

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Alejandro Caturla and Alejo Carpentier's *La Manita en el Suelo*: A Creative (Re)Staging

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Leilani Marie Dade

December 2017

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Walter Clark, Chair

Dr. Leonora Saavedra

Dr. Rogerio Budasz

Copyright by  
Leilani Marie Dade  
2017

The Thesis of Leilani Marie Dade is approved:

---

---

---

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my professors at the University of California, Riverside, particularly my thesis advisor, Dr. Walter Clark, without whose encouragement and guidance this project would not have been possible. He facilitated my transition to the musicology graduate program at UCR and agreed to work with me on my dissertation. Thanks also to Dr. Leonora Saavedra, for her invaluable guidance and encouragement in the early stages of this project and for providing me with a vote of confidence when I needed it most, and to Dr. Rogerio Budasz for supervising my research during my trip to Havana, Cuba. A very special thanks to Dr. William C. Krause, associate professor of music at Hollins University in Roanoke, VA, for starting me on the path that led me to a graduate degree in musicology and a lifelong interest in classical guitar and Spanish and Latin American music. I would also like to thank curator Gary Galvan and the staff of the Fleischer Collection of Orchestral Music at the Free Library of Philadelphia for their gracious assistance in the perusal of Caturla's scores, particularly *Yambo-O*, and for responding thoughtfully to my many questions regarding Cuban music. I am especially grateful for the help of the staff of the Museo Nacional de la Música in la Habana, Cuba, and director Jesús Gómez Cairo for permitting me to examine the *La Manita en el Suelo* score, books of correspondence, and other materials from their archive. I would also like to thank Katherine Devine, artist and community activist in Roanoke for jumpstarting my return to artistic expression and for guiding me through improving my skills in drawing and puppet construction. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues at the University of California, Riverside, and my family for their ongoing support.

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Alejandro Caturla and Alejo Carpentier's *La Manita en el Suelo*: A Creative (Re)Staging  
by

Leilani Marie Dade

Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Music  
University of California, Riverside, December 2017  
Dr. Walter Clark, Chairperson

Alejandro García Caturla (1906-40) is regarded as one of the founders of the Afro-Cubanist movement, though he is often overshadowed by his contemporary Amadeo Roldán (1900-39). After attempts to convince Alejo Carpentier (1904-80) to write an Afro-Cuban ballet for him failed, the opportunity to collaborate with Carpentier finally presented itself in the form of *La Manita en el Suelo*, an opera buffa in one act and five scenes, drawing from a combination of both visual and musical elements of African, European, and Latin heritage within Cuban folklore. Carpentier's collaboration with Caturla was meant to unite the myths and legends of all three cultures, each personified as characters in the story, into one vibrant and accessible production. Due in part to Caturla's untimely death, *La Manita en el Suelo* was never performed in its entirety with the staging that Caturla and Carpentier envisioned. Drawing from the works of Charles White, Malena Kuss, and others, this project examines nationalism, surrealism, and folklore in Alejandro García Caturla and Alejo Carpentier's puppet opera, *La Manita en el Suelo*, and offers a fresh analysis of the work with detailed instructions on how to revive it through live storytelling and stop-motion animation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Biographies	5
Alejandro García Caturla	5
Amadeo Roldán	8
Alejo Carpentier	9
Carpentier And Caturla As Collaborators	14
Cultures and Traditions of Cuba	20
<i>Ñañiguismo</i> and the Abakuá	21
Afro-Cubans and the Slave Trade	23
Chinese Migrant Workers and <i>la Charada</i>	26
Character Analyses	33
Analysis of Carpentier's Libretto	42
Performance Possibilities and Creative Alternatives	57
Conclusion	68
Bibliography	70

## INTRODUCTION

Alejandro García Caturla (1906-40) is regarded as one of the founders of the Afro-Cubanism movement along with his contemporary Amadeo Roldán (1900-39). The puppet opera that Caturla created with Alejo Carpentier, *La Manita en el Suelo*, is a quintessential Afro-Cuban classical work due to its combination of both visual and musical elements of African, European, and Latin heritage within Cuban folklore. Carpentier's collaboration with Caturla was meant to unite the myths and legends of all three cultures, each personified as characters in the story, into one vibrant and accessible production. Due in part to Caturla's untimely death, *Manita en el Suelo* was never performed in its entirety with the staging that Caturla and Carpentier envisioned. Drawing from the works of Charles White, Malena Kuss, Silke Meier, Andy Arencibia Concepción and others, this project examines nationalism, surrealism, and folklore in Alejandro García Caturla and Alejo Carpentier's *La Manita en el Suelo*, and will offer a fresh analysis of the work with intent to revive it through a unique kind of performance.

