s African Oral Literature shows, on par with other oral literatures, repetition plays an extremely important stylistic function (70-88). It is not only of practical or utilitarian value in oral performance, but it is an aesthetic touchstone of oral art in general. Repetition helps the oral artist to organize his material and master the limitations of memory. It is also necessary for the fuller and more assured assimilation of information by the audience. Even more, many of the stylistic features which are recognizably oral, for example, formulae and parallelism, are merely instances of repetition, which in principle and practice range from simple lexical or phrasal recurrences to more structurally elaborated forms, including repeated motifs of theme, character, and action, and even of binary forms of psychological life, as structuralists

have argued. This psychological binarism appears in various forms in the deity Changó, who is himself a true incarnation of such dichotomy: Changó has male and female attributes, is concubine to his sisters; he condemns his sons to slavery and will be their redeemer from sufferings in an alien land at the same time; he rebels against Heaven's creator, Olodumarè, and rejects his divine authority; yet he will not tolerate anyone's challenge to his power. In so being and so doing, he is the point of convergence of psychological polarities.

However, anyone who goes on "to take the occurrence, or a specific proportion, of repetition as a touchstone for differentiating between oral and written styles is bound to be disappointed," as Finnegan remarks in Oral Poetry (130). The concept of repetition is so wide and its application so various that to delimit it in more precise definition is to lose its universality. Finnegan further argues that repetition is at the heart of all poetry and is the means for distinguishing poetry from prose in cultural traditions. Indeed, if there is anything we have learned from structuralist poetics, it is the repetitive nature of all literature. While orature might make repetition particularly explicit, it is a stylistic feature that belongs almost intrinsically to all verbal art.

To my mind, Captain-Hidalgo's assessment joins Ong's, as it seems to suggest that Zapata Olivella employs an aesthetic of extended repetitious narration that has no relevance to the totality of Changó. Based on the above argument, I contest this view, because the technique of repetition in discourse is yet another example of orality that is common in fiction writing in general, in Africa and in the Diaspora in particular. It is precisely because of these features that Changó deserves its mark as one of the best representations of a novel on the African Diaspora, a "repetitive" critical observation made by many well known critiques of African literature in the Latin American tradition, such as Marvin Lewis and Ian Smart. This

literary aesthetic of Zapata Olivella decenters the narrative structure of Changó and africanizes the novelistic style against Ong's theory on orality and Captain-Hidalgo's assumption on repetition. In Changó, oral forms of verbal, idiomatic, and proverbial modes of communication intertwine smoothly with felicitous and generous written letters to convey meanings.

Deconstructing Binarisms in Parallel Structures in Western Thought

According to Ong and Havelock, when an oral culture acquires writing in any deep way, it has taken upon itself a force capable of permanently altering its state of being and direction of development. It is not a mere question of having seized on a useful technological item. On the contrary, the impact of this technology is even felt in the very consciousness of the members of the society. The way they reason and therefore the types of discourse they produce; their arts and sciences; the forms of government and social organization — in short, all that could be characterized as their material and spiritual cultures — are determined by this technology.

Ong occasionally provides some examples of contemporary oral cultures, especially in his Interfaces of the Word. But to generalize on this basis raises questions of validity. Many of the so-called oral cultures globally have undergone so many changes in their mode of life, including media of communication, that to speak of them as if they are fixed in a putative pristine oral condition is an anachronism. On the other hand, not even the most rigorously literate society today is completely devoid of features of orality. The point is that none of those features that Ong describes as the cognitive conditions of oral cultures are completely

absent in the most literate societies of our own day. This is what enables Ong to speak of “second orality.”¹⁹

It is clear that a faulty principle of causality is at work in this rationalization. It is not logically admissible, and equally empirically impossible, to explain the entire direction and shape of society on the basis of a single technological term, when the connection between the two terms is so tenuous and rests on such thin ice. This point has been made quite forcefully by Ruth Finnegan in Literacy and Orality:

Much of the plausibility of the “Great Divide” theories has rested on the often unconscious assumption that what the essential shaping of society comes from is its communication technology. But once technological determinism is rejected or queried, then questions immediately arise about these influential classifications of human development into two major types: oral/primitive as against oral/literate. ... It is worth emphasizing that the conclusions from research, not only about the supposed “primitive mentality” associated with orality, but also about, for example, concepts of individualism and the self, conflict and skepticism, or detached and abstract thought in no-literate cultures now look different ... and once-confident assertions about the supposed differentiating features of oral and literate cultures are now exposed as decidedly shaky. (13)

To recapitulate the point, a look at Ong’s distinctions between orality and literacy reveals very little difference between them and the dichotomies drawn by earlier cognitive anthropologists such as Levy-Bruhl in How Natives Think (1910) and later ones like Levi-Strauss in The Savage Mind (1966). For instance, in his seminal work, Levy-Bruhl argues that the collective representation of “undeveloped peoples” shows a prelogical mentality that is based on the “law of participation,” marking their stark difference from Western consciousness conceptually or in terms of logical procedure (37-38). This participation mystique and the mentality to which it gives rise are responsible for the fact that the primitive mind is essentially synthetic, being little inclined to analysis; that in the life of primitives, memory plays a much more important part than it does in Western mental life; that the slightest mental effort involving abstract reasoning, however elementary it may be, is

distasteful to them; that objective validity that can be verified is unknown; and that their reasoning is unrelievedly concrete (86-128). In sum:

Primitive mentality does indeed possess a language, but its structure, as a rule, differs from that of Western languages. It actually does comprise abstract representations and general ideas; but neither this abstraction nor this generalization resembles that of Western concepts. Instead of being surrounded by an atmosphere of logical potentiality, these representations welter, as it were, in an atmosphere of mystic possibilities ... and for this logical generalization, properly so-called, and logical transactions with its concepts are impracticable. (127)

Placing these remarks side by side with what Ong had to say later would require no further comment. While some scholars have much of Levy-Bruhl's retraction of this position in his posthumous notes, Les carnets de Levy-Bruhl (1949), for instance, it remains clear, as Scott-Littleton argues, that "much of what is now taken for granted by cognitive, structural, and symbolic anthropologists was in fact anticipated in Levy-Bruhl's work, especially his early work" (xlii).

