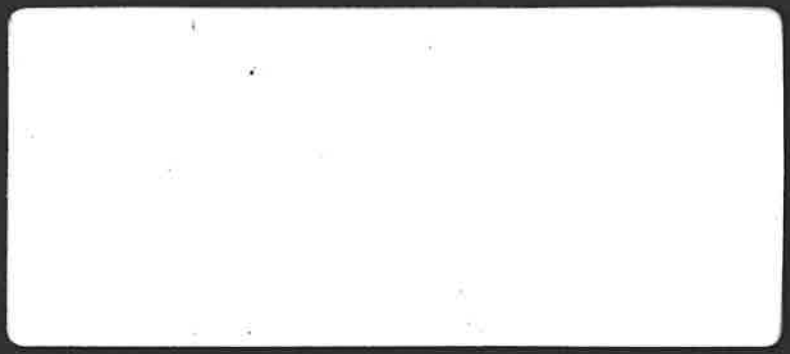
TROTTER INSTITUTE



RESEARCH REPORT

WILLIAM MONROE TROTTER INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AT BOSTON
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125-3393

Research Report No. 17

Writing the Diaspora Experience

by
Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo

1992

Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo is Assistant Professor of Spanish at George Washington University and was a Trotter Institute Fellow during the academic year from 1987 to 1988.

Through this series of publications the William Monroe Trotter Institute is making available copies of selected reports and papers from research conducted at the institute. The analyses and conclusions contained in these articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions or endorsements of the Trotter Institute or the University of Massachusetts.

The Trotter Institute publishes its research through the Occasional Papers Series, the Research Report Series, the Monograph Series, and the institute's periodical, the *Trotter Review*. For more information on any of these publications or the William Monroe Trotter Institute, please contact us at the address below.

Dr. James Jennings, Director
William Monroe Trotter Institute
University of Massachusetts at Boston
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125-3393

Acknowledging the dispersion of Africans to various parts of the New World is not in itself a difficult endeavor. What offers a challenge for analysis is the artistic translation of that experience. Furthermore, the very fact that the African diaspora is of thematic interest is not sufficient material for analyzing the body of diaspora literature. Rather, such an interest in the displacement of blacks in the Americas serves as a point of departure for further scrutiny. What is far more significant is how the communication of that subject operates within a diaspora context.

Almost from the very beginning of the dispersion of blacks to the Americas, there has been an intellectual desire to seek out what is the same among the various ethnic groups emanating from the African continent. It is as though the very removal from Africa prompted a recognition of certain ties among the new Americans—acknowledgment not always existent before removal from the continent. The enslavement process would, of course, be a further bond. Notwithstanding the differences—and there are many—that would separate a black Latin-American from a United States black or a Caribbean of African descent, there remain commonalities that go beyond pigmentation. Anthropology, history, and economics are intellectual disciplines that have explored these interrelationships.

Literature, then, is not unique in its attempt to arrive at a common base of understanding. On that creative level, the global interest in blacks finds its roots in centuries past, practically since the modern arrival of Africans in the Americas. Before the twentieth century, much of the curiosity focused on Americans' search for Africa. Until recently, many nonhistorians considered the United States black to be

uninterested in seeking his African roots, but there are some surprising examples. Some eighteenth-century poets, such as Jupiter Hammon, Phillis Wheatley, and the more militant George Moses Horton, actively queried their relationship with the African continent.[1] Examples of such writers multiply as the literature moves into subsequent centuries and becomes more central to creative works, starting with the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s.

In the English- and French-speaking Caribbean, the cultural bonds with Africa have enjoyed long-standing acknowledgment. Francis Williams, an eighteenth-century Jamaican poet, was one of the early writers who cultivated a sense of Caribbean ties to Africa.[2] The literature manifested sporadic interest until the first two decades of this century—with Claude McKay's work—and later with the Negritude movement of the 1930s.

