

Caribbean literature in Spanish

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The literatures of the three hispanophone islands of the Caribbean – Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico – are the oldest in the region. Their origins can be traced back to an Arawak oral tradition rich in myth and legend – gathered in all its vividness by Spanish Friar Ramon Pané in his *Relación acerca de las antigüedades des los indios, las cuales, con diligencia, como hombre que sabe su idioma, recogió por mandato del Almirante* (1571) (*An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians, Gathered Diligently by a Man Who Knows Their Language; Chronicles of the New World Encounters*, 1999) – that speaks of a worldview centered on a harmonious relationship between religion, culture, politics, and patterns of work and exchange. Pané, who lived in Hispaniola from 1494 to 1499, gathered a rich trove of myths, beliefs, and aboriginal religious practices that constitute most of what we know of the Amerindian lore of the Caribbean. Together with the many descriptions found in Spanish chronicles of the dancing and singing rituals known as *areitos*, through which the Taínos recorded their history and reconstructed through drama salient episodes of everyday life, they offer glimpses of rich cultural traditions lost through the impact of warfare and the virgin soil epidemics that decimated the aboriginal population of the Caribbean. The picture they convey, of a society dependent on a simple economy of subsistence agriculture and fishing, survived the devastation and environmental assault of European conquest and colonization to make an important contribution to Puerto Rican, Dominican and, to a lesser extent, Cuban rural cultures, laying the foundation for traditions of resistance that would later serve as a counter world to the economy of the plantation. The rural subsistence farmer, a figure that with time would become the literary symbol of cultural authenticity and national purity throughout the Hispanic Caribbean, traces its existence and worldview to the Taino/Arawak traditions captured with such vitality by Pané, later syncretized with Spanish and African customs.

The myriad exchanges triggered by Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean were, first and foremost, literary. The natural environment and autochthonous

cultures of the Caribbean region enter Spanish literature – adding to the foundations of Caribbean literature in Spanish – through Christopher Columbus's "Carta a Luis de Santangel" (1493) ("Letter of Discovery") and *Diario de a bordo* (*Diario de navegación* or shiplog, 1491–1506). The documents, which describe the natural wonders and varied people he encountered during his three voyages of "discovery," show a Spanish language already in the process of creolization, adapting itself to new realities and struggling with its inadequacies as it attempted to do justice to phenomena it had never served before. Its incorporation of Amerindian terms enriches and transforms the language, initiating the process of transculturation that would begin to give shape to a new Creole language suited to conveying the nuances of a colonial society. The myriad *Crónicas de las Indias* (*Chronicles of the Indies*) produced in the wake of the encounter took the shape of letters, reports, histories, and biographies that conjure up a world where classical and Amerindian myths, European and American realities and languages, ethnicities and races, coexist and clash.

The earliest of these texts focus on Hispaniola, the center for Spanish expansion in the newly discovered territories throughout the sixteenth century, and the first site of arrival for African slaves. Friar Bartolomé de las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1522) (*The Devastation of the Indies: A Brief Account*, 1974), his denunciation of the atrocities committed by the *conquistadores* against the native population, contributed an image of the Caribbean population as noble savages in harmony with the environment – the Indian as classic hero – to which Caribbean writers would return again and again in search of symbols of preconquest, preslavery cultural wholeness. Las Casas, a soldier turned bishop who had accompanied Columbus in his early travels through the region, was particularly concerned with the question of how to incorporate the native Americans into the Spanish nation as subjects with rights and prerogatives.

Las Casas's *The Devastation of the Indies*, perhaps the most influential of all chronicles of the conquest of the New World, had a long-lasting impact on historians' and writers' perception of Spain and its colonial policies. Credited with having been the source of the "Black Legend" which attributed to Spain utmost cruelty and design in the destruction and depopulation of the islands of the Caribbean, particularly of the three islands on which they concentrated their efforts – Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Cuba – Las Casas's text, with its citation of numerous incidents of the torture and maiming of indigenous peoples purportedly for failing to meet gold-production quotas, is also said to be responsible for counseling the importation of African slaves as a substitute for Indian labor, a suggestion that Las Casas came to regret and disallow.

Las Casas's subsequent works, *Historia de las Indias* (1566) (History of the Indies), which covers the history of the conquest and colonization of the Caribbean islands from 1492 to 1520, and his *Apologética historia sumaria* (1575) (General Apologetic History) in which he argues for an acknowledgment of the full rational capacities of the Indians, include African slaves among those subjects for whom he would advocate full rights as citizens. Like fellow Dominican friar Francisco de Vitoria, Las Casas wrote of the natural rights inherent in all humans, regardless of their condition, in part because of their having been created in God's image but, most importantly, because Spain's juridical tradition had elaborated and sustained a rational foundation for natural rights. Ultimately, the significance of Las Casas's work to Caribbean writing rests on his interpretation of the early history of Spanish expansion in the region as already dependent on the economic, political, and cultural exploitation of the native populations and new environments.

Eyewitness accounts of history, such as those of Las Casas, despite their obvious tensions between historical testimony and historiographic authority, determine the pattern of writing in Spanish about the Caribbean throughout the sixteenth century. The history of writing in Spain's Caribbean possessions throughout this period is indeed that of an emerging discourse that calls upon every European literary genre only to see it transformed by the necessities of the fresh content to which it seeks to respond. This content is primarily descriptive and historical, protoliterary in this new context. The cumulative importance of texts such as the 1493 letter describing the wondrous new world written by Diego Alvarez de Chanca – the Sevillian physician who accompanied Columbus on his second trip – the letters and accounts of the exploration of Florida written by Juan Ponce de León, the report to the Governor of Puerto Rico written by Juan Ponce de León Troche and Antonio de Santa Clara, known as the *Memoria de Melgarejo* (1582) (Melgarejo's Memoir) is that of chronicling how postencounter cultures and institutions, as they develop in a new multiracial social space and unfamiliar natural environments, create what is virtually a new world requiring a new literature.

Attempts at writing comprehensive histories of this crucial period in Caribbean history, such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's *Sumario de la natural historia de las Indias* (1526) (Compendium of the Natural History of the Indies), already expose the uneasy consciousness of conflicting perspectives that comes out of the violence, warfare, and epidemic ravages of the conquest. Oviedo, named Official Chronicler of the Indies in 1532, in his official apologia for the conquest, had to defend the system of *encomienda* instituted by Spanish officials in their attempt to maximize Indian labor and the subsequent importation of

African slaves into the Caribbean, all in the name of the justification of Spanish colonization made necessary by the growing voices of criticism and dissent. His main work, the *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y Tierra Firme del mar Océano* (1535) (General and Natural History of the Indies, Islands, and Mainland of the Ocean Sea), described this new world from the viewpoint of an observer who was both surprised by the variety and vastness of its nature and cultures and aware that the devastation necessary for the imposition of Spanish rule in these new territories required a range of textual responses that stretched the limits of literary approaches and techniques.

These textual responses became increasingly literary as the sixteenth century moved to its close. Fernández de Oviedo had himself made his mark with the first book of poetry written in and about the new world, *Las Quinquagenas de los generosos e ilustres e no menos famosos reyes . . . e personas notables de España* (1556) (Fifty of the Generous and Illustrious and No Less Famous Kings . . . and Notable People of Spain), a text written in *arte menor* verses (six or eight syllables) in Hispaniola which, like his histories, sought to chronicle the emergence of a distinctively colonial culture. It precedes by almost three decades the most significant Caribbean literary work of the latter half of the sixteenth century, Juan de Castellanos's *Elegía de varones ilustres de Indias* (1589) (Elegy to the Illustrious Gentlemen of the Indies), the epic in verse in which de Castellanos chronicles the early history of the postencounter Caribbean, from Columbus's arrival through the conquest of Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad, and Margarita. His stirring account of Juan Ponce de León's colonization of Puerto Rico, and of his search for the fountain of youth, helped make of the first Spanish governor of the island a hero for the ages.

As a record of the process of acculturation and of the thematic possibilities of the proto-Creole world of the Spanish Caribbean in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, no text can match two early anthologies – Eugenio Salazar de Alarcón's *Silva de poesía* (1585–95) (Assortment of Poetry) and Dr. Juan Méndez Nieto's *Discursos medicinales* (1607) (Medical Discourses). Salazar de Alarcón's *Silva de poesía*, a text that discusses and displays the poetic production of writers based in Hispaniola, speaks to their versatility, as well as to the preponderance of Italian verse forms as poetic models during this period. It is of particular importance for its mention of two women poets, Leonor de Ovando, a nun in the Santo Domingo convent of Regina Angelorum, and Elvira de Mendoza. Ovando's poems, five of which have been preserved, sustain her claim to be the first woman poet in the Americas; Mendoza's work did not survive. Méndez Nieto's *Discursos medicinales*, also introduces an intriguing collection of texts – among them a sampling of the

work of poets living in Santo Domingo at the turn of the seventeenth century. Its importance rests particularly on its introduction of the first black protagonist in Caribbean literature. His "Discurso xiv" tells the captivating tale of a slave who feigns epilepsy so as not to be separated from the woman he loves.

In this period of "firsts," Santo Domingo also boasts the first play written and performed in the Spanish Caribbean, an *entremés* (or dramatic interlude) written by Cristóbal de Llerena, a Santo Domingo-born professor at the University of Gorjón in Hispaniola. The satirical piece – performed by students in the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in 1588 – already displays a proto-Creole political consciousness that expresses itself through the critique of the colonial officials and institutions that, through their lack of control of local conditions, have failed to fulfill the expectations of the population. The piece addresses a multiplicity of ills plaguing the oldest colonial city in the new world – the rising tide of prostitution, the problems posed by trade restrictions placed on the local population, which had led to the increase in smuggling and piracy, corrupt officials, and venal lawyers – and resulted in Llerena's temporary banishment from the colony.

This early promise of a blossoming of Caribbean-born writers voicing the realities of colonial life from a recognition of their difference from the metropolis was slow to fulfill itself in the seventeenth century. As the Caribbean region lost its centrality in Spain's growing empire after the conquest of Mexico and Peru and its territorial expansion throughout the Americas, the islands of the Caribbean began to lose their population. Cries of "may God take me to Peru" signaled the beginning of a flight to the continent that left the islands depopulated, and their economies dependent on subsistence agriculture and smuggling. Frequently under attack, and occasionally occupied by Dutch, French, and English privateers, the Spanish possessions in the Caribbean were quickly reduced to Hispaniola, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, a development that intensified their isolation and economic decline. They were subordinated to a peripheral role as way-stations for the Spanish *flota* transporting the wealth of South America to Spain, fortified garrisons for the armies protecting the naval routes between the new center of the empire and the metropolis, their economies dependent on the *situado*, a subsidy collected from the Mexican treasury. Until they restored their dwindling fortunes by the large-scale cultivation of sugar, which did not take firm hold on the Spanish Caribbean economies until the mid-eighteenth century, the political and social climate of these islands did not offer the most propitious ground for literary expression.