Levy-Bruhl's work provided the inspiration for Lévi-Strauss's The Savage Mind, even if the latter's system of classification relied on the work of Durkheim and Mauss. Lévi-Strauss argues that magic and science are "two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge" and he shows that Neolithic man had a genuine scientific spirit and, further, that in the nominal and classificatory systems of primitive societies is to be found a logical categorical ability. But it is in his concept of oral or mythical thought as "intellectual bricolage" that he reveals the true direction of his thought: "The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal (17).

In this thought pattern, the "bricoleur" is perceptual, while the scientist is conceptual; the scientist opens up new possibilities of knowledge by extension or renewal, while the

bricoleur conserves knowledge only by reorganization; the scientist creates events by means of structures, thus changing the world, while the bricoleur creates structures by means of events. Admittedly, mythical thought, bricolage, is not the necessary preserve of any culture, and indeed all cultures have these alternative thought processes. Still, what is of importance, as later poststructuralist commentators have pointed out, is the framework, the contextual condition of this analysis, including the metaphoric import and the constitutive terms of discourse, which elaborates not mere mental forms but structures of social and cultural organization. As Derrida says explicitly in Of Grammatology, this is ethnocentrism masquerading as anti-ethnocentrism (120-22).

By implication, Ong's binarism orality/literacy reproduces the traditional oppositions of cultures presented in Lévi-Strauss and Levy-Bruhl's works: prelogical versus logical, wild versus domesticated, primitive versus civilized, magical versus scientific, all of the discursive baggage of Western anthropological thought. It is instructive that Goody not only recognizes this but effectively advocates this superficial substitution in his Domestication of the Savage Mind (1977).

At this point, again, Irele's view on culture bears on my argumentation on the dichotomy primitive/modern. In the adaptation of man to his environment, in time and space, Irele is of the view that "the only logical solution for Africans is to face up to the change by redefining their concept of culture" (14). He goes on to say that this is necessary because the traditional way of life (supposedly devoid of science in Western thought) "is no longer a viable option for their continued existence and apprehension of the world" (15). Besides reviewing their perception of culture, blacks, Irele argues, also need to use science and technology more fully. What Irele's statement implies clearly is that blacks were already acquainted with

science, albeit very little. They have to appropriate the “scientific spirit itself” (26). This involves the cultivation of the “deductive method which was elaborated in the philosophy of ancient Greece” (26), specifically in Aristotle’s Organon, on which the manifesto of modern science, Francis Bacon’s Novum Organum, was later based. Irele’s position derives from knowing that “The contribution of Africa to Western Civilization is far from negligible” (33). Irele buttresses this claim with examples from works like Cheikh Anta Diop’s The African Origins,²⁰ profound studies that validate the bricoleur’s scientific spirit.

So science is not alien to black in his attempt to dominate nature and, by the same token, science and magic are not mutually exclusive since both are part of the existential practice of black. They blend together, complement each other in black’s response to his social environment. They are liminal. Western critiques tend to see works like Changó as a fictional universe where only magic and mysticism prevail. This deontology which characterizes the Western critical attitude toward such an elaborate aesthetic construction as Changó is another way of presenting the divide orality/literacy, but in terms of the periphery versus the center. In this framework of ideas, Zapata Olivella challenges the Judeo-Christian view that the black universe is denuded of science and is inferior to its literate Western counterpart.

In Changó’s fictional world, critically rooted in the pristine, traditional African concept of universe and in the destiny of self and community, Agne Brown is brought face to face with North American historical figures as the narrative voice teaches a crash course in late nineteenth and early twentieth century history as it relates to the scientific and technological achievements of blacks in the United States:

Agne Brown, para valorar lo positivo o nefasto de mi obra es necesario que tu vista se extienda en la profundidad del tiempo. Así podrás distinguir al ekobio Daniel Hale

Williams disponiéndose a repetir la hazaña sólo antes lograda por los cirujanos del antiguo Egipto: abrir y saturar el corazón de un paciente vivo. Verás en el Viejo Instituto en Tuskegee al professor George Washington Carver alimentando con savia sintética las raíces de los cafetos. ¡Oye! El joven Granville Woods te transmite la primera señal inalámbrica desde un tren en movimiento. (368-69)

It goes without saying that even though this quote aims first to emphasize the presence of modern science and technology among the so-called bricoleurs, it also raises critical points in the understanding of Changó as a postmodern historiographic metafictional text. The fictionalization of personalities such as Daniel Hale Williams, George Washington Carver and Granville Williams, who signify nonfictional truths, catapults the narration onto the historical plane. The narrative voice, in the form of Ngafúa, instructs Agne Brown of these truths relative to the scientific and technological contribution of Africans in North America. Ngafúa makes reference to the fact that surgeon Daniel Hale Williams, in 1893, performed the first successful open-heart surgery in the United States. Agne is reminded of the scholar and inventor Dr. George Washington Carver, of his professorship at Tuskegee Institute and one of his many feats in the area of agricultural development that revolutionized the economy of the North American South. Finally, there is the mention of the mechanical and electrical engineer Granville Woods, whose patented devices transformed the communications and railway industries. The facts are historically accurate and function within Zapata Olivella's fictional text as signifiers of Changó's metafictional quality by causing the reader to ponder the very nature and function of fiction.

Chango's liminal use of orality and literacy to parallel other binary categories such as magic and science and bricolage and science, and to communicate other versions of truth, is Zapata Olivella's postmodern reconstruction of a power paradigm through European de-centering. Relating to the issue of "de-centering," African American scholar Cornel West in "Black Culture and Postmodernism" states that "The current 'postmodern' debate is first and

foremost a production of significant First World reflections upon the centering of Europe that take such forms as the demythification of European cultural predominance and the deconstruction of European philosophical edifices” (391).