But what about the Afro-Latin writer? Emphasis on African diaspora literature becomes more than an intellectual given when referring to Afro-Latin literature. It becomes most intriguing. No other ethnic group suffers as much from the misconception that they deny their blackness. Particularly since the 1960s—when, in popular U.S. black culture, the call was made for those of African ancestry worldwide to "own up to their blackness"—the statement "I'm not Black, but Latin"[3] has sometimes been made. Hence, the Afro-Hispanic writer offers a special case study. Yet, as Richard L. Jackson has shown with his exhaustive research, Afro-Hispanic writers do indeed manifest an interest in their black heritage.[4] Furthermore, it is an interest that comes about long before the present moment of

black militancy in Latin America. Only when we understand that emphasizing one's blackness does not preclude acknowledgment of other cultural or blood ties can criticism expand beyond its previously exclusive domain. In this cross-cultural milieu, one of the first recorded poets was the Mexican poet José Vasconcelos, an eighteenth-century creator of popular verse.[5]

All of the early writers, including those mentioned above, speak solely of the ties between their respective countries and Africa. Nevertheless, there is in their work an ontological questioning that paved the way for future works of global concern. It was not until the twentieth century that a more constant, all-encompassing literary dialogue would take place—one that included Latin-America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the United States.

While it is evident that many writers have contributed to the literature of the diaspora, this study makes frequent reference to three key writers: Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Manuel Zapata Olivella. Each represents a different region of the diaspora, and together they constitute intersecting generations of black writers—the Jamaican (1889-1948), the North American (1902-1967), and the Colombian (1920 through the present), respectively. Focusing on these chronologically related authors affords a synchronic glance at the Harlem Renaissance. It also allows us to move into the twenty-first century because it surmises the development of a diaspora literature. Because of the many ways in which one can examine these three writers' works, I consider them to be highly representative of much that is possible with the establishment of a tradition for diaspora literature. Furthermore, what most

interests me are those texts that are specific to the diaspora experience, that is, those texts that treat the diaspora directly.

From the perspective of other scholarly disciplines, the literary critic is relatively new to the diaspora bandwagon. While questioning has occurred sporadically in the literature almost since Africans of the Americas wrote their first words in the various languages of the New World, literary criticism was relatively slow in its analysis, showing only occasional interest in the subject. Since the 1970s, that dearth of attention has been corrected, and today the study of literature of the African diaspora is very current.

Not only has literary criticism lagged chronologically behind other disciplines and the art itself in an examination of the diaspora, but there has also been a reluctance on the part of many critics, particularly those in the larger area of Latin American literature (outside of Afro-Hispanic scholarship), to acknowledge the very possibility that some degree of affinity exists in the literature written in the Americas by people of African descent. Given the high degree of artistic and intellectual activity among the creative writers themselves, this refusal to explore even remote evidence of some interconnections is somewhat puzzling.

Those who reject the notion of any continuity have not followed the development of the discourse on the diaspora. On the one hand, there remain artists and critics adamantly insistent on viewing Afro-Americans as Africans. On the other hand, there has been an increasingly analytical examination of both the ruptures and the linkages that exist between the African continent and the Americas. This more

analytical vein of criticism has recently gained momentum and currently boasts an impressive, convincing body of scholarship, if not for its frequency throughout the years, then for its sheer intensity.

Most importantly, the adamant rejection of a literature, and hence a criticism, that would speak of the African diaspora is related to a reluctance among critics in general, regardless of their areas of endeavor, to consider the concept of race significant in literature. Certainly, there are those who exclude race as a category of meaning without recognizing what race "means" in this global, yet hierarchical, society in which we live. While it is not the only point of departure in studying literature, race certainly does hold significance for the literary scholar. The issue here is not one of "race first," or "race over class," but rather "race also."

Critics who adhere to the "non-existence theory" of a diaspora literature might do well to read the poetry of the Afro-Cuban Nancy Morejón. Not only are her poems instructive for the issues relating particularly to black people, but her works do not negate other aspects of her being. In fact, her poetry often includes a figure who is black, female, and Cuban.[6]

Enough creative literature exists regarding the presence of blacks worldwide that a typology of diaspora-related works can be undertaken. The work of Edward Kamau Brathwaite is instructive in this area.[7] Upon examining the literature, we find that there are basically two oscillating poles of writing, which are not always discernible in a chronological order. These are: a remembered past and a renewed present.