In the introduction to *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanism and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*, Robin Moore states that "Perhaps the most central goal of the project as initially conceived was to determine how the music of a 'despised' minority—African descendants in the Americas—has become so central to national identity in various countries that continue to discriminate against them."<sup>1</sup> Moore, along

---

<sup>1</sup> Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), ix.

with Charles White and Kuss, undoubtedly faced harsher travel restrictions when they first began their research into Afro-Cuban music and its composers than I did when conducting research in Havana, Cuba, this past year. In fact, Moore felt that “government policy actively discourages such work in Cuba,” despite an official position to the contrary, because of the insurmountable difficulty in acquiring funding for research in Cuba at the time. I travelled to Havana in early March of 2017 knowing that my research on this opera came at a time when US relations with Cuba had relaxed for the first time in years thanks to President Barack Obama. After delaying my trip which was originally planned for summer of 2016, I closely monitored the changes in regulations for travel from the US. More and more commercial flights became available. Major cell service companies began offering coverage. Changes were happening and they were happening rapidly. I am fortunate to have visited Cuba and conducted my research at a time when travel remained open. At the time of writing this, Donald Trump has pledged to partially undo Obama’s policies. Combined with the death of Fidel Castro, who knows what the future of the relationship between Cuba and the United States under this new leadership will hold? The purpose of this trip was not only to study the original score, which is housed only at the Museo Nacional de la Música in Havana, but to experience, even for a brief time, the diverse peoples and traditions of Cuba that Caturla and Carpentier sought to champion in their work. I wanted to hear the music firsthand, visit the churches, and converse with the locals, all while keeping an open but critical mind. I cannot with this project alone attempt to address the complex issues that Moore tackles in his extensive work. I can, however, offer something else: a fresh look at an example of Afro-Cuban

music from 2017, exactly twenty years after Moore’s book was published, an “unexplored aspect of a relatively familiar subject.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the greatest challenges that I faced over the course of this project is striking a balance between historical accuracy and modernity. In this analysis, I aim to reach an authenticity that is a messy blend of these two goals. I extend the folkloric timelessness of *Manita en el Suelo* to include carefully curated elements of the modern day, including my own impressions of Old Havana and a new type of puppetry—stop-motion animation. The idea first came to me during a discussion with my first advisor on this project. She suggested that I look into Caturla’s *Tres Danzas Cubanas* or some of his more well-known works. While reading through Charles White’s biography *Alejandro García Caturla: A Cuban Composer in the Twentieth Century*, an invaluable resource in my research project, I was quite surprised to discover a work by the composer in an entirely different format in chapter seventeen, “Culmination of a Creative Ideal: *Manita en el Suelo*.”<sup>3</sup> The idea of a puppet opera enchanted me. I arrived at my next meeting with an entirely new idea for my thesis project. I remember saying something along the lines of *I could do this. I could make this*. To my surprise, her response was, “That would be really cool.” I expected greater resistance to this kind of interdisciplinary application of my musicological training.

---

<sup>2</sup> Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, x.

<sup>3</sup> Charles White, *Alejandro García Caturla: a Cuban Composer in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 171.

After that meeting, I had a focus and a dream of producing *Manita en el Suelo* as a stage production; however, correspondence between myself and Malena Kuss indicated that a fully staged version was already in the works. I was disappointed but remained committed to realizing the work some other way. Much like *La luna* at the end of the fourth scene, my enthusiasm was only temporarily deflated. My vision shifted from puppet-making for live staging towards stop-motion animation, a medium which had long held my interest but my passion for which had lain dormant for years as I shifted my academic interests away from studio art towards language and music. For me, stop-motion animation is a modern-day marvel. It is old and new in that it taps into the same *magic* as puppet theater of old but does so with new technologies. Its process is tedious and often goes under-appreciated by your average movie-goer.