In relation to West’s statement, I think that the narrative voice in Changó makes a pivotal observation when mentioning Dr. Daniel Hale Williams. The text indicates that Dr. Hale Williams successfully repeats a medical procedure that was only performed in the Ancient culture of Egypt. Thus, Egypt is projected as the birthplace of a procedure that revolutionized global modern medicine. This inversion of the world power paradigm replaces Europe with Africa and de-centers and deconstructs some ideological premises relative to advances in modern medicine. Whereas Europe has been positioned traditionally as the world leader in the field of medicine, Zapata Olivella subverts this worldview by constructing an Afrocentric ideology where Africa, in the context of modern medicine, shifts from a marginal position to the center.

In a similar line of ideas, Robin Horton approaches black thought and Western science in a direction which brings the two systems of thought closer to each other. In Horton’s analysis, traditional thinking is rational and logical, often in ways analogous to scientific thought. For one thing, models of scientific theory are a quest for unity, simplicity, order, and regularity underlying the apparent diversity, complexity, disorder, and anomaly that characterize the universe of phenomena. Likewise, African thought also seeks this order through the structure of the pantheon and the categorical relations of its spiritual forces. And just as scientific thought seeks causal explanations, so does African thought. For example, the causal connection between social conduct and state of disease; or cause and effect implications of human deeds on social stability or fracture of community, such as, for

instance, in Changó, the falling apart of the Oyo Kingdom and the terrible condemnation of the Yoruba people to slavery in the New World as a curse of the deity Changó on his subjects in retaliation for their rebellion against him; or Changó's revolt against Olodumarè, the supreme deity, challenging his power when he discovers that the dearth, famine, and plagues that are affecting his kingdom are caused by a crime of injustice committed against Obatalá under Olodumarè's authority.

But Horton maintains that there are also substantive differences between the two models, differences he characterizes as "open" versus "closed" predicaments, by which he means that traditional culture, unlike scientific culture, has no understanding and toleration of alternative thought.²¹ He tries somehow to link this with the commonplace notions of the mystical attitude to language, recourse to a personal idiom, and the contextual basis of all oral discourse. In the event, oral thought turns out to be lacking in logic and philosophy in the strict sense, although, Horton himself affirms, "most African traditional worldviews are logically elaborated to a high degree" and are "of eminently rational character" (229). At this point, I find Horton contradicting himself.

The assumption on which Horton proceeds is indeed a common one in anthropological-philosophical discourses. This is the notion that the magical, with its connotation of, and connection with, ritual and religion, is the dominant characteristic of primitive thought and behavior. The volume of anthropological research, from James Frazer upwards, illustrates that this assertion is indeed overwhelming. But what is not so certain is the theoretical justification for this position. The question that could be raised legitimately, from all accounts, is why, for instance, the comparison is not made within the same experiential

domain, say, between traditional religious thought and modern Western religious thought. In other words, what is to be done with the crucial question of their incommensurability?

Presumably, because the scientific is regarded as the most characteristic Western model of thinking, just as the religious is regarded as the most specific aspect of traditional, non-Western thought, a comparative analysis is felt to be possible on cross-cultural grounds.

If, then, the basis of the distinction between the magical and scientific, with all the intertextual connections to the other oppositions — savage versus civilized, prelogical versus logical, oral versus written — is hardly more than ethnocentric convention or intuition, what can this distinction serve in the Western understanding of the culture of the Other? The point is important because the value of the arguments about the magical and scientific lies in the various attempts made, however unsuccessfully, to account for cultural differences. But if these failures in the domain of philosophy, anthropology, and the social sciences are related in some way to the aims and methods of these disciplines, it is inevitable for the debate to be carried over to the fields of linguistics and literature, which, I think, may be commonly regarded as lying at the very heart of cultural communication. Emevwo Biakolo argues in this direction in On the Theoretical Foundations when he writes:

Orality and literacy are par excellence, cognate concepts in the field of verbal communication. The enormous volume of work on orality and literacy in the disciplines of language and literary communication is thus to be explained not only on the basis of a certain natural disciplinary appropriation of the concepts, but because of the perception that research had come to a dead end in the social sciences. At the same time, it points to the intertextual variability of the concepts. (10)

With this critique, we reach then an aspect of the relations between orality and literacy that appears less controversial, the connection between spoken and written language.

Changó is a linguistic universe involving phonological, semantic, lexical, and syntactical elements. The novel provides lexical and syntactic specificities of spoken language, in

implicit or explicit contrast to written language. But, in my view, the contrasts are sometimes simply graphic in the grandiloquent appearance of words coined by Zapata Olivella himself. I mentioned earlier that the Afro-Colombian social critic and ethno-linguist resorts to such creative practice to resist and subvert the repressive power of the dominant European culture mirrored through Spanish language. The specificities encompass a tendency to use longer words, increased nominalization as against verbalization in speech, greater variety of vocabulary, more attributive adjectives and fewer personal pronouns. On the syntactical side, Changó is a paradigm of complex nominal and verbal constructions, with a preference for subordinate rather than coordinate constructions, passive voice, and a higher frequency of grammatical features such as gerunds, participles, attributive adjectives, and modal and perfective auxiliaries.

An important feature of spoken language in Changó includes the narrators' greater involvement with their audience, the involvement of self in speech and with the reality they speak about. Ngafúa, Agne Brown, and Elegba, in their interactions with people of Changó, are good illustrations of such involvement. This can be elicited from these speakers' frequent reference to self, their references to the addressee, and to the concrete reality with which they are dealing. Indeed, this contrasts with the detachment of the writer, which shows up in "interest in ideas that are not tied to specific people, events, times, or places, but which are abstract and timeless," as Chafe and Danielewicz remark in "Integration and Involvement" and "Linguistic Differences." In Nuestra voz (1987), Zapata Olivella observes the following on language, writing, and technology:

Alienado por el increíble desarrollo de la técnica, el lenguaje popular Americano se debate por ajustar sus ideas al mundo cambiante de la sociedad moderna.

La lengua hablada, fenómeno vivo, quiera que no, debe apoyarse en circunstancias concretas: mímica y entonación; las cosas de que se habla están casi siempre a la vista en “situación”. Por tanto, los cambios de la realidad afectarán al hablante.