In the category of a remembered past, the literature is only partially related to the fact that slaves recalled specific details of their lives in Africa. After all, at most, only one generation of Afro-Americans would be able to recall an Africa that was immediate in their history. What most stands out as a remembered past, then, is the very ephemeral, yet real, cultural memory that survived despite the centuries of differentiation of Africans from Afro-Americans. Even in the United States, where it has often been erroneously assumed that no residual Africanisms exist, there is clear evidence that patterns of West African culture, passed down from one generation to the next, continue to this day. While the cultural connections with Africa have been proven at least since Melville Herskovits's *The Myth of the Negro Past*, the lesson of surviving cultural patterns bears repeating for its instructiveness in a discussion of the creative literature. Herskovits was one of the first to cull the various research showing that religion, language, and the arts of the Americas have irrefutable linkages with the continent of Africa.

A second area of investigation for the literary scholar is that of a renewed present—with all of the polemical discussions this entails. While not unrelated to the notion of a remembered past, the literature that projects from a present moment of temporality differs because of the very reality of separation from Africa apparent in, if not central to, its discourse. Furthermore, this literature evidences two subdivisions. One of these is the sentimental vision of writers—especially apparent in some of the very young artists of the 1920s' Harlem Renaissance, the 1930s' Negritude movement, and in much of the poetry from the 1960s (especially in,

although not limited to, the United States)—who write of an Africa that never truly existed, yet unites all people of African descent. The second branch of the literature of a renewed present manifests the gradual cultivation of a modern literature about the diaspora. While all facets of the literature contribute to a sense of the whole, it is this particular area of writing that should compel the literary critic to afford more analytical space to the subject at hand.

Not yet quite a school of thought or movement, the literature of the diaspora finds much support for its basis in many forms of communication. Among them is the direct, epistolary interchange among writers who frequently correspond with one another. There is enough of a sense of kinship among the artists that they often translate each others' works. Of course, not all writers everywhere communicate with one another, but the revealing factor of the epistolary genre is that many key writers from various parts of the world do indeed maintain active extra-literary dialogue with one another.[8]

The following passage by Langston Hughes offers a significant example of how that communication developed:

> Wright influenced Ellison in the nineteen-forties, as I had influenced Wright in the thirties, as Claude McKay and James Weldon Johnson influenced me in the twenties. . . . The Harlem poets and novelists of the twenties became an influence in faraway Africa and the West Indies—an influence reflected till today in the literature of black men and women there. To us, *negritude* was an unknown word, but certainly pride of heritage and consciousness of race was ingrained in us.[9]

As Hughes shows, the communication was there before the "Negro" Renaissance. It moved through the Negritude movement of the 1930s and found a

continued voice well after that period. The poet's analysis of diaspora dialogism ends with direct mention of the poets of the 1960s. (Hughes died in 1967.) His brief essay also implies that the now-established tradition would live on for future generations.

What Hughes's seminal overview of a sense of connectedness does not mention directly is a Latin contribution. Particularly in the area of correspondence there have been—and still exist—communications between writers of significant talent in Latin America and writers from other parts of the world. Writers from countries as diverse as Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, and Uruguay contribute to this sense of the whole.

The most well-known Afro-Hispanic writer to engage in the epistolary communication is Nicolás Guillén, whose personal and literary friendship with Langston Hughes is well-documented.[10] Hughes also maintained a relationship with a younger South American writer, Manuel Zapata Olivella. A Colombian, Zapata Olivella, affirms his closeness to Hughes in the following passage, which describes his departure from the United States after traveling there in the mid-1940s:

> Me dispuse a regresar a México. Nos despedimos, pero siempre a lo largo de todas nuestras vidas, conservamos una correspondencia. No fue abundante pero cada vez que publicaba un libro, me lo enviaba con una dedicatoria. Yo le correspondía con mis nuevas obras . . . . [P]ara mí Langston implicaba la expresíon más viva del pueblo norteamericano-no sólo del pueblo negro norteamericano. De la misma manera que con Whitman, yo me siento identificado con los Estados Unidos a través de Langston. Todavía cuando pienso de los Estados Unidos, lo aprecio en funcíon de mi amigo Langston, aun cuando haya muerto.[11]

Not only is Zapata Olivella and Hughes's correspondence interesting because it offers further proof of a willingness to communicate, but because it also offers proof of the existence of a continuity of ideas in general, and about black culture worldwide

in particular.