Consequently, literary production in the Spanish Caribbean throughout the seventeenth century was sporadic at best. The texts for which the century is known are often only tangentially literary. The most salient of these, *Espejo de paciencia* (1608) (Mirror of Patience), a story in two cantos written by Silvestre de Balboa, a native of the Canary Islands, is a seminal text in Cuban literature, not only for its description of the flora and fauna of the island, and of the language, mythology, and customs of the native inhabitants, but for its cast of characters, a cross-section of the growing ethnic and racial diversity of the Caribbean colonies. It narrates, in royal octaves, the true story of the kidnapping in 1604 of the Bishop of Cuba, Juan de las Cabezas Altamirano, by French pirates, and of his rescue by a ragtag militia representative of the race and class spectrum of early colonial Cuban society. From among this band of Indians, Africans, *mestizos* and *mulattos* emerges a black slave as hero. The text survived through its inclusion in Bishop Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz's *Historia de la Isla y Catedral de Cuba* (1760) (History of the Island and Cathedral of Cuba). *Espejo de paciencia* and the poems of Francisco de Ayerra Santa María, Puerto Rico's first poet, comprise the best of what can be considered strictly literary production in the seventeenth century. Ayerra Santa María, although born in Puerto Rico, gained fame and gathered prizes as a writer in Mexico, where his works were collected by Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora in *Triunfo Parténico* (1683) (Parthian Triumph), and is best known for a sonnet written to the memory of celebrated Mexican poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz included in *Fama y obras póstumas* (Fame and Posthumous Works) a volume published in her honor in Spain in 1700.

Filling the vacuum left by the paucity of strictly literary production in the region during this period is a number of *descripciones* and *relaciones* that, in the process of addressing conditions on the islands (particularly in Puerto Rico, whose stagnant economy and decreasing population was the source of serious concern and study), gave ample opportunity for flights of literary fancy and incursions into creative narrative. Diego de Larrasa's *Relación de la entrada y cerco del enemigo Boudoyno, general de la armada del príncipe de Orange en la ciudad de Puerto Rico de las Indias* (1625) (Relation of the Entrance and Siege to the Island of Puerto Rico by the Enemy Boudoyno Enrico, General of the Prince of Orange's Navy) offers a stirring account of the Dutch siege and burning of San Juan. Bishop Damián López de Haro's "Carta a Juan Díaz de la Calle" (1644) ("Letter to Juan Díaz de la Calle") is of note for its disparaging portrayal of the poverty and desolation of the island, where women are described as not able to attend Mass because they lack decent clothing to appear in public. His letter is particularly known for its inclusion of a sonnet – the first example of

satirical verse written in/about Puerto Rico – that speaks of the nakedness of the black population and describes the inhabitants as fewer than those held in the prison in Seville.

It is of interest in this context to note that López de Haro's secretary, Diego de Torres Vargas, a *criollo*, offered in *Descripción de la Isla y Ciudad de Puerto Rico, y de su vecindad y poblaciones, presidio, gobernadores y obispos; frutos y minerales* (1647) (Description of the Island and City of Puerto Rico, of its Neighborhoods and Towns, Citadel, Governors and Bishops; Fruits and Minerals), a countertext to his superior's dismal assessment of the colony. Torres Vargas, writing from a decidedly colonial perspective, as one who identified with the land and its incipient national definition, has much to say in praise of the island's natural environment – particularly of its healing waters – and in defense of the moral character, intellectual potential, and physical strength of its people. His stance has prompted critics to conclude that the text represents the first example of protonational affirmation in Puerto Rican writing.

Pedro Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz's *Historia de la Islay Catedral de Cuba*, a comparable work, although finished in 1760, was not published until 1929 and, as a result, failed to have a corresponding impact on other works of this genre. Known best for his inclusion of Balboa's *Espejo de paciencia*, the *Historia . . .* offers minute descriptions of life in Cuba after Columbus's arrival, peopled with vivid historical characters and peppered with colorful anecdotes. It has been faulted by critics, however, for its failure to address the African presence in Cuba or raise the question of Cuba's growing dependence on African slavery as a main source of labor.

Writing in Hispaniola, Cuba, and Puerto Rico follows a similar descriptive and historiographic pattern throughout the eighteenth century, particularly after the introduction of the printing press in Cuba around 1723 and the publication of the first newspaper, the *Gaceta de la Habana* (Havana Gazette), founded in 1764. Of these texts – which include Alejandro O'Reilly's *Relación circunstanciada del actual estado de la población, frutos y proporciones para fomento que tiene la Isla de San Juan de Puerto Rico* (1765) (Contextualized Description of the Present State of the Population, Resources and Opportunities for Development of the Island of San Juan de Puerto Rico) – perhaps the most significant is the *Historia geográfica, civil y política de la Isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico* (1775) (Geographic, Civil, and Political History of the Island of San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico) by Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra, noted for its acute observations of the natural environment, the customs, practices, and racial compositions of its people, and his observations on the island's dependence on slave labor as the basis for its economic development. Abbad y Lasierra's book

is of particular significance for its application of Montesquieu's theories of geographical determinism to his analysis of Puerto Rican society. The Caribbean's tropical environment, in Abbad y Lasierra's argument, determines the physical, moral, and intellectual character of native Puerto Ricans and imposes profound character changes on Spaniards who have settled in the colony. This impact, which he sees as responsible for the inferiority of the colonial population, can be overcome through *arte*, or determined intellectual exertion, thus leaving some room for the emergence of the exceptional colonial as a being comparable to the European colonizer. The arguments resurfaced in the closing years of the nineteenth century, as part of the ideas sustaining the Naturalist movement.

Abbad y Lasierra's arguments about the Spaniards' superiority, part of an intense debate that raged in the last decades of the eighteenth and opening decades of the nineteenth century, were countered by Havana native José Martín Félix de Arrate in *Llave del Nuevo Mundo* (1830), a work that, like Abbad y Lasierra's, offers a description of the geography, economy, institutions, and culture of Cuba throughout its colonial history. Arrate parades before the reader a sampling of those exceptional *criollos* whose *arte* constitute his strongest case for the equality, if not the superiority, of the colonial. Like Abbad y Lasierra, Arrate builds his arguments on theories of environmental determination, but unlike the former, he argues for the superiority of man in his natural environment, building his line of reasoning on a comparison between the adaptability of the indigenous population to their native landscape and the struggles of the African slaves to acclimatize themselves to unfamiliar surroundings. Like Abbad y Lasierra, Arrate, although recognizing the moral evils of slavery and the corrupting effect it has on slaves and slaveholders alike, rejects abolitionist viewpoints as being inimical to the economic health of the islands.

The institution of slavery does indeed constitute the main focus of intellectual debate, and literary production, in the Spanish Caribbean islands – particularly in Cuba – through the first half of the nineteenth century. In Cuba, beginning with *Petrona y Rosalía* (1838) by Félix Tanco y Bosmeniel, the novel carried the burden of translating problematic ideology into narratives accessible to the Cuban reading public. The Cuban antislavery novel was profoundly influenced by the European and Latin American literary fashions of the second half of the nineteenth century – Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, and *Criollismo* – but most particularly by the Romantic movement. It accomplished its effect primarily through the exploitation of every possible convention we have come to associate with Romantic writing – melodrama, vows of virginity, incest, racial taboos, exoticism, primitivism, and bathos. The seminal

works of the Cuban antislavery novel – Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1838) (*Cecilia Valdés*, 1962), Anselmo Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* (1839), Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841), and Antonio Zambrana's *El negro Francisco* (1875) – are vital, impassioned stories of thwarted love whose sentimental core provides an ideal filter for mildly subversive abolitionist arguments and denunciations of its concomitant racism, as well as for more conservative rationalizations of slavery and racial hierarchies.

What links these narratives together is their adherence to liberal philanthropist Domingo Delmonte's position that as a group the abolitionists' main recourse was that of speaking out against the abuses of the institution through every avenue open to them in an effort to gain converts to their cause. Cuban writers found their ideal vehicle in the passionate melodrama of the forbidden love between mulatto women and white upper-class men. Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* is structured around such a tragic relationship – that between a young white man and the mulatto woman whom he discovers to be his half-sister, a revelation that eventually results in his murder after he has married a woman of his own race and class. Suárez y Romero's *Francisco* – the story of a slave couple whose love is destroyed by the brutality of the slave system – explores the somewhat touchy subject of slave rebellion as a response to the forced labor, sexual exploitation, and racial oppression of slavery. The plot of *Francisco*, as that of Zambrana's *El negro Francisco* (which is based on the earlier text), revolves around the tensions between the plantation master's sexual desire for the woman the protagonist loves and the slaves' pure, innocent love. In both tales the young woman, in an effort to save her lover, capitulates to the master's desire, a decision that leads to the protagonist's suicide. Both tragic love stories are presented in the context of unsuccessful slave rebellions.

Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* – often compared to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (published eleven years later in 1852) for its contribution to antislavery literature – finds a fresh approach in the reversal of some of the familiar elements, portraying the heartbreaking love of a mulatto slave for his white mistress and his mortal sadness when she marries a man unworthy of her. The novel was banned in Cuba both because of its antislavery stand and for the perceived immorality of its subversive equation of slavery with the situation of women in Cuba's nineteenth-century colonial society. Through the character of Teresa, the poor and unattractive cousin to the heroine who identifies with Sab's plight and offers to run away with him and begin a new life together in some faraway land, Gómez de Avellaneda adds a feminist dimension to her abolitionist text, shocking her audience in the process. As a result, in 1844 the official Censor, Hilario de Cisneros, declared the novel

to contain a doctrine "subversive to the system of slavery" and contrary to "morals and good customs."