La escritura, despersonificada del vaivén del diálogo, posee su propio mundo: es para leer. No requiere comprensión inmediata. Se redacta a satisfacción, pudieron utilizar sin mayor sosiego los anacronismos, neologismos, deformaciones sintácticas, etc. Es “acrónica,” pues a voluntad el escritor toma de aquí y de allá, en el pasado y presente los vocablos que quiere. En comparación con la hablada, es secundariamente social (96-97).²²

It is in such a spoken linguistic setting that Elegba, the word force, communicates power, is the opener of doors, the enabler par excellence. Every end is a beginning and every beginning is an end in Elegba. Necessarily, the very final page of Changó inscribes a new beginning, with all the sense of hope that this implies. This is the space which Elegba fills; he intervenes to pronounce the absolutely final words of the book. Significantly, he speaks to calm Changó's rage at the “Muntu Americano” for their slow progress in the march toward liberation and complete expiation: “Difuntos ... ¡Ya es hora que comprendáis que el tiempo para los vivos no es inagotable! (511).

The second person plural, used in Spain as the familiar form, is reserved in Spanish America for only the most formal occasions, most commonly in sermons. It is this high-register form that Elegba employs in the final utterance of the long text. The setting is, in fact, the mythical space where the kingdom of the dead communes and unites freely with that of the living. The narrator of this final act is none other than Malcom X, describing what transpires at his funeral and at his point of passage into the kingdom of the dead. Through the poetry of traditional African theology, all of the heroes of the race, literally the living and the dead are brought together in transcendental convocation. Although the recently departed Malcom X narrates the final act, the section itself, the fifth and last, is enacted principally through the voice of Agne Brown, a young Angela Davis type who is still alive at this point.

And once the barrier between the kingdom of this world and that of the world beyond vanishes, all time is compacted and past, present, and future become one.

Elegba's intervention is realized in this quintessentially revolutionary, liberationist environment. It is occasioned by the elevation into the pantheon of one of the greatest revolutionaries of the twentieth century. It occurs in the presence of such figures as Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, John Brown, and Martin Luther King, Jr. His message is clearly addressed to those oppressed black people who still reside in the land of the living, and who are still subject to the curse of sequentiality, "who are hounded by Cronus."²³ They must achieve their liberation within the limits of an imperfect time that is not inexhaustible. It is a message of secure hope, for not only is it couched in terms that are uncompromisingly Afrocentric, but it seeks directly to inspire a continued commitment to revolutionary struggle.

Orality and Literacy: Cognate Concepts in Cultural Communication

Language is a major battleground on which the struggle against Western alienation of black has been waged. In this regard, we have seen that Irele, for example, is of the view that learning European languages is a first step to resolving the problem of the cultural estrangement of black because therein lie some of the moral and practical ideas that are responsible for the crisis.²⁴ For Fanon, nothing can be further from the truth. As he argues in Black Skin, these languages are just the tombs of many an illustrious indigenous civilization.

Fanon echoes Paul Valery when he calls language "the god gone astray in the flesh" (19). Moreover, critics such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin join Fanon in their work in The Post-Colonial Studies Reader (1995), as they observe:

Language is a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse because the colonial process itself begins and ends in language. The control over language by the

imperial center —whether achieved by displacing native languages, by installing itself as a ‘standard’ against other variants which are constituted as ‘impurities,’ or by planting the language of empire in a new place— remains the most potent instrument of cultural control. Language provides the terms by which reality may be constituted; it provides the names by which the world may be ‘known.’ Its system of values —its suppositions, its geography, its concept of history, of difference, its myriad gradations of distinction— becomes the system upon which social, economic, and political discourses are grounded. (28)

Changó is conscious of this metaphysics of language. The novel is crafted to reflect the social conscience of a writer whose aesthetic creation aims to resist, subvert, and de-center the hegemony of the center and of the master discourse over art creation in the periphery.

Similar to The Post-Colonial Studies, in Nuestra voz, Zapata Olivella observes on language and literature that

Se necesitaron varios siglos de mestizaje y la alcanzada independencia de España, para que académicos y letrados americanos se sustrajeran de la alienación colonialista que los impulsaba a menospreciar el habla vulgar. Sólo con los alientos renovadores del Romanticismo reaccionan nuestros escritores y filólogos. Pero el peso del letargo de siglos y las nuevas fuerzas alienadoras del neocolonialismo, reinfiltan la alienación europeizante en la corriente liberadora de la conciencia americana. Algunos de nuestros actuales escritores, replantean con nuevos vocablos, escuelas y teorías, los viejos prejuicios que los apartan del aprovechamiento correcto del habla popular. (96)

Zapata Olivella goes on to quote: “Y después de todo, dice Bally refiriéndose a los falsos opuestos del habla y la escritura, no se trata de renunciar a los ejemplos escritos, sino más bien de fiscalizarlos constantemente, sistemáticamente, con una norma. Esta norma es la lengua hablada.”²⁵

Changó is just as reflective of Zapata Olivella’s concept of literature and language when it comes to the extent to which the work appropriates and integrates African linguistic elements. Ranging from stories, chants, songs, oratory, and poetry to such ancillary stylistic enhancers as ideophones, neologisms, repetition, allusion, imagery, and tonality, in all cases their function is to portray these elements of African communication practice as legitimate

tools of discourse that should be valued not only by the intended audience of the writer, but also by the other inhabitants of the Americas.²⁶

We can see a combination of them in the Ngafúa story, at times simple chant rendered in poetic form, as the following excerpt illustrates:

¡Oídos del Muntu, oíd! / ¡Oíd! ¡Oíd! ¡Oíd! / ¡Oídos del Muntu, oíd! // Soy Ngafúa, hijo de Kissi-Kama. / Dame, padre, tu voz creadora de imagines, / Tu voz tantas veces escuchada a la sombra del baobab (6); // ¡Changó! / Voz forjadora del trueno. / ¡Oye, oye nuestra voz! / Siéntate, descansa tu descomunal falo / tu gran utero, / la vida tenga conciencia de la muerte. / ¡Oye, oye nuestro canto! Oye la palabra del Muntu / sin el truenoluz de tus relámpagos. (26)