One of the drawbacks is that the interpretations of *Manita en el Suelo* are my own and as such are subject to my own limitations and biases. I have made every effort to reduce inaccuracies by studying the score, libretto, and correspondence closely and to preserve the many modernist, syncretic, and nationalist qualities that White, Kuss, and others have identified. I do not endeavor to *capture* Caturla and Carpentier's puppet opera, but rather to set it free from the confines of history and to offer one possible version which faithfully follows the guidelines set by the composer and librettist while melding it with my own artistic vision and the social and political context of my own time.

## ALEJANDRO GARCÍA CATURLA BIOGRAPHY

“Caturla was not ‘in search of the Cuban soul.’ he *was* the Cuban soul, and proved it by sacrificing everything, including his life, for the cause of his people.”

-Charles White, *Alejandro García Caturla: a Cuban composer in the twentieth century*, xvii

In the introduction of his biography on Caturla, Charles White compares him to Revueltas, describing them both as “modern native-born patriotic zealots whose mission was to bring about a cultural liberation of their own people.” According to White, both composers “did so by assimilating the environments of the towns in which they lived and worked and transforming them into sources for a new musical language, one that was syncretic in nature and highly personal in style.”<sup>4</sup> Caturla is often discussed in relation to his contemporary Roldán who many viewed as more successful. White, on the other hand, places Caturla and Revueltas in a different category than Roldán, one that was shared with Charles Ives and Heitor Villa-Lobos, for their “stark originality that eventually brought a new sound of national identity to their music.”<sup>5</sup> Another quality that unified these composers was their “exigency to transcend the barriers of Eurocentric influence.”<sup>6</sup> Caturla and Roldán were similar in that they initiated a whole new Afro-Cuban movement in the domain of art (or concert) music; however, one thing that separates Caturla from all of the aforementioned composers is his determination to

---

<sup>4</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, xi

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

succeed against all odds. As White states, “None of the composers in this exclusive group fought so courageously against such extreme odds to raise cultural standards in their respective homelands as did Caturla.”<sup>7</sup> White draws yet another distinction between Caturla and Roldán, the fact that Caturla is “Cuba’s first native-born modernist composer.”

Alejandro García Caturla was born in the city of Remedios, Cuba. A very important aspect of Caturla’s life is the fact that he was of Spanish descent and born into a “highly distinguished family of judges, lawyers, doctors, and landowners,” which allowed him to enjoy a very privileged and cosmopolitan social life.<sup>8</sup> In his adolescence, he began to compose while he studied both law and music. Caturla had many bourgeois interests and was influenced by music from Europe and the United States during his frequent trips abroad to study.<sup>9</sup> Both of Caturla’s principal interests, music and law, could be said to have come from a passion for social justice. “Influenced by *minorismo* ideals while a student at Havana University, Caturla began to demonstrate his interest in Afro-Cuban idioms as the basis for a new compositional style in his early songs *Bajo mis besos* (1924) and *Ansia* (1925), both of which he dedicated to Carpentier.”<sup>10</sup> Caturla developed

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., xiv

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>10</sup> Caroline Rae, “In Havana and Paris: The Musical Activities of Alejo Carpentier,”

*Music and Letters*, 89/3 (2008): 375.

a fascination for African culture which extended far beyond musical motifs. Beginning at the early age of seventeen, Caturla lived with an Afro-Cuban woman, Manuela Rodríguez, who was a servant at his uncle's house, a decision which scandalized many of his own family members and residents of Remedios and "did not eradicate his inherent bourgeois roots" but rather "simply reaffirmed his fierce sense of independence."<sup>11</sup> Caturla and his first wife were never officially married due to the stigma and illegality of interracial marriage. When she died of typhoid fever, Caturla began another relationship with her sister Catalina, who many said was more beautiful.<sup>12</sup> Between both common-law marriages with these two women, Caturla had eleven children.