A complete linking of authors translating or corresponding with other writers in various regions of the black world is too large to enumerate. Suffice it to say that, aside from correspondence among writers of the Negritude movement and the Harlem Renaissance, the eagerness to communicate continues with poets like the North American Jay Wright, Cuban Nancy Morejón, and Brazilian Abdias do Nascimento. Again, Kamau Brathwaite manifests an impressive knowledge of his peers through the indirect means of research for critical analysis.

Undoubtedly, literary correspondence and the accessibility of works through translation should prove useful in the further study of specific and detailed contributions to diaspora literature. After all, it is logical that such communication among individual writers would result in some form of shared literary expressions. What the field warrants, then, is a thorough investigation of this correspondence, resulting in a detailing of common characteristics.

Just as such a typology of the literature of the diaspora is possible, so a categorization of the critical discourse on that creative body of work is also feasible, no matter how small that body of criticism. Cultural journals offer insightful commentary on the search for diaspora meaning. Sporadic reports on literature from various sectors of the black world other than the United States have existed at least since 1916 when Carter G. Woodson's *Journal of Negro History* came into being. The Uruguayan journal *Nuestra Raza (Our Race)* reveals a discussion of black cultures and literature since the early 1930s.[12] In addition, the journal *Presence Africaine* has

done much to promote a spirit of literary and cultural connectedness among black cultures worldwide since the mid-century. The Barbadian *Bim* took up the call for the diaspora in the 1940s. *Presencia Negra* of Colombia has delighted in promoting black world awareness since the 1970s. Finally, ever since the well-connected U.S. journal *Callaloo* awakened to a global presence in the 1970s, literary study related to the diaspora has changed its face forever. Because of their globality, these early, encouraging signs of interest in the literature are significant precursors to the current body of discourse on the African diaspora.

This small body of criticism has generally been of a thematic nature in that it has focused mainly on what the artists chose to write about, rather than how they wrote. Despite the merits of such an approach, theme-induced criticism does limit the possibilities of discourse.[13] It can, for instance, result in the failure of critics to acknowledge the difficulties inherent in establishing a sense of the whole of black letters. Limitations of the defined boundaries are inevitable with any intellectual pursuit, regardless of the orientation; but the lack of even brief consideration of these problems lessens the strength of an argument for a definitive literature of the diaspora.

The most pressing of those problems is the recognition of the fact that African diaspora literature is not a closed system of discourse that locks the authors into one absolute realm of study. Indeed, diaspora criticism, like gender-centric criticism, is similar to literary study that focuses on a particular region of the world and thus must be viewed as simply one statement that contributes to the discussion that

literary study engenders.

Furthermore, as is evident with any criticism that places a writer within a given tradition, critics must recognize that not all writers fit neatly into the mold of one particular tradition. There is a danger in establishing and maintaining any tradition simply because of the specificity that then defines that tradition. Once details are offered as precepts, it is inevitable that more than a few writers who otherwise would be considered a part of that tradition will not adhere to that particular stricture. And, of course, it will always be possible to uncover artists outside of the intended pattern who fit the prescriptive set, yet cannot be included because that tradition is limited to Irish writers, women, or turn-of-the-century artists, for example. For the specific purposes of the present study, the attribution of certain literary qualities solely to black artists could prove rather embarrassing when "others" can be proven to have the same qualities. Certainly, some issues and styles point toward a broader, Third World literature rather than a specifically diaspora-centric one. In the end, one must concede that an artist is ultimately an individual. Aside from patterns that allow for a comparison of his or her work with others, the very nature of creative thinking dictates that one artist will not be identical to another.

When addressing the literature of the diaspora there are several general similarities within the texts that warrant analysis. On a surface level we find commonalities that establish direct, obvious correlations among the cultures of people of African descent. Some of these are expressed in the following: the appearance of

certain cultural residuals like the themes and characters in folktales that survived the journey across the Atlantic Ocean, the specific naming of certain characters, and the paralleling of certain events in one culture or another.

On another level there is evidence of a substratum that reveals a more subtle affiliation between writers. At this level there is the often unmentioned—yet revelatory—discursive practice of expanding on, recreating, or "correcting" another artist's version of the diaspora experience.