Examples of oratory also abound in Changó. While the first is the exchange that took place between Benkos Biojo and Father Peter Claver on the question of humility and obedience to the Catholic God, others include the following words from the Babalao to Father Alonso de Sandóval:

Nada me aflige más que oír tan buenas intenciones, pero creo que defrauda tus propósitos. Bien sabes que no podrás ser nunca el defensor de mis convicciones religiosas. Mal podrías convertirte en predicador de Odumare, en caballo de Changó, en mensajero de Elegba. Sólo conseguirás que te reprochen el falaz intento de apiadarte de un pertinaz réprobo como yo. Dejad que el Santo Tribunal me acuse, pues cada palabra, cada instante de los días que me quedan, ya que seré quemado vivo en la hoguera, los emplearé para predicar entre mis ekobios la fe que deben a nuestros Orichas. (150-1)

Another example is this fiery speech from an African-American World War II veteran:

¡Hemos vuelto! ¡Hemos vuelto del combate y regresamos combatiendo! ¡Abrimos paso a la democracia! ¡La salvamos en Francia y por Changó que la salvaremos en este país donde hemos nacido! (403).

Although this last piece belongs to the prose section of the novel, it nevertheless exhibits the same poetic attributes that characterize the purely lyric portions of the novel in the internal rhythm, tonality, and semantics of the words used, all of which echo and enhance the revolutionary mood of the speaker. Together with the rest of the pieces quoted, it functions

as a channel of criticism for both individual and institutional acts of injustice. It also serves to arouse what Okpewho calls “the fighting spirit” of the African (151).

The clearest manifestation of the black voice in Changó, however, is the grammatical inconsistencies that riddle the work. Presented especially in the novel’s prose sections, the examples are too many to recount since they are on almost every page. Here are a few: “La oscuridad cayó tempranamente sobre la fortificación y la Loba *baja* la bandera con desgano” (35); “Las moscas *se prenden* a la carne cuando los soldados se la *llevaban* a la boca” (36); “Dos Lobas *rodaron* aullando y las otras atrapadas *se defienden* a rebencazos (37); “Los Orichas sagrados *escalaron* los muros de la fortaleza y *penetran* en la mansión del Kilumbu Blanco cuando dormía” (38); “Mientras el fuego los *consumía*, nuestros ekobios *suelen* entonar cantos guerreros, mostrando amenazantes a las Lobas Blancas sus puños encadenados” (40).

I could not agree more with Zoggyie that, given Zapata Olivella’s impressive educational background the grammatical inconsistencies are intentional.²⁷ They are designed, Zoggyie proposes, to capture the notion of circular time so prevalent in traditional African thought and to convey what Bill Ashcroft calls the “illocutionary force” of the story told (In Search 184). Illocutionary force is that aspect of every discourse which depends on the specific context of the enunciation to be understood. In the specific case of Zapata Olivella’s story, it is the uniqueness of America’s black in relation to the other inhabitants of this space, and the fact that s/he perceives and processes the world differently. The linguistic discrepancies enable the writer to express this difference while affording his intended audience a voice of their own.

Another linguistic example in cultural communication involves the neologisms that riddle Changó. Essentially ideophones, since they are “idea[s]-in-sound” (Okpewho 92), they contribute to the revival of the new African voice, and they enable Zapata Olivella to express what would otherwise have been inexpressible in Spanish language. A case in point is the word “luzsombra/lightshadow” (43) associated with the personality of Elegba. While the “luz” component is consistent with the earthly collaborations that blacks often affiliate with their gods that of the “sombra” also implies a dark side in Spanish, hints at the very fact of the latter’s divinity and the idea that gods are physically invisible to men. By combining “luz” and “sombra” into one word, the Afro-Colombian ethno-linguist manages to convey his notion of liminality, complementarity, and dialogic presence of two polarizing elements in a linguistic formation even while speaking in a language that traditionally seems to be ignorant of this phenomenon.

Other neologisms with similar functions include the “vistasonido” of Sosa Illamba (74), the “ayermañana” of the Muntu as a group (19), the “espaciotiempo” of Agne Brown’s body (348), and the “nochesdías” she spends recalling her stay with Reverend Robert’s family (354). On a par with “luzsombra,” each of these words-phrases drives a concept which is uniquely black. Speaking of liminality, in “vistasonido,” for instance Sosa Illamba, because of her status as a deity, does not merely see but also hears the future, hence the component “sonido.” In a similar vein, consonant with the cyclical notion of time in the black universe, the Muntu does not only exist in the here and now but also simultaneously in the past and the future — “ayer, mañana.”

We come again to the point that what must be recognized, it seems to me, is that speech/listening is a mode of language as is writing/reading. The art of speaking is highly

developed and esteemed in the black world for the very material reasons that voice has been and continues to be the more available medium of expression, that people spend a good deal of time with one another, talking, debating, entertaining. For these very reasons, there is also respect for speech and for writing as communicative and powerful social acts.

Our objective as readers and critics, as Julien remarks, should not be to isolate orality, to see it as singular, as inherently “first” or “other” in opposition to writing (24). Neither medium should serve as a metonymy for African or for European. Speech and writing are modes of language, and both modes are ours when we have the means to produce them. When we look at their interaction in literary genres, it therefore should not be in an effort to prove or disprove cultural authenticity but rather to appreciate literature as a social and aesthetic act.

There must not and cannot be prescriptions for authenticity in approaches to cultural communication. As M. Z. Rosaldo explains in The Use and Abuse of Anthropology, the search for origins is a dubious quest:

To look for origins is, in the end, to think that what we are today is ... primordial, transhistorical, and essentially unchanging. ... Quests for origins sustain a discourse cast in universal terms; and universalism permits us all too quickly to assume ... the sociological significance of what individual people do or even worse, of what, in biological terms, they are. Stated otherwise, our search for origins reveals a faith in ultimate and essential truths. (392-93)

Conversant with Bhabha’s concept of liminality and Biakolo’s view on orality and literacy, I believe Zapata Olivella demonstrates through Changó that speech and writing are cognate concepts in the field of verbal communication. Language can be said to play an active role in the development of theme in Changó. Through the manipulation of this element, the ethno-linguist and social writer Zapata Olivella succeeds in underscoring the individuality of the audience he represents. He shows that this group can be and is indeed

different from everyone else, despite the passage of centuries, that this difference is an integral part of who they are, and that accepting and respecting it is the first step toward achieving racial harmony in the Americas since, as Zoggyie puts it in In Search, “intolerance and civil unrest often go hand in hand” (185).