In writing his biography, Charles White set out to "rectify some of the misconceptions by previous writers, critics, and musicians who misunderstood Caturla's music or wrongly compared him to nineteenth-century models." White's book presents "a new perspective of Caturla that not only establishes him as the most *innovative* Cuban composer of the first half of the twentieth century and one of the pioneers of Latin American music during his time, but also a great humanitarian."<sup>13</sup> Caturla's relationship to his home town was even further complicated by the reluctance, and at times outright resistance, of the townspeople to Caturla's aggressively progressive ideas. Still, Remedios provided Caturla with a view into a starkly contrasting and racially divided

---

<sup>11</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, xiv.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

world. According to White, “the most penetrating aspect of Caturla’s cultural heritage is not of Hispanic origin; it stems from the presence of a large African community that surrounded Remedios and the sounds of their ceremonial drums.”<sup>14</sup> This experience of living in two worlds separated by class and race undoubtedly influenced his musical career, which he dedicated to the service of elevating African music and culture to the concert hall and to give credit for the contributions, both voluntary and involuntary, to Cuban culture.

Because of these contributions, Caturla is considered along with Amadeo Roldán as a pioneer of modern Cuban symphonic music. From 1925-1927 he continued his musical studies in Paris, as a student of Nadia Boulanger, the legendary pianist. After finishing his musical studies, Caturla returned to his small village of Remedios where he began to work as a lawyer in order to maintain his growing family. It is uncertain what Caturla might have accomplished had he been able to devote his life entirely to music; however, the realities and economic burden of supporting such a large family would not permit him to abandon his studies in law. He was assassinated in the Street on November 12, 1940, at only 34 years old by a young criminal who mistakenly thought that Caturla was the deciding judge in his case. White points to the bitter irony that “the bronze plaque commemorating his tragic death... was placed there by the neighboring townspeople of Caibarién.”<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., xvi

<sup>15</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, xvi.

## ALEJO CARPENTIER BIOGRAPHY

Alejo Carpentier was born in 1904 in Havana.<sup>16</sup> While Caturla's family and upbringing situated him between the rich and the poor, white and black, Carpentier's life was split between Cuba and Europe. His father was a French architect, and his mother was a Russian-language professor.<sup>17</sup> There has even been speculation as to whether Carpentier was even born in Cuba at all.<sup>18</sup> Although Carpentier is most well-known for his works in literature, he was involved in music from a young age, having played Chopin and Debussy on the piano as a child.<sup>19</sup> According to Caroline Rae,

The dichotomy of Carpentier's cultural background, situated between the cultures of Europe and Latin America, placed him in an unusual and difficult position when he began forging a career in writing.... Carpentier was forced to assert his Cuban cultural identity at the same time as presenting himself as an authentic proponent of the European and particularly French artistic milieu.<sup>20</sup>

Caroline Rae describes Carpentier as a "hero of Castro's Cuba" and "an advocate of new music, particularly that associated with the French avant-garde as well as with his native Cuba."<sup>21</sup> Fascinated with *neoprimitivismo*, Carpentier problematically hailed

---

<sup>16</sup> *Alejo Carpentier: Un hombre de su tiempo Edición homenaje Centenario del natalicio de Alejo Carpentier* (La Habana, Cuba: Letras Cubanas, 2004), 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Rae, "In Havana and Paris," 377.

<sup>19</sup> *Alejo Carpentier*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Rae, "In Havana and Paris," 377.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 373-374.

Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* as "the ideal model for Cuban musical nationalism."<sup>22</sup> Andy Arencibia Concepción's *En un segundo de fulgurante revelación: Alejo Carpentier y Alejandro García Caturla en los cruces híbridos del nacionalismo y la vanguardia*, the most recent work on *La Manita en el Suelo* having been published in 2016, traces Carpentier's influences of nationalism and *vanguardia* as well as his fascination with everything Afro-Cuban. Carpentier was a music and art critic for *Carteles* and *Social* and was "a committed advocate of European modernism at a time when musical and artistic life in Havana was as conservative as the political régime of Cuba's Gerardo Machado was repressive."<sup>23</sup> The agenda that Carpentier pushed through his essays "aimed to stimulate debate among his *vanguardia* contemporaries and raise awareness of a repertory then largely unknown in Cuba."<sup>24</sup>

Like Caturla, Carpentier worked tirelessly to promote new music. In 1926, Carpentier founded Música Nueva, Havana's first new music society, actively campaigned against the popularity of nineteenth-century Italian opera and instead favored internationalism, impressionism, and neoprimitivism.<sup>25</sup> This revolutionary streak paralleled his involvement with the *Grupo Minorista*. Carpentier met Caturla and Roldán through this group. It was Carpentier's involvement with the Grupo Minorista that landed