In both the surface and substratum levels of literary bonding it is possible to uncover elements of the remembered past and the renewed present. It is particularly at the surface level, though, that the frequency of commonalities stands out. For example, elements of folk culture dominate the majority of the artists' works and, in essence, aid in defining the quality of their work. This emphasis on folk culture can be found in Claude McKay's novel *Banjo*, a controversial depiction of itinerate dockworkers in Marseilles, France. The following conversation between a Haitian and a Martinican character approximates the artists' stance on popular, folk culture:

> "You can't get away from the Senegalese and other black Africans any more than you can from the fact that our forefathers were slaves. We have the same thing in the States. Northern Negroes are stand-offish toward the Southern Negroes and toward the West Indians, who are not as advanced as they in civilized superficialities. We educated Negroes are talking a lot about a racial renaissance. And I wonder how we're going to get it. On one side we're up against the world's arrogance—a mighty cold hard white stone thing. On the other the great sweating army—our race. It's the common people, you know, who furnish the bone and sinew and salt of any race or nation. In the modern race of life we're merely beginners. If this renaissance we're talking about is going to be more than a sporadic and scabby thing, we'll have to get down to our racial roots to create it."
>
> "I believe in a racial renaissance," said the student, "but not in going back to

savagery."

"Getting down to our native roots and building up from our own people," said Ray, "is not savagery. It is culture."[14]

Ray is bound to the dockworkers by his willingness to be among them. His intellectual expression of the issues broached in the novel separates him from the other "root" characters who act more than reflect on life. The novel attempts to wed intellect and passion.

Aside from its perspective on culture, the passage from *Banjo* is also significant because of its direct mention of a worldwide black presence. Indeed, the major reason for including this novel in the present study is its constant and heated discussions comparing one black ethnic group with another.

The passage obliquely reveals the presence of a remembered past. Surviving cultural ties are proffered as a given to the colleague Ray chides because they feel above the rest. Virtually all of McKay's literary trajectory confirms this sense of the importance of "root" culture to black heritage. Not only does the novelist's entire corpus of writing speak against the unilateral view of intellectual and middle-class values, but he also takes issue with specific ideas of diaspora intellectuals. For instance, in the same novel the narrator rejects Du Bois's notion of the veiled black American (p. 272).

McKay's emphasis on "common folk" shares some ideological similarities with his contemporary and fellow-countryman Marcus Garvey. At the same time, he can be linked with generations preceding him. Booker T. Washington, for example, was a man whose insistence on "grounds up" culture had direct bearing on both McKay's

and Garvey's development.

> In [McKay's] mind's eye, Booker T. Washington and Tuskegee loomed as beacons of black hope and accomplishment. As a symbol of progress in a progressive age, Washington's achievements at Tuskegee, real and imaginary, obscured from McKay's distant gaze the hard realities of American race relations. Besides, just as Washington symbolized hope for every black man the world over who knew of him, America held special significance for mankind in general, including black Jamaicans.[15]

As this passage indicates, Washington was a symbol of all that was thought possible for black people worldwide, including South Americans. For Washington, the "leader of the race," the solution was to focus on the lower socioeconomic class. To be sure, his ideas would be challenged, especially since Du Bois. Ultimately, there is no single identifiable source of a "roots" ideology—either inside or outside of black thought. Nevertheless, it is possible to point to significant precursors to the ideas of the artists mentioned in this study.

Langston Hughes would also express an interest in folk culture. His "simple" character, Jesse B. Simple, is perhaps the most direct manifestation of that interest. Through humorous anecdotes, Hughes's character articulates the "average working man's thoughts" on a variety of subjects. Although the poet's entire literary outpouring can be seen as one black universal text,[16] certain poems of the artist stand out. For instance, "My People," "Negro," "Brother," "Black Seed," and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" all speak of the oneness that exists among people of African descent. To be certain, some of these works express a sentimental longing for a non-existent Africa. Beyond the expressed identification of one ethnic group with another there is generally a duality of emotion expressed in the tone of these poems:

celebration and sadness. We find elements of a remembered past—that of slavery on the one hand, and the dignity of a people on the other. In the renewed present there is the suffering of constant indignities, while at the same time there is uncontained joy—either achieved or desired. For instance, in "Afro-American Fragment," Hughes writes:

So long,
So far away
Is Africa.
. . . . . .
Subdued and time—lost are the drums
And yet, through some vast mist of race
There comes this song
I do not understand,
This song of atavistic land,
Of bitter yearnings lost . . .
(Emphasis mine)

And in "Black Seed":

World-wide dusk
Of dear dark faces
Driven before an alien wind,
Scattered like seed
From far-off places
. . . . . .
Hybrid plants
In another's garden . . .