The Cuban antislavery novel, with its Romantic typology of the white master with his illegitimate mulatto offspring, the abusive white mistress, and the beautiful mulatto in love with her secret half brother, offers at best a strong argument for the amelioration of the conditions under which slavery operated in Cuba. Written as it was primarily by the white Creoles who constituted its reading public – and often with white Creoles as central characters – it did not present a bold argument for the abolition of slavery. It remained, despite its success in inciting pity for the slave's condition and criticizing the moral failures of a slave society, too bound in rigid literary conventions and too fearful of shaking the racial/caste hierarchies of Cuban society to propose solutions that would lead to social upheaval. Even Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1838) (*Autobiography of a Slave*), written to be included in an antislavery tract to be published in the United States, despite the unquestionable truth of its tale, is too dependent on Romantic rhetorical conventions to escape the ambiguities that plague the abolitionist novel in Cuba. This is not to say that these texts did not have a positive impact in eliciting sympathy for – and perhaps improving – the plight of the slaves, but that the solutions they proposed were not radical from the social and economic point of view.

The literatures of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola – which became the Dominican Republic in 1824 when it gained its independence from Spain – do not have an abolitionist tradition that can be compared to that of Cuba. In Puerto Rico, despite the strength of the abolitionist movement, with its ties to the struggle for political independence through the leadership of Ramón Emeterio Betances, the abolitionist novel did not flourish as a genre. In his writings – particularly his *Diez mandamientos* (1870) (*Ten Commandments*) and his preface to Wendell Phillips's *Discours sur Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1879) – Betances repudiates the Darwinian scholars who argued for the inferiority of blacks on pseudoscientific grounds and included freedom and equality for the slaves among those freedoms (of speech, suffrage, and national determination) necessary for the creation of a new nation after independence from Spain was achieved. Yet the only sustained literary exploration of the evils of slavery and racism is to be found in a quintessentially Romantic drama by Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, *La cuarterona* (1867) (*The Quadroon*), about the frustrated love between a beautiful mulatto girl and the handsome scion of a white aristocratic Havana family (the tale is set in Cuba), which ends tragically when it is revealed that she is the illegitimate offspring of his father's relationship with one of his

slaves. A conventional Romantic drama, despite its vividly created characters and richness of language, it remains an isolated example of abolitionist writing in Puerto Rico.

Tapia y Rivera, however, represented the second crucial aspect of Romantic writing in the Spanish Caribbean, that of voicing the emerging nationalist feeling among the region's intellectuals. A versatile writer who cultivated a broad spectrum of genres – the historical drama, the allegorical novel, philosophical poetry, autobiography, treatises on esthetics – Tapia y Rivera's work represents the crystallization of a project of creation of a Creole literature that reflected Puerto Rico's environment, history, and political realities. Puerto Rican literature – hampered by the late arrival of the printing press (1806) and the island's uncertain status as a second-rate military garrison – had been slow in developing before the mid-nineteenth century. The protoliterary texts that appeared in the *Gaceta de Puerto Rico*, the country's first newspaper, paved the way for the three anthologies that marked the beginning of a truly Puerto Rican literature: the *Aguinaldo puertorriqueño* (1843), the second *Aguinaldo puertorriqueño* (1846), and the *Cancionero de Borinquén* (1846), collections of poems and short prose, falling into the general category of *cuadros de costumbres* (snapshots of local customs) through which the contributors sought to record the idiosyncrasies of Puerto Rican Creole culture as the means of establishing it as different from that of Spain. As snapshots of national culture through which the authors sought to inscribe the specificities of Puerto Rico's incipient identity as a nation, they anticipated the publication of Manuel Alonso's seminal book, *El Gíbaro* (1849), a book credited with the consolidation of Puerto Rican *Criollismo*.

Alonso's *El Gíbaro* documents the traditions and practices of the Puerto Rican peasant or *gíbaro* (Jíbaro), the white subsistence planter from the mountains whose way of life is bound with the cultivation of produce and coffee and whose culture Alonso posits as the essence of nineteenth-century Puerto Ricanness. The book's significance comes primarily from its establishing the figure of the peasant as a symbol of the island's embryonic nationhood, an enduring symbolism that would become increasingly problematic in the twentieth century when it clashed against notions of nationhood that sought to embrace Puerto Rico's African heritage and open spaces for a broader representation of classes and gender.

El Gíbaro's powerful affirmation of rural Puerto Rican culture as emblematic of the national character contrasts against Tapia y Rivera's prolific urban cosmopolitanism, evident particularly in his drama and fiction. Tapia y Rivera, one of the founders of the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, the island's most important

nineteenth-century cultural institution, and a contemporary of Alonso's, devoted his energies to the representation of Puerto Rico as a nation on the brink of modernity. His work, a reflection of the latest European literary trends – Romanticism, most emphatically – and his essays, in which he explored the relevance of European philosophy (chiefly Hegel and Schelling) to the development of modern Puerto Rican society, argued for a different concept of the nation from that of Alonso's subsistence farmer, tied to the land and rooted in his traditions. Tapia y Rivera and his colleagues at the Ateneo, which included the poet Alejandrina Benítez (niece of Puerto Rico's first woman poet, María Bibiana Benítez), prose writers José Julián Acosta and Segundo Ruiz Belvis (both active in the abolitionists movement), and novelist and feminist activist Ana Roqué de Duprey, had their fingers firmly on the pulse of European (and increasingly American) social and intellectual trends. Avid readers themselves, they sought, through the founding of journals, newspapers, and reviews, to translate and adapt into Creole realities those ideas they believed capable of transforming Puerto Rico's insular colonial society into a cosmopolitan independent democracy free of slavery and increasingly enlightened about the position and rights of women.

Tapia y Rivera's own literary work, in all its prolific variety, sought to bring life to these ideas. An admirer of Victor Hugo, Lord Byron, José de Espronceda, and the Duque de Rivas, leading names in European Romanticism, Tapia y Rivera became an indefatigable producer of Romantic texts, particularly of the historical plays and novels that had been the cornerstone of European Romanticism. His historic dramas *Roberto D'Evreux* (1848, inspired by the romance between Queen Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex), *Camoens* (1868, about the love between the Portuguese poet and Catalina de Ataíde), *Hero y Leandro* (1869), and *Vasco Núñez de Balboa* (1872), among others, together with the lyrics he wrote for Felipe Gutiérrez's *indigenista* (Indian-centered) opera *Guarionex* (1854), allowed him to approach controversial themes and ideas – political freedom, racial prejudice, colonialism, gender oppression – while protected by the historical, geographical, and political distance to the settings of these texts from an energetic Spanish censorship.

Tapia y Rivera was also Puerto Rico's first novelist and writer of short stories. The numerous Puerto Rican "legends" he invented, such as *La palma del cacique* (1862) (The Chief's Palm Tree), where he explores Puerto Rico's pre-Columbian past and the shock of the Encounter, or his novel *Cofresí* (1876), which narrates the adventures of Roberto Cofresí, a Puerto Rican pirate executed by the Spanish in 1825, seek to interpret Puerto Rican history to the larger public at a time when Puerto Rican incipient historiography had yet

to produce its first account written from the local perspective. Of all of Tapia y Rivera's many narratives, however, three stand out as his most original, all three representing a break away from Romanticism and engaging local themes: the autobiographical *Bildungsroman*, *La leyenda de los veinte años* (1874) (The Legend of the Twenties), and the two-part exploration of reincarnation, *Póstumo el transmigrado* (1882) (Póstumo the Transmigrated) and *Póstumo el envirginado* (1882) (Póstumo the Envirginated). In *La Leyenda de los veinte años*, Tapia y Rivera's transition to autobiographical social realism, he follows the adventures and sentimental episodes in the life of a young man against the backdrop of Puerto Rican history in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The two Póstumo novels, which reflect the widespread popularity of Allan Kardec's *espiritismo* among Puerto Rican intellectuals of his time, are noted for the humor and social satire through which he tells of the adventures of a man who after death returns to life in the body of his most hated enemy (in *Póstumo el transmigrado*) and has a second transmigration of soul, this time returning in the body of a woman named Virginia (in *Póstumo el envirginado*) and learning first-hand of the restrictions and frustrations of women's lives in the mid-nineteenth century.

Tapia y Rivera also made his mark as an essayist with two biographical works, the first written in the Spanish Caribbean – *Vida del pintor puertorriqueño José Campeche* (1855) (Life of the Puerto Rican Painter José Campeche) and *Noticia histórica de Don Ramón Power* (1873) (Historical Account of Don Ramón Power) – as well as an autobiographical text, *Mis memorias, o Puerto Rico como lo encontré y como lo dejo* (My Memoirs or Puerto Rico as I Found It and as I Leave It, published posthumously in 1928), and a volume that collects a number of the lectures he gave at the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, *Conferencias sobre estética y literatura* (1881) (Lectures on Esthetics and Literature) on a variety of philosophical and sociological topics.

Rivaling Tapia y Rivera's commanding presence in Puerto Rican literature during this period is the figure of Eugenio María de Hostos, the writer, patriot, and educator whose influence was felt throughout the Spanish Caribbean. As the region's first sociologist and follower of Herbert Spencer, Hostos sought to produce in his *Moral Social* (1888) a theory of Positivism suitable for the specificities of Antillean realities. A passionate proponent of Antillean independence from Spain, Hostos assumed a pan-Caribbean perspective, writing indefatigably in support of Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican independence movements and working towards the establishment of homegrown public education systems that he saw as crucial to the development of free nations in the Spanish Caribbean. As an advocate for the principles of Positivist

liberalism – duty, respect for elders, education, ethical behavior, individual and social rights – so consistently thwarted by colonial repression, Hostos's work shows his progression from liberal reformist to proponent of Latin American revolution. His efforts, which earned him the title of *ciudadano de América* (citizen of America), were manifest in his pedagogical publications – among them his *Lecciones de Derecho Constitucional* (1887) (Lessons in Constitutional Law) and *Tratado de Sociología* (1901) (Treatise on Sociology) – but above all in his travelog, *Mi viaje al Sur* (1871) (My Voyage to the South), which narrates his travels through South America working on behalf of Cuban independence, and his *Diario* (1903), a remarkable chronicle of his selfless efforts and dedication to political freedom and education whose many volumes span more than thirty years.