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 379.

him in jail in 1927 for his alleged communist ties by the Gerardo Machado government where he wrote the novel which would later serve as the basis for *La Manita en el Suelo*. This work, *Ecue-Yambo-O* (translated to Lord, Praised be Thou) was revised in 1933. “Carpentier’s championing of the European avant-guard also had a political dimension: the promotion of new art ‘in all its diverse manifestations’ was among the declared aims of the Grupo Minorista, a group of leftist militant Cuban writers, artists, and intellectuals active during the 1920s that included Carpentier among its members.”<sup>26</sup> He fled to Paris in 1928, “the well-established promised land for Latin American intellectuals” and remained there for eleven years.<sup>27</sup> Caturla followed him that same year.<sup>28</sup> In 1930, Carpentier wrote the libretto for *La Manita en Suelo*.<sup>29</sup>

Carpentier’s connection to Carlos Chávez in Mexico paved the way for Roldán and Caturla to join Henry Cowell’s Pan American Associate of Composers in 1930.<sup>30</sup> Carpentier’s imprisonment ceased his role as promoter, Música Nueva revived under Roldán who focused on more Spanish and Cuban composers, including himself and Caturla.<sup>31</sup> Carpentier’s music journal inspired María Muñoz de Quevedo to start

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>29</sup> *Alejo Carpentier*, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Rae, “In Havana and Paris,” 380.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 381.

publishing *Musicalia*, which Carpentier contributed to and Caturla became a staff member and later chief editor. In turn it inspired Caturla to form his own journal *Atalaya* in 1933.<sup>32</sup> Throughout his career as a music critic, Carpentier always emphasized the rejection of the standard classical repertory, a conviction which made his an ideal choice to collaborate with Caturla.

While Carpentier's cultural complexity made him uniquely suited to provide an interface between European and Latin American influences, it was also in danger of alienating him from the country with which he sought to align his cultural identity: in Cuba, where he is reputed to have spoken in a peculiarly throaty French-accented Spanish, he was considered almost French... but in France Carpentier was also a foreigner, an importer of exotic cultural influences from an island whose music was rapidly becoming vogueish in the ever fashion-conscious cultural melting-pot of Paris.<sup>33</sup>

According to Pedro Barreda, Carpentier's *¡Ecué-Yambo-O!* offers "the tragedy of the contemporary Cuban black in the framework of the sugar industry." In this work Carpentier "means to capture the essence of blackness and the black environment, beginning with its roots, by placing himself in the magical-mystical world of this black man," an act which Barreda describes as a "preoccupation with the magical and primitive aspects of the black being."<sup>34</sup> Alejo Carpentier belonged to a generation of twentieth-century Cuban writers who are "distinguished by their nonconformity and their innovative zeal in all areas, as they reacted against the official, rigid, academic standards

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>34</sup> Pedro Barreda, *The Black Protagonist in the Cuban Novel* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 34.

of the past.” Barreda categorizes this group as avant-garde as opposed to postmodern and considers the “revival of the black theme” as one form of rebellion.<sup>35</sup> Barreda states that “Carpentier’s work is defined as he seeks to interpret the real America and to react against that superficial conception of the novel; but at the same time, because he has learned to the lesson of the criollistas and of the European surrealists, he brings to his novels the deep reality of Latin America.”<sup>36</sup> Carpentier’s novel is a reference to a more cyclical conception of time, where past and present are not viewed as steps in a teleological progression but rather as states of being which can be repeated.<sup>37</sup>

Although deeply moved by surrealism, which greatly influenced certain elements of *Manita en el Suelo*, Carpentier claims to have avoided surrealism in his novel because “it seemed to me that it would offer nothing to this continent.” Carpentier aimed to “surpass criollismo.”<sup>38</sup> Barreda states that *¡Ecué-Yambo-O!* “belongs to the Cuban negroist movement” typical of the traditional Spanish-American style in its employment of the man vs. nature trope. In this case, nature includes the religious activities of Africans, which Carpentier studied and conducted ethnographic research by attending religious rituals and ceremonies.<sup>39</sup> Because of the numerous flaws in his understanding of