Zapata Olivella’s argument on literature, language, and cultural communication in Nuestra voz is very relevant to the aesthetic and ideological purpose of Changó:

Nuestros románticos comienzan a descubrir la inexplorada cantera de su literatura oral. Leyendas, cuentos, oraciones mágicas, romances y deidades de España preclásica y de la América prehispánica, inspiran al poeta y al narrador. Desde entonces, hasta hoy, el escritor latinoamericano persigue captar su mundo real y mítico. Si en la actualidad se aproxima a su ideal estilístico se debe a que posee un lenguaje cuyas palabras, dinámica, y resonancia, conllevan el espíritu de nuevas connotaciones surgidas de su realidad vivencial. ... Lo nuevo es el lenguaje que surge del humus Americano fecundado por la palabra hispánica. ...

La afirmación de que los estilos literarios y orales de nuestros contemporáneos arrancan de las fuentes preclásicas y clásicas, en ningún momento quiere indicar que tales influencias constituyen estribos enmohecidos que encadenen el contenido y la forma de nuestra literatura. Nada más opuesto a nuestro concepto de la dinámica social como gestora de la lengua y de su creatividad que este presupuesto estático y anacrónico. (105)

This view of Zapata Olivella’s on language and literature in Latin America is on par with his deconstructionist approach to orality/literacy through Changó. Nevertheless, Zapata Olivella’s analysis joins Julien’s view on orality/literacy and reveals that it is to the Eurocentric reception of black literature that we owe the current academic orientation in studies of oral traditions and literature. If there had been no Eurocentric annexing of black texts, the issue of orality/literacy might never have arisen as it did—with its urgency and emphasis on “Africanness or blackness” of literary texts. The exploration of links between oral and written art forms might then have taken a less ideologically motivated course, and studies of orality and literature might have examined the binarism, not in its supposedly

essential nature as African and European, but in the interplay of aesthetics and social context that it connotes.

Notes

¹ Among the first to signal the continuity of African verbal arts was Senghor. In Ethiopiennes 1956, he includes among his poems the essay “ Comme les lamantins vont boire à la source.” He states with regard to French influences in his poetry and that of other poets included in his Anthologie: “Si l’on veut nous trouver des maîtres, il serait plus sage de les chercher du côté de l’Afrique” (156). As is well known, throughout his poetry, beginning with Chants d’ombre in 1945, Senghor frequently alludes to the oral tradition in the titles of poems such as “Que m’accompagnent koras et balafongs.”

² The digestive metaphor used by Soyinka, “ingestion,” in Poems of Black Africa (14-15) is reminiscent of Verlaine quoted by Silviano Santiago in O entre-lugar do discurso latino-americano (21). See for instance, “Modernismo Revisitado” by Jorge Schwartz.

³ The spirit of “O Modernismo brasileiro” is summarized by the following quotation from “Modernismo Revisitado: La Caja Modernista,” translated from the Portuguese by Pablo Gasparini from La Semana de Arte Moderno de 1922. ¿Por qué São Paulo?:

Además de la secuencia que cubre prácticamente una década, se asuman dos criterios importantes: el de la interdisciplinaria y de la desregionalización. Intentó respetar el espíritu de la Semana: en el Programa la literatura aparece aliada a la música; en el Catálogo de la exposición las otras manifestaciones artísticas son arquitectura, pintura, escultura. No podríamos tener mejor ejemplo de la contaminación del *esprit nouveau* (la denominada nueva sensibilidad o espíritu moderno) entre las diversas vertientes artísticas que este efecto de vasos comunicantes en los que un evento complementa al otro” (3).

In a nutshell, the Adradian cultural “antropofagia” and “canibalismo” are the effect of “la contaminación del *esprit nouveau*” manifested in practical terms as “efecto de vasos comunicantes,” which is another way of expressing Bhabha’s idea of liminality.

⁴ See liminality in Ascroft et al’s Post-Colonial 130-31. See also Bhabha 1994.

⁵ Cheikh Anta Diop’s Nations nègres et culture is a major document in the current reassessment of Africa’s intellectual and aesthetic life prior to colonization. One of the most important and ancient scripts is, of course, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Diop demonstrates that Egyptian civilization was both a product of and contributor to African culture.

Albert Gérard’s African Language Literatures (1981) popularizes the little-known history of writing in Africa. He describes, for example, the fourth-century development of Sabeian script in the region that corresponds to present-day Ethiopia and the later flowering of Geez literature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (7-12). He also cites the fact that after the European contact, Fulani, Hausa, and Wolof continued to be written with the use of Arabic script. Similarly, David Dalby documents the development of scripts for “restricted” use in nineteenth- and twentieth-century West Africa. As Harold Scheub indicates, oral and written forms have coexisted and enriched each other.

⁶ There are, however, valid questions which may be asked with regard to the reciprocity between social context and literary forms and the relationship of language choice and literacy to creation and reception of novels. See Mudimbe's argument in L'odeur du père 110-11 and Julien's comment in African Novels 160.

⁷ Finnegan's Oral Literature 34-48 gives a detailed account of anthropological theories as they relate to African oral literature.

⁸ Hountondji presents, in African Philosophy, a discussion on Paul Radin and Marcel Griaule, two anthropologists whose works were at odds with the prevailing views that oral work is uncrafted and inferior to writing (88-101).

⁹ This is from Gates's "Functionalism and Studies" in The Collective and Functional Fallacies 12.

¹⁰ See the presentation and social attribute of Mamadou Kouyaté in African Novels 13-14. More is said on "le griot" in Amadou Koné's Tradition épique et généalogie 55.