As a fiction writer, however, Hostos's reputation rests on *La peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863), a Romantic novel written in diary form that returns to the Caribbean's Arawak past – shared by the three Spanish islands of the Caribbean – by building a tale of the search for nation, justice, and humanity around characters taken from the legends and histories of Cuba (Marién), the Dominican Republic (Guarionex), and Puerto Rico (Bayoán). As embodiments of Hostos's dream of an Antillean Confederation – the basis of his program for independence – they embark on a pilgrimage across the spaces of violence and enslavement that figure prominently in Caribbean colonial history. *La peregrinación de Bayoán*, like Tapia y Rivera's "legends," finds an echo in comparable texts published in newspapers and magazines in Cuba and the Dominican Republic in the second half of the nineteenth century. In Cuba, these texts, although not as central to literary development as the abolitionist novel, yet produced some examples of note, chief among them Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's novellas about the conquest of Mexico, *Guatimozín* (1846), and of Colombia, *El cacique de Turmeque* (1860). *Indigenista* texts are of particular importance in the Dominican Republic after the restoration of its independence in 1865. The first half of the nineteenth century had been a period of intense political turmoil in the Dominican Republic, marked by the struggle for independence from Spain (1809–24) and the Haitian occupation that followed – which ended only after another armed struggle against Haiti (1844–61) and a brief return to Spanish colonialism (1861–65). The relaunching of political independence in 1865 signaled the return to consistent literary activity, heralded by tales about Indian lore and the sixteenth-century Arawak war against Spanish conquest and colonialism on which the new independent nation sought to build its national identity, such as Javier Angulo Guridi's *La ciguapa* (1868, The Water Sprite Tree) and *La fantasma de Higüey* (1869) (The Ghost of Higüey).

The crowning achievement of the *indigenista* approach to the definition of national identity in the Spanish Caribbean was Dominican writer Manuel de Jesús Galván's *Enriquillo* (1882) (*The Sword and the Cross*, 1954), a historical romance tracing its roots to Bartolomé de Las Casas and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's sixteenth-century histories of the colony of Hispaniola, which reached the status of a national epic shortly after its publication. The noble Indian hero, Enriquillo, direct heir of the Indian queen Anacaona, rose against the Spaniards after the seizure of his possessions by his *encomendero* and the attempted rape of his wife, holding the Spaniards at bay for fourteen years until reaching a truce with the Spanish king that guaranteed his people freedom and lands in return for their loyalty to the crown. The romance-cum-epic through which Galván sought to cement the roots of the nation in the distant indigenous past rested in part on the elaboration of a *mestizo* identity that could erase the nation's black and *mulatto* roots. Needing a historical past as removed as possible from the history of black rebellion that had made of Haiti the region's first independent republic, Galván – echoing Dominican resistance to any identity connected even tangentially to that of Haiti – returns to the presumed origins of the nation in the distant past of the Spanish conquest, thereby expunging from the national epic any connection to an Afro-Caribbean historical and cultural past. This problematic foundation for Dominican identity would be the focus of a debate that continues today, as Dominican intellectuals have sought, often unsuccessfully, to validate the nation's Afro-Caribbean past against the powerful hold of *Enriquillo's* legacy.

Dominican narrative of the late nineteenth century, dominated by Galván's *Enriquillo*, produced only a few examples of the *costumbrismo* that followed in the wake of Romanticism in the Hispanic Caribbean, and which paved the way for the Naturalist novel that marked the transition into the twentieth century. Francisco Billini's narrative of social customs, *Engracia y Antoñita* (1892), and Miguel Billini's late-Romantic *Estela* (1904) are the two salient examples of turn-of-the-century narrative in the Dominican Republic. Cuba, in the midst of its own First War of Independence against Spain during this period (1868–78), produced sporadic examples of *costumbrista* literature that showed the incipient influence of European Realism. The best examples are Ramón Meza's *Mi tío el empleado* (1887) (*My Uncle the Civil Servant*) and *Don Aniceto el tendero* (1889) (*Don Aniceto the Shopkeeper*), both critiques of colonial bureaucracy and mercantile practices, and Nicolás Heredia's *Un hombre de negocios* (1883) (*A Man of Business*).

The unsettledness of Cuba's political situation in the last two decades of the nineteenth century meant an erratic literary production that curtailed the

impact of Naturalism, especially after the resumption of the war of independence against Spain in 1895. The one salient example of Cuban naturalism, Martín Morúa Delgado's proposed cycle of novels on slavery and racial discrimination, of which two novels were completed – *Sofía* (1891) and *La familia Unzuázu* (1901) – earned him a reputation as the Caribbean "Black Zola." In Puerto Rico, on the other hand, Naturalism found fertile ground, first in Salvador Brau's novellas, and later in the works of Manuel Zeno Gandía and Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo.

Brau, Puerto Rico's foremost historian of the nineteenth century, began his literary career as a writer of Romantic drama: his *Héroe y mártir* (1871) (*Hero and Martyr*) dealt with the rebellion of the *comuneros* in Castille, while *La vuelta al hogar* (1877) (*The Return Home*) centered its tragic melodrama on the history of piracy and smuggling in eighteenth-century Puerto Rico. After earning a reputation as a writer of *costumbrista* literature – with narratives taken from the oral tradition such as *Una invasión de filibusteros* (1881) (*Pirate Invasion*) and *Un tesoro escondido* (1885) (*A Hidden Treasure*) – Brau makes his mark as a Naturalist writer with *La pecadora* (1890) (*The Sinner*), a searing indictment of colonial laws and of the unforgiving Spanish clergy that interprets them too literally, subtitled *estudio del natural* (a study from nature). A feminist tale of how they combine to destroy a poor woman whose lover seeks unsuccessfully to marry her, it speaks to the plight of women in Puerto Rican society that had been the focus of intense public debate in the press during the 1880s and 1890s. *La pecadora*, as earlier in his *La campesina* (1887), shows how Brau, responding to the influence of sociologists Robert Owen and Herbert Spencer, saw the peasant as the necessary focus for any analysis of Puerto Rican reality that meant to look seriously at the intersections of the economic life, commerce, agriculture, and incipient industry of which the peasant was the pivot.

La pecadora and *La campesina* paved the way for Manuel Zeno Gandía's *Crónicas de un mundo enfermo* (*Chronicles of a Sick World*), a cycle of portraits of Puerto Rican society – four of which were ultimately published – through which he sought to translate into Puerto Rican Creole society the experimental notions put forth by Emile Zola and the social Darwinism made popular by Herbert Spencer. In his prologue to Carmen Eulate Sanjurjo's *La muñeca* (1895) (*The Doll*), Zeno Gandía would describe his efforts to apply science, logic, and reason to the literary text (without neglecting esthetic form) as the only way of understanding the world and the creatures that inhabit it. Of the four chronicles published, two – *La charca* (1894) (*The Pond*) and *Garduña* (1896) – addressed the problems of the rural world; the other two – *El negocio* (1922) (*The Business*) and *Redentores* (1925) (*Redeemers*) – published two decades later

as Zeno Gandía was leaving Naturalism behind, looked with a critical eye at the economic and political exploitation of the island that was undermining the economic health of the new American colony.

Of these, *La charca* is considered the Spanish Caribbean's Naturalist masterpiece. Written against the backdrop of a coffee plantation in the mountains of Puerto Rico – and featuring a version of Alonso's archetypal peasant degraded by poverty, disease, and miscegenation – the various plot strands of the novel weave a web of infection, official corruption, planters' greed, clerical collusion, and psychological and racial determinism through which Zeno Gandía seeks to illustrate how Puerto Rican postslavery plantation society is a "stagnant pond" that will eventually drown all who come near it. Zeno Gandía, from his perspective as a doctor, seizes upon the illness metaphor as the best textual strategy for laying bare the ills that plague Puerto Rican society, bringing upon his analysis a Naturalist esthetics built upon social determinism and contemporary psychological and physiological theories that saw miscegenation as a weakening of the "pure" races that undermined the strength to fight against social and economic conditions. Working with a gallery of social types within interweaving plots intent on showing the inevitability of death and decay in an environment plagued with tuberculosis, venereal disease, hunger, and their concomitant moral degradation, Zeno Gandía presents a scenario in which the figure of the *gíbaro*, forty-five years after the publication of Alonso's seminal text, is threatened with destruction from within, a victim of the "morbid debility" brought about by the repression and abuses of the colonial system.

Two years after the publication of *La charca*, Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo, a young friend and colleague of Zeno Gandía, published *La muñeca* (1895), a naturalist study of empty social *mores* that probes the depths of a beautiful young woman's self-centeredness and greed, and which looks upon high society as an environment as fraught with moral dangers as any stagnant pool in rural Puerto Rico. Set in Madrid, *La muñeca* opens with the preparations for the protagonist's wedding and ends with the suicide of her husband, driven to bankruptcy and self destruction by her coldness, the insatiable thirst for luxury to which her social ambition has driven her, and her inability to consider the impact of her behavior on others. *La muñeca* and Ana Roqué's *Luz y sombra* (1903) (Light and Shadow), which tells the parallel tales of two friends – one living an idyllic love story in the coffee-growing mountains of Puerto Rico, the other having married for money and position only to find real love after the fact – represent hybrid texts that blend elements of Romanticism and Realism with a heavy dose of experimental Naturalism to explore the changing role of women in Spanish Caribbean societies. Both proponents of the bourgeois

feminism that had been foremost in public debate since the publication of Alejandro Tapia y Rivera's *Póstumo el envirginado*, Roqué and Eulate Sanjurjo represent a temporary openness of literary space to women's issues at the turn of the twentieth century, a space promptly closed to anything but nation-building concerns when the island passed into American control in 1898 after Spain lost its remaining Caribbean colonies in the Spanish-American War.

The growth of nationalist thought was the salient intellectual focus of the second half of the nineteenth century, and it found its most important vehicle in the region's developing poetic tradition. In the Dominican Republic, bound as the country had been throughout the century in a seemingly ceaseless struggle to solidify its independence, as in Cuba and Puerto Rico, nineteenth-century poetry assumed a patriotic tone, proclaiming its solidarity with the nationalist struggle. Salomé Ureña, the Dominican Republic's "Muse of Civilization," author of a volume of *Poesías* (1880) and a friend and follower of Hostos in her educational endeavors, poured into her patriotic poetry all her Positivist faith in the power of education, the arts, and the sciences to consolidate the foundations of a new nation. Through poems such as "La Gloria del progreso" (1873) (The Glory of Progress), "La fe en el porvenir" (1878) (Faith in the Future), and "Luz" (1880) (Light), Ureña played a fundamental role in the elaboration of the ideal of a proud nation with a promising future, free from the wars, ignorance, and dictatorships that threatened national aspirations. Her most famous poem, "A Mi Patria" (1878) (To My Nation), argues against the indiscriminate deployment of brute force in politics and the blatant disregard for prudence in the use of power, calling for peace as the first step towards the glorious future awaiting the nation. Her poetry, exaggeratedly Romantic and "excessively exhortatory" as a rule, achieves its central role in Dominican letters through its direct appeal to the budding citizenship to rally for the national cause. Published in newspapers by a young girl still in her teens, they made of Ureña the embodiment of the nation's hopes.