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 117-18

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 137

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 137

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 139

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 142

*Santería* and *ñáñiguismo*, Barreda describes *¡Ecué-Yambo-O!* as “a necessary first step in the development of Carpentier’s novelistic work... a learning experience and one that started him off in the direction of an authentically deep and universal expression.”<sup>40</sup>

#### CARPENTIER AND CATURLA AS COLLABORATORS

Caturla was not the first composer with whom Carpentier collaborated, nor was he the first to engage Carpentier on a project of Afro-Cuban-inspired classical music. Carpentier wrote the scenarios for Amadeo Roldán’s two Afro-Cuban ballets: *La rebambaramba* 1928 and *El milagro de Anaquillé*, 1929.<sup>41</sup> Unlike Caturla, Roldán was *mulato*. Born in Paris in 1900, Roldán studied violin at the Madrid Conservatory. He moved to Paris in 1921, seven years before Caturla and Carpentier made their pilgrimage, where he worked as a conductor then assistant to the director of the Orchestra of Havana. He founded the String Quartet of Havana in 1927. Both groups presented concerts of new music. Roldán died in Havana in 1939, only one year before the untimely death of his colleague Caturla. After the Castro Revolution, the *Conservatorio Municipal de la Habana* was renamed to the *Conservatorio Amadeo Roldán*. It is evident in the correspondence of Caturla that he was anxious to collaborate with Carpenter in a similar manner, especially in regards to *La rebambaramba*, in one act and two scenes, which was a representation of Havana in the early nineteenth century. It was staged for the first time August 12, 1928, at the Teatro Nacional by the Orquesta Filarmónica de La Habana

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 143

<sup>41</sup> Rae, “In Havana and Paris,” 374.

directed by Roldán himself.<sup>42</sup> *La rebambaramba* was full of religious themes of both Catholic and African origin and culminated in a ceremonial snake ritual.

As I mentioned before, *La Manita en el Suelo* was never realized in its entirety with the staging that Caturla y Carpentier imagined. But how did they imagine it? In this portion of the thesis, I will discuss the composer-librettist relationship between these two artists referencing their correspondence, which was preserved in a book that I accessed at the Museo Nacional de la Música in Havana. What does it mean to be Afro-Cuban? In Malena Kuss' article titled "Cuba: A Quasi-Historical Sketch," which appears in volume two of her *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Encyclopedic History*, Kuss addresses the stakes of referring to Cuban peoples of African descent as Afro-Cuban or Cuban, citing Zoila Gómez García's work and preference for the latter term. "By substituting 'Cuban' instead of 'Afro-Cuban' the African legacy is not only legitimized but appropriated, embraced while also relegated to the role of 'antecedents' in discursive representations...."<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *Obras completas de Alejo Carpentier* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Ed, 1985), 68.

<sup>43</sup> Malena Kuss, "Cuba: A Quasi-Historical Sketch," in *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Encyclopedic Volume 2: Performing the Caribbean Experience*, Joe R. and Teresa Lozana Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture Series (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), 123.

In the 1978 introduction to *Correspondencia*, María Antonieta Henríquez writes on the political aspect of Caturla's letters and his career as a judge who often advocated on behalf of working-class Cuban people.

“These letters constitute today a true denunciation of the cruel indifference maintained by the cultural authorities of the country with respect to the work of its creators in the period before the Revolution. In addition, it clearly shows the political position assumed by him [Caturla] facing the excesses of a society who, like an actor, was tormented by frustrations for the Cuban people....”<sup>44</sup>

This political resistance was a quality that Caturla shared with Carpentier. Caturla wrote to Carpentier on September 1, 1927, to congratulate him on his release from unjust imprisonment.<sup>45</sup> One of the principal ways in which Caturla and Carpentier collaborated was through musical publications. In 1926, Carpentier founded *Música Nueva*, the first musical society of Havana, under the campaign against the popularity of nineteenth-century Italian opera. This organization helped produce music of a variety of intellectual movements including internationalism, impressionism, nationalism, and neo-primitivism. The connection between Carpentier and Chávez in Mexico opened up a door for Roldán and Caturla to connect with the *Asociación Panamericana de Compositores* in 1930. Following Carpentier's incarceration, *Música Nueva* was revived under the direction of Roldán who welcomed more Spanish and Cuban composers along with himself and