¹¹ This term is used by Johnson in Critical Terms 44, and I understand it in the sense that the speaker in "Meditation" cannot write his way into an immediacy that would eliminate writing, nor can he write himself into a submissiveness great enough to overtake the fact that it is he, not God, who writes, that his conceit will never succeed in erasing the conceit of writing itself, which I think is his signature.

¹² On this point, even Ong, who has made strong arguments with regard to orality/writing and sensorium-thought "writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before to the interior self against whom the objective world is set" (105), comes close to deconstructing his claims. See Orality and Literacy 175.

¹³ Cheikh Anta Diop is straightforward when he remarks that the terms of definition of négritude are precisely those of Gobineau, with this difference — that they are now seen as positive and essential to world humanism. Hountondji confirms Anta Diop's view by referring to the complicity in the 1930s and 1940s "between Third World nationalists and 'progressive' Western anthropologists." The ambiguous remark of Cendrars, "n'est-ce pas le théoricien et le fondateur du racisme aryen, le comte de Gobineau, ce contempteur des races de couleur, qui, sur la tête maudite du Nègre pose la couronne de la poésie" (100), is a denunciation of the French racist's hypocritical strategy to lure Western thought of the Negro and Senghor and his followers into espousing his derogative perception and essentialist definition of the African. It is now established as a fact that Sartre's "Orphée noir" is a remote, ambiguous echo to Gobineau's theory. Why should such a racist, suddenly, at all, like and admire the fact that the Negro is endowed with poetry and orality, whereas at the same time, he sarcastically states: "parmi tous les arts que la créature mélanienne préfère, la musique tient la première place, qu'elle ne demande rien à la partie pensante de son cerveau" (474)?

¹⁴ JanMohamed's view is a common and ambiguous assertion close to Ong's proposition that writing restructures thought processes. By contrast, Hountondji's view that a true African philosophy requires ongoing critical assessment, made possible by the accumulation of

written texts suggests that writing is technically necessary to provide the means to store and retrieve intricate arguments.

¹⁵ This is from “Criticism of Logocentrism” in Derrida’s De la grammatologie. The hidden but ineradicable importance of writing that Derrida uncovers in his readings of logocentric texts in fact reflects an unacknowledged, or “repressed,” graphocentrism or covert privileging of the social power of writing, such as it is manipulated by Gobineau. See note 13. See also Johnson’s “Writing” in Critical Terms 47.

¹⁶ I understand pedagogy in David Bleich’s concept of adopting an antiformalist and nonobjectivist paradigm for literary studies, for instance. In his orientation of pedagogy, no response to a text could meet the unreal orthodox criteria of objectivity and completeness. Just as reading depends on personal psychology and necessarily engenders distortions (exaggerations, omissions, associations, insertions, errors), pedagogy in black culture draws its force from Soyinka’s “metaphysics of the irreducible” or antiformalism. See “The Subject of Pedagogy” in Leitch’s American Literary Criticism (223-26).

¹⁷ Magara, according to Zapata Olivella, is “Vida, inteligencia. Fuerza espiritual que interviene en la formación biológica de un ser humano. Tiene relación con Kulonda, el que, entre los Bantú, es semilla física y espiritual con la que un Ancestro auspicia el nacimiento de una criatura sembrándola en el útero de su madre” (521). As for Buzima, it is “Concepto bantú que alude al cadáver carente de vida biológica, aunque persista su muntu, energía plena de inteligencia y voluntad (515). All of the four words, “Ifá-Fa,” “magara,” “kulonda,” and “buzima,” express continuity and elasticity between the universe of the dead and the world of the living.

¹⁸ See Changó as a text of resistance in Tittler’s “Catching the Spirit” in Afro-Hispanic 4.

¹⁹ In “Orality is Agonistically Toned,” Ong observes that primary oral cultures often evidence wars of words, such as riddle or song contests, name-calling, and bragging. On the positive side, eulogizers can strive to outdo each other in heaping up words of praise on the living or dead. Writing, on the other hand, separates us from each other, and therefore subdues the constant verbal jousting of oral cultures. Contemporary cultures still have their contests, their *agon*, but they have moved to other arenas, perhaps in today’s culture business and sports. Curiously, Ong claims that in secondary orality, the agonistic tendency of oral speech remains subdued, a carryover from print culture: “Electronic media do not tolerate a show of open antagonism. Despite their cultivated air of spontaneity, these media are totally dominated by a sense of closure which is the heritage of print: a show of hostility might break open the closure, the tight control” (137). What Ong says may be true for television, where presidential debates are anything but fiercely contested verbal battles. However, Ong’s claim may not hold for many other forms of electronic communication — for instance, the contemporary, urban, oral tradition of “hip-hop,” in which we witness a revival of an oral, formulaic tradition, with a sharp, sometimes vicious verbal edge. On the Internet now, the phenomenon of “flaming” — heaping bitter invective upon one’s interlocutor — is well-known and widespread (LaQuey and Ryer: 71-73; Krol: 150). In short, there is abundant evidence of a sharp agonistic tone in much of secondary orality. In the same way as primary orality and secondary orality show similarity in their manifestations, in hypertext, as in

primary orality, the distinction between author and reader once again melts away in the midst of the collaborative effort of navigating the hypertextual network: “Electronic text is, like an oral text, dynamic.... The electronic writing space is also shared between author and reader, in the sense that the reader participates in calling forth and defining the text of each particular reading. The electronic reader plays in the writing space of the machine the same role that the Homeric listener played as s/he sat before the poet (Bolter, 1991: 59). In conclusion, Ong’s notion of secondary orality and secondary literacy leads him back to the point of the complementarity and liminality which have always existed between primary orality and primary literacy, as I demonstrate in this work. See “From Orality to Literacy to Hypertext: back to the future?”

²⁰ Irele bases his claims on his analysis of Anta Diop, Martin Bernal, and George James’s works on ancient African civilization.

²¹ Horton takes this idiom from Karl Popper, but his use of the pair is ambiguous, as it is not clear whether he uses them as dichotomy or liminality. See Biakolo’s On the Theoretical Foundations (8).