And in "Dream Variation":

To fling my arms wide,
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently
Dark like me,—
That is my dream!

. . . . . .
Night coming tenderly,
Black like me.

Finally, what Hughes's poetic figure—as well as his Simple character—often reveal as "folkness" is the all-too-familiar emotional defense of "laughing to keep from crying."[17]

Similarly, the folk character is often the center of Manuel Zapata Olivella's narratives. Strong manifestations of that novelist's sense of folk culture are present when characters share tales of Uncle (Bro') Rabbit, suffer and survive common misery, or are named in the tradition of some African forebear. The novel in which Zapata Olivella best expresses a spirit of folk culture is *Changó, el gran putas (Shango, the Holy Mother)*—a work deeply rooted in Yoruba and Bantø mythologies. When the Harlem Renaissance ancestors of the novel gather to discuss the race's future, their heated discussion reveals a belief in the soul of the culture:

> —No perdamos la compostura. ¡Somos Negros pero no Cafres! [A' Leila Walker speaks]
>
> —¡Vivan los Cafres!—exclama Langston—De los Zulués nos viene el código de guerra: ¡Primero muertos que vencidos!
> Trato de amainar el fuego de la hoguera: [Agne, a character from the present, narrates and speaks below]
>
> —El Renacimiento Negro debe ser un retorno al soul de los Ancestros.
> Afirmando con la cabeza, Lilian Alexander acoge mis palabras:
>
> —¡Sí! ¡Sí! ¡No olvidemos a los viejos si queremos ser jóvenes!
> La aparente calma no era sino el combustible para que los espíritus vuelvan a inflamarse.
>
> Claude McKay, fusilador de blancos en sus versos, declaró con el mismo tono intransigente que le censurará a su paisano Marcus Garvey:

—Está bien que veneremos a los Ancestros. Que tengamos vivo el recuerdo de Africa. Pero no olvidar jámas que estamos en una sociedad blanca racista. Es todo cuanto tengo que decir.[18]

The heart of the debate is the soul of the race. "Soul," as the author demonstrated he well-understood in this ground-breaking novel, has the double meaning of spiritual self and aesthetic expression of the self.[19] Hence, a term often used in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s—soul—is employed for a concept that existed in other regions of the diaspora long before that period.

While many of the artists of the Harlem Renaissance period are depicted as embracing the same concept of "roots" culture evident in McKay's *Banjo*, the ancestor Hughes embodies more enthusiastically that concept in the novel. In this carefully researched and renewed present, Zapata Olivella evidences a clear desire to reconnect the ties partially unraveled by historical events. Indeed, what all three artists—McKay, Hughes, and Zapata Olivella—articulate in literary form is the earthiness that defines the culture of Afro-Americans, no matter what their present location or socioeconomic status. It is a substratum level of discourse that reverberates perennially in the literature, although appearing in different guises and often misunderstood by critics.

This earthiness resonates in the work of one of Zapata Olivella's own countrymen—nineteenth-century poet Candelario Obeso's *Canciones populares de mi tierra* (*Folksongs of My Native Land*). Paul Lawrence Dunbar, who could be historically placed one generation before the Harlem Renaissance writers, and Zora Neale Hurston, a contemporary of Hughes and fellow Renaissance writer, both insist

on this stance, as well. Martinique Joseph Zobel's *Black Shack Alley* (or *Sugar Cane Alley*, as the movie version was titled) had the same undercurrent. The list is practically endless. In fact, it is certainly arguable that those artists who attempt literary portraits of the race by focusing solely on "model" middle-class characters are in the minority. No greater testimony to this fact exists than the long-standing objection of black middle-class leaders to the portrayal of the race's "root" culture because they see it as demeaning. Undoubtedly, some of their protests are justified; but, for the most part, such objections arise simply because the middle class is uncomfortable focusing on what they deem to be cultural elements less representative of the best the race has to offer.