In Puerto Rico, the Romantic celebration of the beauty of the island – such as we find in José Gautier Benítez's "Ausencia" (1878) (Absence) and "Puerto Rico" (1878) – blossoms into patriotic exhortations as the political status of the island becomes the center of intellectual and literary debate in the works of Lola Rodríguez de Tió, Luis Muñoz Rivera, José De Diego, and others. Gautier Benítez, dead in 1880 at the age of twenty-nine, was the island's most accomplished Romantic poet, a young talent whose work celebrates the loveliness of the Puerto Rican landscape, the temperateness of its climate, and the sweetness of its people. His work, published in newspapers and journals across the island, helped crystallize the identification between the mildness

of the Puerto Rican environment and the character of its people, a powerful notion that continues to surface as an explanation for the lack of armed struggle in pursuit of independence in Puerto Rican history.

The poetry of Rodríguez de Tió and De Diego was more systematically political. Rodríguez de Tió, a militant supporter of the Grito de Lares (the failed rebellion against Spain of 1868), spent most of her adult life in exile because of her revolutionary activities. Her collections of poems – *Mis cantares* (1876), *Claros y nieblas* (1885), and *Mi libro de Cuba* (1893) – became vehicles for a call to the struggle for political independence and a union with Cuba through a Confederation of the Antilles. One of her poems provided the lyrics for the Puerto Rican national anthem. Together with De Diego – whose *Cantos de rebeldía* (1916) spoke to the agony of the Puerto Rican patriots as the island moved from a hard-fought political autonomy to becoming an American colony after the Spanish American War – Rodríguez de Tió represents the transition from Romanticism to the *Modernismo* that characterized Caribbean poetry in Spanish in the early years of the twentieth century.

In Cuba, the role of patriotic poet belongs to the national hero, José Martí. Following in the footsteps of José María Heredia, Cuba's best-known nineteenth-century poet, whose work served as a rallying cry against Spanish tyranny, Martí eventually concluded that war against the Spaniards was the only recourse left to the small budding nation. In poems such as "El himno del desterrado" (c.1820) (The Exile's Hymn), "La Estrella de Cuba" (c.1820) (Cuba's Star), and "El laud del desterrado" (c.1820) (The Exile's Lute), Heredia had given voice to the ideals of the liberal Cuban bourgeoisie that had begun to articulate the foundations of a separatist political ideology. His evocations of the idyllic Cuban landscape as paradise lost and his nostalgia for the absent homeland were instrumental in the elaboration of a discourse of the nation that remained at the heart of Cuban nationalist expression until well into the twentieth century. His participation in the conspiracy known as "Los Rayos y Soles de Bolívar" (The Suns and Rays of Bolívar) and his organization of a failed invasion of Cuba from Mexico, led by Mexican General Santa Ana, prefigured Martí's own career.

Martí, a larger-than-life figure who was at once journalist, philosopher, essayist, ideologue, and soldier, reached his largest audience as a poet through his *Versos sencillos* (1891) (*Simple Verses*, 1997), celebrated for its innovative use of popular verse forms as well as for the space it opened for the expression of his moral, social, and political aspirations. In their blend of Romanticism, incipient *Modernismo*, and liberalism his verses provide a populist frame for Martí's pan-Americanism, which manifested itself through his emphasis on the Latin

heritage that united the Caribbean and the Americas and through his warnings against the emerging shadow of the United States as an imperial nation, a threat that risked both the sovereignty and hopes for democracy of the newly formed Latin American and Caribbean nations and the internal integrity of the United States's own democratic institutions.

As the Caribbean entered the twentieth century, the looming presence of the United States became central to the region's economic, social, and political development – and to a great extent, almost as central to its literature. Spanish Caribbean writers, who opened the first decades of the twentieth century as adherents to a literary *Modernismo* emerging out of European influences but rooted in the realities and traditions of the Americas, closed the century writing against the backdrop of the ever-growing influence of the United States's media, pop culture, economy, and politics over Spanish Caribbean nations and their cultures.

Modernismo, the first literary movement original to Latin America, sprang out of a reaction against the centrality of the material world – and the concomitant neglect of spirituality – characteristic of Realism and Naturalism, as well as out of a desire for formal experimentation and renewal. Its tenets – the preference for sensual, dynamic language, the centrality of synaesthesia to the production of literary imagery, the experimentation with meter and rhyme (including the use of free verse), the influence of the French Parnassians and Symbolists and of the English Pre-Raphaelites, the return to Greco-Roman motifs, and the creative use of Oriental exoticism and cosmopolitanism – offered Spanish Caribbean poets the possibility of escape from the thematic and formal demands of patriotic exhortation and a narrowly defined nationalist agenda.

The Caribbean's greatest *modernista* poet was undoubtedly Cuba's Julián del Casal, once described by the movement's founder, Rubén Darío, as a "deep and exquisite prince of melancholy." A translator of Charles Baudelaire into Spanish, Casal embodied the same decadent neo-Romanticism that had stamped the *fin-de-siècle* sensibility of the French *poète maudit*. His work, in both prose and verse, sought perfection through strict adherence to the most rigid of literary forms, while his themes – death, bitterness, alienation, pain, and hopelessness – were deployed through imagery that sought to make palpable what was vile and corrupt, what awakened horror and melancholy. In *Hojas al viento* (1893) and *Bustos y rimas* (1893), Casal, who died prematurely at the age of thirty in 1893, anticipated the exoticism, elusiveness, and dreamy ambiguity of the brief flowering of pure *Modernismo* in the Spanish Caribbean.

Puerto Rican *Modernismo*, spearheaded by José de Diego's experiments with form in his patriotic and philosophical poetry, found its principal vehicle

in the *Revista de las Antillas* (Review of the Antilles) – founded in 1913 by Luis Lloréns Torres – which published the work of the island's foremost *modernistas*, among them Lloréns Torres, José de Jesús Esteves, Nemesio Canales, and the post-*modernista* Evaristo Rivera Chevremont. Of these, the most accomplished poet was Lloréns Torres himself, whose early work, *Al pie de la Alhambra* (1899) (At the Foot of the Alhambra) introduced *modernista* ideas to Puerto Rican literature. His evolution as a poet, especially after the publication of his *Visiones de mi musa* (1913) (Visions of My Muse), led him to embrace the *criollista* aspect of *Modernismo* that José Martí had pursued in the populist themes and forms of his *Versos sencillos*. Lloréns's *Voces de la campana mayor* (1935) (The Toll of the Main Bell) and *Alturas de América* (1940) (Heights of America), appealed broadly to an increasingly literate Puerto Rican population through the musicality of verse forms drawn from popular traditions, such as the *décima*, the use of themes and motifs taken from the island's folklore, and a lucid vernacular that resonates with an identification with the culture of the mountain *jíbaro* already elevated to the status of national symbol by Manuel Alonso in 1849.

Of the many literary trends and movements that followed in quick succession in the wake of *Modernismo*, the most important to the development of Spanish Caribbean literature were those concerned with the affirmation of the African roots of Antillean cultures. Beginning with Alejo Carpentier's *Écue-Yamba-O!*, his novel about a young man's initiation into an Afro-Cuban secret society, and Nicolás Guillén's *Motivos del son* (1930) (Variations on the Cuban Son), which incorporated the rhythms of Afro-Cuban music into a vibrant poetry that celebrated the Caribbean's neglected African heritage, the literature of the period between 1930 and 1950 was for the most part committed to integrating the population of African descent into the discourse of nationality. Guillén's *Sóngoro cosongo* (1931), *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934), *Cantos para soldados y sones para turistas* (1937) (Songs for Soldiers and Beats for Tourists) proposed a revolutionary reassessment of Cuban culture, with its implied affirmation of the centrality of African-derived culture and practices to the definition of the nation. Following on the groundbreaking anthropological work of Fernando Ortiz and Lydia Cabrera, whose *Los negros brujos* (1906) (The Black Sorcerers) and *Cuentos negros de Cuba* (1936) (Black Tales from Cuba) respectively had brought overdue attention to the culture, narrative traditions, and belief systems of the peoples of African descent in the region, Guillén, his fellow Cuban Lino Novás Calvo (author of *La luna nona y otros cuentos*, 1942, *The Ninth Moon and Other Stories*), and his counterparts in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic – principally Luis Palés Matos and Manuel del Cabral – sought to

redefine the Antilles as mulatto islands. Del Cabral, a proponent of *Negrismo*, achieved, through the poems collected in *Trópico negro* (1941) (Black Tropic), a well-deserved international fame that made him one of the early voices of black decolonization.

In Puerto Rico, Luis Palés Matos, founder of the *Movimiento Antillano* (Antillean Movement), built upon the technical experimentation of the *modernistas* and the *criollistas'* concern with folklore and local custom, to present through his poetry a challenge to the accepted cultural notions of the Puerto Rican elite and its preference for the white *jíbaro* as the emblem of the island's culture. In *Canciones de la vida media* (1925) (Songs of the Half-Life) and *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (1937) (Drumbeats of Black Life and Kinky Hair), Palés answered the racialist claims of the likes of Antonio S. Pedreira, whose *La actualidad del jíbaro* (1935) (The Relevance of the *Jíbaro*) had argued for the white peasant as the essence of the nation, and who, in *Insularismo* (1934) (Insularism) had offered environmental and biological arguments in support of his contention that miscegenation had weakened the Puerto Rican race and culture. Palés's poetry – built upon stylized notions of Afro-Caribbean culture that were not themselves devoid of some degree of exoticism – nonetheless argued for Afro-Caribbean history and cultures as vital elements in the elaboration of an Antillean consciousness. His work had an enormous impact on writers of subsequent generations, among them Francisco Arriví, whose play *Vejigantes* (1958) (Carnival Dancers) explored the complexities of Puerto Rican attitudes toward race, and the writers of the 1970s generation, whose own version of the nation – built upon notions of inclusion and social justice inspired by the Latin American revolutionary movements of the 1960s – required the recognition of the essential mulatto roots of the Puerto Rican nation.

The Afro-Antillean movement of the first decade of the twentieth century developed alongside a recurring *Criollismo* that delved into the dismal realities of rural Caribbean life under a succession of dictatorships (in the case of Cuba and the Dominican Republic) and American colonization (in the case of Puerto Rico). This *Criollismo* manifested itself primarily through prose – short stories and novels alike – that speak of the plight of the sugar-cane laborers working under slave-like conditions, the tragic wrenching of the subsistence peasant from the land (and his subsequent uprooting into menial jobs in the new urban slums), the indifference of the state (and in many cases the Church) to the exploitation and terrorizing of the peasant, and the debasement and prostitution of the landless peasant.