²² Zapata Olivella quotes from Charles Bally’s El lenguaje y la vida (1947).

²³ Smart’s usage of Cronus contrasts with Elegba’s capacity to connect the worlds of the dead, the living, and of the not-yet-born. Elegba’s approach to human problems is circular whereas the one of Cronus is sequential and linear. Smart underlines the emphasis Zapata Olivella puts on the importance of history in shaping present and future. See Smart’s “Orisa and Literature” in Proceedings 97-105.

²⁴ As we can recall from In Praise of Alienation, Irele thinks that the best way for Africans to acquire the “spirit” and “totality” of Western civilization is to learn European languages (6).

²⁵ See Charles Bally’s El lenguaje y la vida 110.

²⁶ These are elements of African culture because they have been identified as such by a number of African scholars. See, for example, Isidore Okpewho’s African Oral Literature and Jack Goody’s The Interface.

²⁷ Besides his outstanding literary credentials as the author of several novels and monographs, Zapata Olivella is also an eminent medical doctor and anthropologist. He is not a novice when it comes to the use of language, culture, and communication.

CONCLUSION

My dissertation is a focus on a very different postmodern and post-colonial novel that uses the American slavery past as a means to question concepts, uses, and ethics of America's black minority identity within the specific cultures from which Changó emerges as a discourse. In Changó, Zapata Olivella deploys various ironic narrative strategies which undermine yet at the same time support his interrogations and suggestions. That is, Changó questions self-understanding as resting upon either of the two ontological bases used for the foundation of argument, namely essentialism and existentialism. In this perspective, Changó is an artistic reflection on and engagement of the discourse of its time.

In Changó, Zapata Olivella uses characters and conflicts to reveal the futile attempts to reduce reality to language and subjective desires. Through irony, he deploys characters imbued with paradoxical perspectives to form a narrative structure where more than one dialogue between the reader and the text's explicit intentions takes place simultaneously. Irony enables its user to pretend to mean something yet refuse to mean that particular something in the same instance.

The questions and demands Changó places upon its reader are a function of several dialogical processes of imagining relation and enhancing understanding. Among the processes, important to my analysis are: reforming memory as continuity rather than as dichotomy, and, as a result, deconstructing the received schemes of history, knowledge, culture, and identity.

On the theoretical ground enunciated above, the people of the French Antilles, for instance, since their being made French citizens in 1946, have been, with the négritude movement and particularly with Aimé Césaire, working through their collective, relational self-concepts in the French nation and the black world simultaneously. Franco-caribbean writers such as Glissant, Condé, and Ménénil, at a par with Zapata Olivella, demand that readers study with care the often ambiguous lessons of the past in light of the current questions about the ontological frameworks for home-grown identity aesthetics. These authors, like Zapata Olivella, demonstrate that the very questions of identity and status from slavery times continue to be important long after many people have forgotten why. The great questions of epistemology displace knowledge formulated through oppositional discourse and reinforced by race-based folk culture as the foundational pathos for identity aesthetics. Their new socio-conscious négritude discourse urges readers to assess critically and intellectually the apparently philosophically ingenuous and disinterested folk or nativistic pathos so prevalent through narrative. The past's pathos, left unexamined, continues to rely on ever more narrowed pride and determined language to override the human condition. To halt the stalled progress of becoming, these authors advocate using questions and dialogism, not claims, to accommodate paradox, irony, and in ways that reckon with humility and humanity.

I expand my study of the tropo of slavery by comparing Changó with African novels of similar sub-genre and sensibility, namely Soyinka's The Swamp Dwellers, Ayi Kwei Armah's Two Thousand Seasons, and Sambène's Les bouts de bois de Dieu. Whereas Soyinka questions the myth of retrograde forces of tradition and superstition in his work, and Ayi Kwei Armah denounces stridently the vestiges of past slave trade and his country's

leadership neo-colonial conspiracy against the people, in Changó, Zapata Olivella constructs a continuous spiritual presence that is based on voodoo folk practice. Changó posits the human spirit itself as the agency of continuity in the struggle for freedom and as the zone of change in cultural makeup. With this novel, one could realize that the more things change, the closer the opposed groups approach each other, thanks to métissage, hybridism, and syncretism. Transition is the only constant where the New World order of imposed, exclusionary systems of language and ideology gradually gives over to the ironies of fate in the human condition. The ever-present aesthetic of change continues to reform knowledge, culture, and identity, and this spiritual orientation to history obviates epistemologies based on stable systems.

In all this, Voodoo epitomizes as much the leitmotiv of Changó as the multi-faceted nature of deity Changó represents the multifarious views of the Afro-Colombian author on humanity. Official historical processes aside Zapata Olivella seeks to amend minority identity and political consciousness. Voodoo by itself does not need to be recovered from any abyss of oblivion. Instead, the idea of Changó paradoxically finds renewed solidarity in diversification. Ostensibly a celebration of voodoo as a primary component of diachronic spiritual continuity in pan-Afro-Hispanic culture, Changó tacitly reminds its readers that voodoo is as much an agent of synchronic cultural continuity across the African, Native American, and European contributions to the tradition. A major part of voodoo's flourishing and energetic life, like culture and deity Changó's dynamic capacity to adapt to new environments, is its power to reconcile animism and monotheism. What at first glance appears to be a sign of problematic, programmatic unity under the sign of Changó is refigured as the multi-vocal, multi-focal spirit of diversity.

I have approached all of the four chapters of my dissertation in the syncretic perspective of voodoo and demonstrate that Changó is a postmodern slavery discourse that uses prominent slavery topics, personalities, or myths to transgress borders and to deconstruct schemes of group identity formation prominent in contemporary cultural situation. In Changó, The Swamp Dwellers, Two Thousand Seasons, and Les bouts de bois de Dieu, language is revealed to be merely a deferral of the ultimate confrontation with the fact that the referent – the human spirit – cannot be captured in language and bent to the service of what always becomes a political agenda or ideology. According to Timothy J. Cox in Postmodern Tales of Slavery, “the human spirit and body resists such symbol and actual enslavement” (137).

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