The above-cited manifestations of literary ties offer proof of commonalities. However, the truest test of a oneness in the creative process will eventually occur at the deepest substratum of the text—that in which a clearly defined expressive strategy plays a key role. Only at this level will it be possible to discern what Henry Louis Gates playfully refers to as the very "blackness of blackness."[20] Indeed, how is it possible to arrive at a language of blackness, particularly when speaking of more than one region and when taking into account the several European language systems in which artists write? If there is any validity to a literary language, it would have to take into account elements of the remembered past and the renewed present detailed earlier.

Some critics are exploring this issue. Josephat Kubayanda and Ian Smart do so with Afro-Hispanic writers as their base.[21] Similarly, Mildred Hill-Lubin and

Edward Kamau Brathwaite discuss in separate pieces the musicality of the language of blackness.[22] Understandably, not all texts written by authors of the diaspora, nor all texts specifically concerning the diaspora, will manifest the same unifying traits. Nevertheless, the analyses by Brathwaite, Hill-Lubin, Kubayanda, and Smart do reveal some level of continuity. Eventually their separate studies might provide the basis for an aesthetic of diaspora literature. Just as Houston Baker has so carefully wrought a theory of black United States literature, rooted in a "blues vernacular," so might the claim for a worldwide black literature be found in musicality or in other expressions of the language of blackness.[23]

Evidence is certainly overwhelming for the connectedness of musical expression itself. The proliferation of the "cha-cha" (Caribbean), "soca" music (soul and calypso in Trinidad), Aretha's "rock steady" (Jamaican reggae), the Dunham Technique (Haiti), the twist (United States), Negro spirituals in the Rasta chant, and even salsa (Latins of the United States)—as well as a number of current dance rhythms—confirms that musical commonalities are a culturally remembered past.

Undeniable as well is the renewed present of ties among black cultures—bonds that are generated by frequent world travel, immigration, and the video age. Why not, then, a translation of that song and dance into the renewed present of literature? In terms of the three representative artists of this study, a blues-rooted jazz has defined Langston Hughes's work practically since the beginning of his creative literature; a propensity towards a musical text rooted in African rhythms is evident in Zapata's work; and music is certainly central to the discourse of McKay's works.

To be sure, these postulations will need further investigation.

The above study concerns itself with issues surrounding the persistent and ever-increasing focus on the African diaspora in literature. Although no attention was afforded other discourses that define the various writers of the diaspora, the present investigation in no way wishes to deny the universality (a globality outside of that which can be manifested through texts which treat blacks specifically), the "Third-Worldness," or the individuality of the artists. What has been the concern here is the temporary isolation of these works from larger cultural contexts to emphasize the perennial, long-standing presence.

Notes

1. M. Berghahn, "The Early Images of Africa," in *Images of Africa in Black American Literature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowan and Littlefield, 1977). The inclusion of Wheatley into a diaspora-related literature is significant because the poet has traditionally been considered one who rejects any notion of a relationship with Africa. In reality, her rejection was of a non-Christian Africa. Wheatley "established herself as the first of black American poets who would sing, even rhapsodize, about Africans and things African." See also H. Robinson, *Phillis Wheatley and Her Writings* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), 118. On the subsequent page of his book Robinson excerpts a poem that exemplifies the poet's "rhapsody."

2. See L. W. Brown, "The Beginnings: 1760–1940," in *West Indian Poetry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 19–38.

3. One variant of this mode of thought is articulated in Z. O. Acevedo, "All of the Above," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 3, no. 3 (1984): 16–18. Other treatises on the significance (or lack of significance) of race appear periodically in the journal.

4. Many make mention of literary interest of Spanish-speaking countries in African heritage, but none to the degree of Jackson, who grapples with the issue of the recognition of a black self. See Richard L. Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979).

5. Ibid., 23–24.

6. The publication that most conveniently reveals, for an English-speaking readership, a lack of contradiction in being black, Latin, female, and West Indian is: Nancy Morejón, *Where the Island Sleeps Like Wing* (San Francisco: Black Scholar Press, 1985).

7. The author-critic actually isolates four separate categories for the literature: rhetorical Africa, African survival, African expression, and the literature of reconnection. Although he entitles his serial study "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature," his essays touch upon the literature of black people in other regions as well. See Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "The African Presence in Caribbean

Literature," in *Africa in Latin America*, M. Moreno-Fraginals, ed., and Leonor Blum, trans. (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1984), 103–104.