The depiction of rural life takes as many forms as there were literary movements in the Spanish Caribbean in the first half of the twentieth century. In

Puerto Rico, in the hands of a writer like Emilio Belaval, author of *Cuentos para fomentar el turismo* (1946) (Stories to Encourage Tourism), the predicament of the peasant is presented with a light irony and manifest picaresque enjoyment at the clever ways in which the peasant negotiates the parameters of living under American colonialism. In Enrique Laguerre's ponderous novels, such as in his masterpiece, *La llamarada* (1935) (The Conflagration) and in *Solar Montoya* (1941) (The Montoya's Land), on the other hand, the decadence of the plantation, the abuses of systems of credit that result in the virtual enslavement of workers, the devastation caused by hurricanes on the agricultural sector, and the psychological plight of those middle-class professionals who must serve the American *centrales* (large-scale plantations) or give up their hopes for economic prosperity, are all made to fit into the narrative structures of the tragic drama. Also tragic is the approach of Abelardo Díaz Alfaro in his short story "El Josco" (1947) (The Tough One), the metaphorical tale of the castration and yoking of a proud black Puerto Rican bull to make way for its replacement by a white American stud.

In the Dominican Republic, the names of Juan Bosch (leftist political leader and President of the country from 1963 until the American invasion of 1965), and of poet Pedro Mir (perhaps the most undeservedly neglected of Caribbean authors), are the two most closely associated with the literary rendition of rural conditions. Bosch, in his early and uneven novel *La Mañosa* (1936) (The Sly One) tells the tale – narrated through the perspective of a somewhat picaresque donkey – of the fate of a rural family during one of the many civil wars that preceded the first American occupation of the island in the 1920s. But it is in his numerous short stories, collected in various volumes – among them *Camino Real* (1933), *Cuentos escritos en el exilio* (1964a) (Stories Written in Exile), *Más cuentos escritos en el exilio* (1964b) (More Stories Written in Exile) – that the traditions, language, troubles, and worldview of the Dominican peasantry found a voice. Stories like "Dos pesos de agua" (Two Dollars of Water), "La mujer" (The Woman), and "La bella alma de Don Damián" (The Beautiful Soul of Don Damián) display Bosch's command of the language and perspective of the Dominican peasant, his understanding of rural culture, the anticlericalism that was at the root of his analysis of rural society, and the socialist philosophy that provides a subtext for his tales. The latter forms an ideological link between Bosch and Pedro Mir, whose poems "Hay un país en el mundo" (There's a Country in the World) and "Si alguien quiere saber cuál es mi patria" (If Someone Wants to Know Which Nation Is Mine) represent the most eloquent literary denunciations of the predicament of the landless Dominican peasant. Well-known also for his "Contracanto a Walt Whitman" ("Countersong to

Walt Whitman," 1993), Mir's is one of the strongest voices for decolonization of his generation.

Two other Dominican writers are important in the context of rural history: Ramón Marrero Aristy, author of *Over* (1939), and Freddy Prestol Castillo, whose novel *El Masacre se pasa a pie* (You Can Cross the Massacre River on Foot), although written in 1938, was not published until 1973. *Over* is an indictment of the exploitation suffered by Dominican cane cutters working for American sugar companies; *El Masacre se pasa a pie* tells of the slaughter of Haitian cane workers by Trujillo's forces at the Haitian–Dominican border in 1937. They represent the best of Dominican long fiction until the resurgence of the novel in the 1970s.

Rural-focused literature, on the other hand, is not very prominent in Cuba, where the best talent of the first half of the century – Carpentier, Eugenio Florit, Linás Calvo, Guillén – had concentrated instead on Afro-Cuban expression. The contributors to the period's most influential journal, *Orígenes* (1944–56), founded by José Lezama Lima, pointed to new formal and thematic directions that came to fruition during the literary *Boom* of the late 1950s and 1960s. The quandary of the Cuban peasantry under the dictatorships of Machado and Batista was left to minor talents, such as Luis Felipe Rodríguez, whose *Relatos de Marcos Antilla* (1932) (Tales of Marcos Antilla) tell of the oppression of the Cuban *guajiro* by the combined power of the Cuban landowners and American companies, and Dora Alonso, whose *Tierra adentro* (1944) (Deep in the Country) offers a detailed picture of the brutal reality and poverty of the Cuban peasantry, focusing on their exploitation by the landed classes with the aid of the dictator's Rural Guards.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the attention of writers and intellectuals shift to urban settings. In Puerto Rico, the transition is vividly rendered by short-story writer José Luis González, whose collection *El hombre en la calle* (1948) (The Man on the Street) showcased the plight of characters forced out of their rural homes by the collapse of the sugar industry during the Second World War and into the San Juan slums that became a way-station on their way to low-paying wages and the ghetto in New York. In stories such as "La carta" (The Letter) and "En el fondo del caño hay un negrito" (There's a Little Black Boy at the Bottom of the Culvert) González explores the human cost of dispossession and displacement.

If González represents the transition to urban literature, René Marqués stands out as the first great urban writer in Puerto Rican literature. Known primarily as a dramatist whose work explored the decline and fall of the backward-looking white upper-middle classes, treacherous in their alliance

with American interests in Puerto Rico, Marqués also wrote short stories and two novels, *La víspera del hombre* (1959) (The Eve of Man) and *La mirada* (1975) ("The Look," 1983). His short stories, particularly "En la popa hay un cuerpo reclinado" (1959) (There's a Body Leaning Against the Stern), the story of a man led into murder, self-castration, and suicide by his wife's ever-growing demands for American consumer goods, are meant to work as symbolic renderings of the inroads rampant consumerism had made into traditional Puerto Rican culture.

But it is as a dramatist that Marqués made his most significant contribution to Spanish Caribbean literature. A dramatist with a remarkable command of staging and lighting, Marqués brought his considerable talents to plays such as *Los soles truncos* (1958) (Truncated Suns) and *Un niño azul para esa sombra* (1958) (A Blue Child for That Shadow). *Los soles truncos*, the story of three sisters living in the past, in the realm of denial and memory, gives dramatic form to the threat to traditional culture from injurious American influences. In *Un niño azul para esa sombra* he uses the figure of a child as a symbol of the loss of cultural and national identity that stems from middle-class adoption of American traditions and *mores*.

Marqués's dedication of his work to the representation of the evils of American culture and what its acceptance by Puerto Ricans represented in terms of cultural impoverishment sets the parameters for the literature of the late fifties and sixties in Puerto Rico. In the literature that emerged out of the massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States (chiefly New York and New Jersey) during the 1950s, Marqués's anti-Americanism provides a vital leitmotif. This literature is dominated by two names – those of Pedro Juan Soto and Emilio Díaz Varcárcel – writers whose work is deeply critical of American colonialism and its consequences for Puerto Rico. Soto's *Spiks* (1956) offers heartrending vignettes of the failure of Puerto Rican migrants to New York in adapting themselves to their new environment and circumstances. Díaz Varcárcel's *El asedio* (1958) (The Siege) brings to life the catastrophic participation of Puerto Rican soldiers in the Korean War, moving from personal alienation to the emotional cost of mutilation and death. In his *Harlem todos los días* (1978) (*Hot Soles in Harlem*, 1993) he wrote with light humor and deft satire about the quasi-picaresque adventures of a young innocent immigrant making his way in New York.

In Cuba, the literature of the period immediately preceding the *Boom* is best represented by Virgilio Piñera, himself a master of irony and satire. Primarily known as a short-story writer, Piñera published two novels – *La carne de René* (1952) (*René's Flesh*, 1989) and *Pequeñas maniobras* (1963) (Petty

Maneuvers) – whose influence can be clearly seen in Díaz Varcárcel's late work. His characters, moving vertically and horizontally across society in typical picaresque fashion, bring their mordant wit to the description of the almost lunatic quality of Cuban life.

The decade of the 1960s witnessed the most extraordinary explosion of creative and experimental writing in the history of Latin American literature, a period that came to be known appropriately as *el Boom*. The technical innovation, inventiveness in the use of language, incorporation of popular culture, the deployment of humor and parody, and revolutionary ideology for which the decade became known placed Latin American writing at the very center of international literature. Coinciding as it did with the first decade of the Cuban Revolution – and sharing its sense of promise and expectation, the *Boom* signals a consciousness of a new era in Latin American writing. The writers of the *Boom*, translated into a multiplicity of languages, reached undreamt-of audiences around the world.

Among the islands of the Hispanic Caribbean only Cuba played a significant role in the Boom, being represented by four writers: Alejo Carpentier, whose magic realism, which he had introduced in 1949 with *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of This World*, 1957), was vital to the movement; José Lezama Lima, whose "Baroque" masterpiece, *Paradiso* (1966) (*Paradiso*, 1974), challenged the orthodoxy of Cuban social realism; Guillermo Cabrera Infante, whose obsession with language in *Tres tristes tigres* (1967) (*Three Trapped Tigers*, 1971) filtered the manic night life of pre-Revolution Havana; and Severo Sarduy, whose ever-metamorphosing transvestites in *De dónde son los cantantes* (1967) (*From Cuba With a Song*, 1994) point to the never-ending possibilities of carnivalization and play. These writers, about whom volumes of critical work have been written since the 1960s, worked in what has come to be known as neo-Baroque style. Different in their themes and approaches, they nonetheless shared a commitment to the exploration of reality through the richness and bounteousness of language, a gift they wielded masterfully in prolific abandon. Carpentier's amazing productivity – he published almost a novel a year through the 1960s – contrasted only in ultimate volume with Lezama Lima, whose *Paradiso* became a never-ending work, nurtured and perfected through endless resurrections. As with Cabrera Infante's *Tres tristes tigres*, their work recreates Cuban reality with a lavishness that comes from their love affair with words.

Puerto Rico's contribution to the literature of the post-*Boom* came through the work of Luis Rafael Sánchez, whose hilarious *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (1976) (*Macho Camacho's Beat*, 1980) brings parody to bear on the critique of the Puerto Rican obsession with American-style mass media. The novel, built

upon the interweaving monologues of five characters paralyzed by one of Puerto Rico's monumental traffic jams – a metaphor for the country's colonial paralysis – follows them as they listen to Macho Camacho's *guaracha* "Life Is a Phenomenal Thing" on the radio. The gap between the Panglossian lyrics of the song and the realities of the Puerto Rican bottleneck are explored by Sánchez – through at times outrageous parody – as the means of conveying his analysis of Puerto Rican society as a place that "doesn't work."