8. My use of the term "epistolary genre" stems from the lectures of Sylvia Wynter in her discussion of the establishment of a discourse on the Americas.

9. Langston Hughes, "The Twenties: Harlem and Its Negritude," *African Forum* 4 (1966): 11 & 18.

10. See A. Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: I, Too, Sing America, Volume I: 1902–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); E. J. Mullen, *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti* (Connecticut: Archon, 1977); *Langston Hughes Review* (pertinent issues); and Nicolás Guillén, *Prosa de prisa (Hurried Prose)* (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1976).

11. "Convesacion con el Dr. Manuel Zapata Olivella," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 4, no. 1, (1985): 26. Translation: I prepared to return to Mexico. We said goodbye, but throughout our lives we maintained correspondence. It wasn't abundant, but each time he published a book, he would send it to me with a dedication. I did the same with my new works. . . . For me Langston meant the truest expression of the North American community—not only of the black North American community. The same way I identify with Whitman, I identify myself with the United States through Langston. To this day when I think of the United States, I contemplate it in terms of my friend Langston, even after his death.

12. Richard L. Jackson has brought this to the attention of English-speaking critics in "The Black Writer, the Black Press, and the Black Diaspora in Uruguay," in *Black Writers in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979).

13. Recently, this trend is being reversed, due in part to the increasing focus on literary theory in general.

14. Claude McKay, *Banjo* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929), 200.

15. W. F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 57.

16. "The great black American poet, Guillén wrote cheekily, looked like nothing more than 'a little Cuban mulatto'. . . . Yet his 'only concern is to study his people, to translate this experience into poetry, to make it known and loved.'. . . Mischievously, Guillén mimicked Hughes in his persistent questions about race: 'Do blacks come to this cafe? Do they let blacks play in the orchestra? Aren't there black artists here?' At a black dance hall, the little North American mulatto exclaims, 'My people!'" Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: I, Too, Sing America*, 180.

17. A. Chapman, (Ed.), "Foreword: Who Is Simple?" in *Black Voices* (New York: Mentor, 1968), 99.

18. Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Changó, el gran putas* (Bogotá: Oveja Negra, 1983), 485. Translation: "Let's not get carried away. We're Negroes, but not Kafir niggers." [A'Leila Walker speaks] "Long live niggers!" shouts Langston. "From the Zulus we get our code of war: Death before surrendering!" I try to lessen the heated flames of this fire [Agne Brown, a character from the present, narrates and speaks below]: "The Negro Renaissance should be a return to the soul of the Ancestors." Agreeing with a nod of the head, Lilian Alexander takes up my words: "Yes! Yes! Let us not forget the old ones if we want to be young ones!" The apparent calm was only the fuel needed to reignite the spirits. Claude McKay, executioner of Whites in his verses, declared with the same stubborn tone that would later condemn his countryman Marcus Garvey: "It's all right to revere the Ancestors and to keep the memory of Africa alive. But don't ever forget that we are in a racist White society. That's all I have to say."

19. Ibid., 526.

20. Henry Louis Gates, "The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique of the Sign and the Signifying Monkey; Criticism in the Jungle," in H.L. Gates, (Ed.), *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (Methuen: New York, 1984). In these essays Gates expands on this most appropriate of terms first coined by Ralph Ellison.

21. Josephat Kubayanda, "The Linguistic Core of Afro-Hispanic Poetry: An African Reading," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 1, no. 3 (1982): 21–26. See also his *The Poet's Africa: Africanness in the Poetry of Nicolás Guillén and Aime Cesaire* (Greenwood Press); Ian Smart, *Nicolás Guillén: Popular Poet of the Caribbean* (University of Missouri Press).

22. Edward Brathwaite, in his introduction to Roger Mais's *Brother Man*, discusses elements of jazz in the artist's work. R. Mais, *Brother Man* (Kingston: Heinemann, 1985), xviii; Mildred Hill-Lubin, "And the Beat Goes On: A Continuation of the African Heritage in African-American Literature," *College Language Association Journal* 23, no. 2 (1979): 172–187.

23. H. A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).