Sánchez, who earlier in his career had focused on drama – his Creole version of the Antigone myth, *La pasión según Antígona Pérez* (1968) (The Passion According to Antígona Pérez), having been one of the most-often performed plays of the late sixties and seventies throughout Latin America – had also produced a pivotal collection of short stories, *En cuerpo de camisa* (1966) (In Shirtsleeves), noted above all for its candid approach to race and sexuality and its inclusion of the first story in Puerto Rican literature with a clearly avowed homosexual theme. Sánchez reprised his analysis of media obsessions and his critique of *machismo* in *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos* (1988) (The Importance of Being Daniel Santos), his fictionalized biography of the popular singer of *boleros*.

In the 1980s, homosexuality became a sort of ultimate frontier for writers seeking to challenge the hold of patriarchal perspectives – which René Marqués had mastered in his plays and fiction – on the definition of Puerto Rican culture. Of the writers dealing candidly and openly with homosexuality in their work, the most richly talented was the late Manuel Ramos Otero, dead prematurely from AIDS. Ramos Otero, one of Puerto Rico's most experimental short-story writers, published his first collection of tales, *Concierto de metal para un recuerdo y otras orgías de soledad* (A Metal Concert for a Remembrance and Other Orgies of Solitude), in 1971. In this, as in his subsequent collections, *El cuento de la mujer del mar* (1979) (The Story of the Woman of the Sea) and *Página en blanco y staccato* (1987) (Blank Page and Staccato), Ramos Otero anticipates the camp sensitivities of the late eighties and nineties, reveling in references that open the texts to Hollywood images, queenly gay behavior, outrageous in-your-face allusions to homosexual eroticism meant to *épater* all of us bourgeois, and weirdly imaginative psychological aberrations in his characters. This, together with the formal experimentation with fragmented streams of consciousness and minimal punctuation, make of his works an enjoyable challenge. Ramos Otero pushed to its limits the incursions into gay identity and national solidarity presented so painfully in Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas's texts, among them, his best, *El mundo alucinante* (1969) (*Hallucinations, or the Ill-Fated Peregrinations of Fray Servando*, 2001). In comparison, Cuba's Senel Paz's meditation on the

political consequences of being gay in Cuba, *El Bosque, el lobo, y el hombre nuevo* (1991) (translated as *Strawberry and Chocolate*, 1995), appears subdued.

Equally important in post-Boom Puerto Rican literature was the work of novelist and essayist Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, an admirer of Carpentier's whose Baroque text *La renuncia del héroe Baltasar* (1974) (*The Renunciation*, 1997), blurs the line between history and fiction as it creates false historical documentation to support a fable while using the language of the fable to narrate historical events. One of the most inventive texts of the post-Boom period in the Caribbean, the novel returns to the eighteenth century to ponder the possibility of black political power in the colony of Puerto Rico. Rodríguez Juliá has also made his mark through the elaboration of hybrid texts, richly illustrated with photographs, based on funerals of prominent Puerto Ricans. His most fascinating to date, *El entierro de Cortijo* (1982) (Cortijo's Funeral), recreated the pomp and circumstance – and uncontrollable popular grief – of the burial of Puerto Rico's most important *salsa* musician.

In the Dominican Republic, the most important voices of the post-Boom period were those of Pedro Vergés, René del Risco Bermúdez, and Pedro Peix. Vergés is the author of *Sólo cenizas hallarás: bolero* (1980) (There'll Be Only Ashes Left: Bolero), a novel whose form follows closely that of Argentinian writer Manuel Puig's *Boquitas pintadas* (1970) (*Heartbreak Tango*, 1973), but whose command of the multiple registers of Dominican speech and its understanding of the psychology of the Trujillo era combine to create what is arguably the country's best novel of the second half of the twentieth century. Del Risco's two collections of short stories, *Viento frío* (1967b) (Cold Wind) and *Del júbilo a la sangre* (1967a) (From Joy to Blood), showed exceptional promise, but his third collection, *En el barrio no hay banderas* (There Are No Flags in the Neighborhood) was published posthumously in 1974 after his premature death in 1967 at the age of thirty. Peix, a writer whose experiments with form and language and his clear-sighted analysis of Dominican history have made him the natural heir to Juan Bosch as a short-story writer, has published one collection of stories, *El fantasma de la Calle El Conde* (1988) (The Ghost of Conde Street), and has numerous prize-winning stories scattered in newspapers and magazines awaiting publication in book form.

Literary production in the Caribbean in the last two decades of the twentieth century was dominated by a "veritable explosion" in women's writing, as women's voices moved into the mainstream of literary activity in the region after decades of silence and neglect, articulating, primarily through novels and short stories, their gendered position in Caribbean societies and their search for "agency" in their personal and social lives. As the century came to a close,

women's writings expanded into new areas: religion (particularly African-derived religious systems), the erotic, popular culture, and the environment.

In Cuba, beginning in the 1970s, but particularly as a response to the challenges of the "período especial" after the collapse of the Soviet Union, women writers sought to address the reorganization of the island's socialist economy – with its tentative forays into capitalistic enterprise – and the *balseo* flight from the island in the face of diminishing resources and severe reductions in public services have found their way into fiction by Cuban women. From among this generation of new Cuban writers, three stand apart as most innovative and productive: Mirta Yáñez, Nancy Alonso, and Marilyn Bobes. Yáñez has published a number of collections of short stories, the earliest, *Todos los negros tomamos café* (1976) (We Blacks All Drink Coffee), a text that stood out for its groundbreaking use of colloquial language and acute use of irony. Her most recent book of stories, *El Diablo son las cosas* (1988) looks at Cuban realities through the prism of bittersweet nostalgia for the freshness and hope of the early years of the Revolution. Alonso's first collection of stories, *Tirar la primera piedra* (1997) (To Cast the First Stone), displays her talent for creating deeply etched characters through meticulous reconstructions of the specific linguistic registers appropriate to their gender, education, and situation. The tensions between how the persistent scarcity of goods, food, and money haunts the people of Cuba and the ease with which something as banal as a carton of eggs can become a weapon for vengeance in such a context are beautifully showcased in these stories, as are the honesty and deftness with which she addresses the realities of Cuba's Vietnam – the massive losses of Cuban lives in Mozambique and Angola. In turn, Marilyn Bobes, winner of the 1995 Casa de las Américas Prize for her first book of tales, *Alguien tiene que llorar*, deploys multiple voices in her stories to create a cocoon of voices that weaves a particular context around her central characters, giving them definition and depth. Bobes, an avowed feminist, knows the importance of literature for opening venues for the discussion of topics that have long been taboo in Cuba, such as homosexuality (particularly female homosexuality) and violence against women. Her efforts on this behalf have been part of what she sees as a thematic and conceptual opening for which women writers have prepared the ground.

Among Cuban writers living outside of Cuba during this period, Dáina Chaviano has made her mark as a writer of science-fiction, a rare example of a Latin American author working in this genre. A prolific writer, Chaviano published her first science-fiction tale, *Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre*, in 1988, which she followed in 1990 with a collection of science-fiction tales, *El abrevadero de los dinosaurios*. Her trilogy of science-fiction tales, *La Habana oculta*

(The Occult Side of Havana), includes *Gata encerrada* (1998b), an exploration of how the power of the imagination can transform a faceless, shadowy character into an obsessive force as it struggles to become a living entity; *Casa de Juegos* (1998a), which draws on her strong familiarity with fantastic and Surrealist literature, film, art, and the power of the *orichas* (the guiding spirits of the Afro-Cuban practice of Santería) to conjure up a fable about a young woman's penetration into her own heart of darkness; and *El hombre, la hembra, y el hambre* (1999), in which Chaviano returns to Cuban *espiritismo* and the role of the *medium* as conduits to gain access to the world of fantasy and the spirits.

Zoé Valdés, born in Havana in 1959, was the most prolific of Caribbean women writers throughout the 1990s. Valdés began her writing career as a poet, but her international fame is based on her work as a novelist. She first came to notice as a writer in 1995 with the publication of *La nada cotidiana* (*Yocandra in the Paradise of Nada*, 1997), a bestseller translated immediately into a dozen languages. Valdés followed her success with *La nada cotidiana* with a third novel, *La hija del embajador* (1995a), for which she won the Premio Novela Breve Juan March Cencillo. A prolific author, Valdés has published *Te di la vida entera* (1996) (*I Gave You all When I Wed*, 1999), a finalist for the Planeta Literary Prize, *Café Nostalgia* (1999), *Querido primero novio* (2000) (*Dear First Love*, 2002a), and *Milagro de Miami* (2001).

In the Dominican Republic, Angela Hernández, a poet, short-story writer, and novelist, is known for her subtly erotic evocations of the disharmony between a lush internal world where dreams and passions lurk and the mundane terrain of everydayness. "Cómo recoger la sombra de las flores" ("How to Gather the Shadows of the Flowers," 1991), the first of Hernández's short stories, which won her the 1988 Casa del Teatro Literary Prize, anchored her first book of stories, *Alótopos*. By the time she published her second collection of short stories, *Masticar una rosa* in 1993 – mediated by two collections of poems, *Tizne y cristal* (1987) and *Edades de asombro* (1990) – her standing as the foremost Dominican prose writer of her generation was assured. *Masticar una rosa* (Gnawing on a Rose) echoes the writer's childhood memories of having lived through Trujillo's dictatorship. Since the publication of *Masticar una rosa*, Hernández has published two additional prose texts: *Piedra de sacrificio* (1998), a collection of short stories that won the Premio Nacional de Cuentos in the year of its publication as well as the Premio Cole de Literatura, and a novella, *Mudanza de los sentidos* (2001). *Piedra de sacrificio* returns to the urban settings of *Masticar una rosa* to imbue them with the magical aura of the countryside through the voices of characters rooted in rural splendors who have to settle for an urban absence of color. In *Mudanza de los sentidos*, a

Caribbean *Bildungsroman*, the voice of a young girl that served Hernández so well in *Masticar una rosa*, emerges as the filter for the horrid experiences of growing up in the turmoil that was Dominican history in the latter half of the twentieth century. A mature work that draws upon Hernández's experience as a short-story writer, *Mudanza de los sentidos* gives voice to the emerging novelist.

Puerto Rican women writers blossomed in the 1980s with the emergence of voices of such importance as Ana Lydia Vega, Magali García Ramis, Carmen Lugo Filippi, Rosario Ferré, Olga Nolla, Mayra Santos Febres, and Mayra Montero. Ferré, Puerto Rico's foremost novelist and short-story writer of the 1980s and early 1990s, had her first success with *Papeles de Pandora* (1986) (*The Youngest Doll*, 1991) and became an internationally known figure with the publication of *Maldito amor* (1986) (*Sweet Diamond Dust*, 1996). In the early 1990s, aware that translations of her fiction had enjoyed considerable success in the American market, and in response to generous offers from American publishers who found original work in English more profitable than translations – and who saw in Ferré, a writer of established reputation, a perfect bridge to the Latino market – she agreed to begin writing in English. In Puerto Rico, a nation that had made of the Spanish language – and of literature written in Spanish – the symbol of resistance against American political control and cultural influence, the decision was greeted with shock and she came under attack from writers and critics alike. Despite the success of her first English-language book, *The House on the Lagoon* (1997), which was a finalist for the prestigious National Book Award in the United States, her reputation as a Latin American – and particularly a Puerto Rican – writer has yet to recover. Her second English-language book, *Eccentric Neighborhoods* (1999), an upper-class Puerto Rican family saga, was almost equally successful with critics and readers. Ferré's most recent publication, *Flight of the Swan* (2001), is a novel inspired by the life of Anna Pavlova, the famous Russian ballet dancer. It is the third of Ferré's novels to be written and published initially in English.

Olga Nolla, known throughout her literary career as a poet, blossomed as a prose writer in the 1990s. In 1990 she published a collection of short stories, *Porque nos queremos tanto*, which she followed with her first novel, *La Segunda hija* (1992). Two other novels, *El Castillo de la memoria* and *El manuscrito de Miramar*, were published in 1996 and 1998 respectively. *El Castillo de la memoria*, Nolla's meditation on the history of *hispanidad* in Puerto Rican culture, returns to the sixteenth century to imagine what Puerto Rican history could have been if Ponce de León had returned to Puerto Rico after having succeeded in locating the Fountain of Youth, immortalizing in the process the New World as the embodiment of the spirit of the Renaissance. The publication

of *El manuscrito de Miramar* completely transformed Nolla's profile as a prose writer. In it she weaves together the stories of two upper-class women – mother and daughter – through the discovery of a manuscript that unveils the silence that has served as a veil covering stories of desire, infidelity, and longing. The recovered manuscript establishes a dialog with María Isabel's own attempt to reconcile her image of her mother with this new vision of a woman writing of secret desires, adultery, and other illicit passions.

Ana Lydia Vega, whose often hilarious short stories – collected in *Encancar-anublado y otros cuentos de naufragio* (1992) and *Pasión de historia y otras historias de pasión* (1987) – set the tone for Puerto Rican feminist literature in the 1980s, opened the 1990s with a fresh book of tales, *Falsas crónicas del sur* (1991), which gathers eight tales inspired by Puerto Rican history. As she did with detective fiction in *Pasión de historia*, where she parodied that popular genre as the basis for her exploration of a wife's puzzling disappearance (*à la Rear Window*), here Vega calls upon a number of genres – the Romantic novel, the tale of adventure, social satire, the political chronicle – to turn history inside out, helping us to look at familiar incidents from the individual's perspective, bringing history (and the folkloric interpretation of history), in the process, into the realm of the everyday occurrence and personal drama.

Magali García Ramis, whose *Felices días, tío Sergio* (1986) (*Happy Days, Uncle Sergio*, 1995) had redefined the Puerto Rican *Bildungsroman*, published a collection of short stories, *Las noches del riel de oro*, in 1997. In this volume García Ramis begins to distance her work from the familial, autobiographical themes of *La familia de todos nosotros*, the collection she had published in 1988, whose topics were closely connected to the *Bildungsroman* aspects of *Felices días*. Firmly grounded in Puerto Rican popular culture, with *salsa* and other forms of popular music providing a thematic foundation to tales like "Cuando canten Maestra Vida" and "Solita con las estrellas," the tales explore San Juan's urban culture and the obsessions to which it can lead. Of particular interest are "Cuando canten Maestra Vida," about the *habitués* of a somewhat seedy old San Juan bar, and "Frituras y lunas," about a man's incestuous obsession with his daughter, which leads him to murder a young man who buys the last fritter available from a vendor, the very fritter his daughter had requested.

Of all Puerto Rican writers of the 1990s the most important and innovative voice was that of Mayra Montero, born in Cuba but a resident of Puerto Rico for most of her life. Montero opened the decade with the publication of a short story, *Corinne, muchacha amable* (1991) (*Corinne, Amiable Girl*, 1994), that followed upon a collection of vignettes, *Ventitrés y una tortuga*, which had appeared in 1981. In this story of a young woman turned into a zombie by the lover

she has spurned, Montero is particularly interested in deploying the familiar conventions of the Gothic genre to lay bare the Haitian people's struggle against the Duvalier government, here represented by the dreaded Tonton Macoutes, the regime's feared militia. This commitment was already evident in her first novel, *La trenza de la Hermosa luna* (1987), a beautifully rendered tale of an exile's return to Haiti after twenty years as a wandering sailor and of the transformation that leads him from disillusionment to passionate commitment to action against the Duvalier regime. The novel marked Montero as the talent to watch in Puerto Rican writing, a promise that she has fulfilled repeatedly in the period since *La trenza de la Hermosa luna* first dazzled critics.

Montero is, of all contemporary Caribbean writers, the most indebted to the Euro-American Gothic tradition, which she has made her own, transforming the familiar conventions through her deep knowledge of Caribbean magico-religious traditions and her concerns for social justice. As she did in "Corinne, muchacha amable" and *La trenza de la Hermosa luna*, she appropriates the Gothic in *Del rojo de tu sombra* (1992) (*The Red of His Shadow*, 2001b), to unveil the vicious and corrupt politics and African-derived religious traditions that link the Dominican Republic and Haiti despite the enmity that has existed between the countries for centuries. In *Tú, la oscuridad* (1995) (*In the Palm of Darkness*, 1997), Montero returns to the production of horror that served her so well in "Corinne, muchacha amable" in the tale of American herpetologist Victor Grigg who, with the aid of his Haitian guide Thierry Adrien, is on a quest for an elusive and threatened blood frog, extinct everywhere but on a dangerous, eerie mountain near Port-au-Prince. In the volatile and bloody setting of the Haitian mountains, controlled by violent thugs, through her weaving together the stories and vastly different perspectives of her two protagonists, Montero uncovers a new haunting postcolonial space built upon the conflict between a scientific and an animistic worldview: the extinction of species due to a collapsing environment; the troubled landscape of Haiti, peopled with zombies and frightening, other-worldly creatures; political corruption, violence, and religious turmoil.

Montero's concerns with Caribbean spirituality, particularly as represented by the Afro-Caribbean religious practices that have been at the heart of so much of her fiction, maintain their centrality in her 1998 novel, *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*, 1999). Narrated by a young Cuban woman of Chinese and African ancestry, it relates the secret events that transpired when, during a series of performances in Cuba in 1920, legendary tenor Enrico Caruso fled for his life into the streets of Havana after a bomb exploded in the theater where he was rehearsing Verdi's *Aida*. Rescued by the narrator's mother, Aída Petrinera Chang,

the seriously ill Caruso embarks on an adventure that takes him from an intense affair that will result in the narrator's birth to a search for a Santería priest who can heal him – or at least protect his lover from sharing his fate.

Montero also established herself during the 1990s as the Caribbean's foremost writer of erotic fiction. Her two erotic novels, *La última noche que pasé contigo* (1991) (*The Last Night I Spent with You*, 2001a) and *Púrpura profundo* (2000) (*Deep Purple*, 2003), fuse two deep interests: the nature of erotic desire and its connection to Caribbean popular music. Montero, who had been a finalist in 1991 for the Sonrisa Vertical Prize – given in Barcelona by the prestigious Tusquets Press for the best erotic novel written in Spanish in a given year – for *La última noche* – won the prize in 2000 for *Púrpura profundo*.

Of the new generation of Puerto Rican writers that follows in the wake of Ferré, Lugo Filippi, and Montero, Mayra Santos Febres is the most accomplished. Known as a poet – she has published to date a number of poetry books, including *El orden escapade* (1991b), *Anamú y manigua* (1991a), and *Tercer mundo* (2000c) – she has emerged in the last five years as a gifted prose writer. Her first book of short stories, *Pez de vidrio* (1994), won the Letras de Oro literary prize. In 1996, "Oso blanco," featured in her second collection of stories, *El cuerpo correcto* (2000a), won the prestigious Juan Rulfo Prize in Paris. Also in 2000, her novel *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (*Sirena Selena*, 2000d) established her reputation as the leading writer among Puerto Rico's young authors.

The texts of Santos Febres's *Pez de vidrio* and *El cuerpo correcto* are erotic urban vignettes about desire and its frustration as they play themselves out in contemporary Puerto Rico. In "La fragancia de Marina," for example, a woman selects her perfume based on the kind of reaction she wants to elicit from men, while in "Abnel, dulce pesadilla," a female voyeur describes her thrilling sensations while she watches men showering. "Dilcia M." tells of a frustrated young woman imprisoned for her participation in an armed struggle for Puerto Rican independence. Santos Febres's interest in homoeroticism and popular music, and her concern with the exploration of the writing process, link these tales.

These concerns find ample room for development in *Sirena Selena vestida de pena*, the story of a gay teenage boy earning a living on the streets, and of the transvestite who recognizes the crystalline sweetness of his singing voice and helps him become a famous *travestí* in the Dominican Republic. It is also the parallel story of Leocadio, a Dominican boy who knows himself to be different because of his special sensibilities and the ways in which he awakens male desires. Santos Febres's exploration of sexual ambiguity and unsanctioned desire, her command of musical allusion and the technical skill with which

she can incorporate music and rhythm into her text, and her manipulation of language as a disturbing element in her text – at once erotic and humorous – all contribute to making *Sirena Selena* one of the best Puerto Rican novels in recent years.

As the literature of the Spanish Caribbean moves into the twenty-first century, it has moved closer to the pan-Antillean vision imagined by Martí in “Our America.” The work of Mayra Montero, truly Antillean, which has found a worldwide audience, points to the universality of the realities facing the Caribbean. Her literary exploration of popular culture, which we find in the multiple renditions of the *bolero* in late twentieth-century literature, as well as in Leonardo Padura Fuentes’s detective fiction or Daína Chaviano’s science-fiction, augurs well for a renewed and invigorated Caribbean literature in Spanish.

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