---

<sup>44</sup> *Correspondencia*, María Antonieta Henríquez. Original text: “*Estas cartas constituyen hoy una verdadera denuncia a la cruel indiferencia mantenida por los órganos culturales del país respecto a la obra de sus creadores en el período anterior a la Revolución. Muestra, además, claramente, la posición política por él asumida frente a los desmanes de una sociedad que, como aquella de la que fuera actor, estuvo transida de frustraciones para el pueblo cubano.*”

<sup>45</sup> Malena Kuss, “Cuba: A Quasi-Historical Sketch,” 21.

Caturla. Carpentier's musical journal inspired María Muñoz de Quevedo to begin to publish *Musicalia*, to which Carpentier contributed and Caturla served as chief editor. Caturla later formed his own musical review titled *Atalaya* in 1933 which focused on a rejection of classical repertoire. Another significant moment in which Carpentier influenced Caturla's musical career was in providing the introduction to Nadia Boulanger.<sup>46</sup>

This interest in Afro-Cuban culture as well as his actions as a proponent of new music made Carpentier well-suited for Caturla's *Manita en el Suelo*. As Rae states, "Carpentier was intellectually attracted to the ballet as a means of creating a total sound-visual theatrical experience for his personal manifesto of Cubanidad. In Roldán, Carpentier found the ideal composer with whom to collaborate on the realization of his objectives."<sup>47</sup> Similarly to Carpentier, Roldán was European-born. "Yet despite Carpentier's apparent enthusiasm for the form, he repeatedly declined Caturla's requests to collaborate on another Afro-Cuban ballet under the projected title *El Embó*... Carpentier may have doubted the viability of undertaking such a complex project with a composer often perceived as a metaphorical (and actual) second violin to the more successful Roldán."<sup>48</sup> Though harsh, Rae's implication that Caturla lived in Roldán's shadow pervades correspondence in which he expresses his own anxieties and attempts to

---

<sup>46</sup> Rae, "In Havana and Paris," 385.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 382.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

convince Carpentier to undertake the project. Rae goes on to state that “Even when, in 1930, he agreed to write a scenario for García Caturla’s puppet opera *La Manita en el Suelo* (Manita Underground), his fears proved well-founded: the orchestration was never completed and the work remained unperformed for forty years.”<sup>49</sup> While I agree that the writing of *La Manita en el Suelo* dragged on, it is worth taking into consideration the fact that Caturla’s life was cut short. We have no way of knowing whether the project would have been completed shortly thereafter or if Caturla’s duties as a judge would have kept him from fully realizing the work. In any case, enough of the orchestration for *La Manita en el Suelo* existed at the time of Caturla’s death for Hilario González, a Cuban composer, to fill in the gaps over a period of time in the 1970s. This was one of the scores, in addition to the original manuscript, that I consulted at the *Museo Nacional de la Música*. It was used for a performance of the work in Havana in 1979 though not in the manner originally intended by the composer.<sup>50</sup>

In an opening paragraph of her article titled “Modernismo Rumbero in Carpentier’s and Caturla’s Puppet Opera *Manita en el Suelo* (1931-1934),” Malena Kuss cites two letters from Carpentier to Caturla, the first on July 6, 1931, which promised that he would send the libretto and the second which included the libretto on August 16, 1931. I cross-referenced this citing with the correspondence that I encountered at the Museo

---

<sup>49</sup> Rae, “In Havana and Paris,” 383.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

Nacional de la Música de Habana.<sup>51</sup> Caturla responded in a letter from Remedios on July 20, 1931 stating that “And before I leave I want to tell you that I have found your project for marionets magnificent and that of course I accept it, begging that you finish it soon and send it to me to get my hands on it. I warn you that I will keep the absolute discretion on this and I beg you to keep it too. Until we have the work finished no one will know of it.”<sup>52</sup> In that same letter, Caturla mentions that he has a bit of good news, that he was working on his pieces all the time. In another letter from Habana dated September 17, 1931, Caturla profusely thanks Carpentier for a package that he had sent containing the libretto for *La Manita en el Suelo*, which had originally been referred to as *El Embó*.

The day before I left Remedios, or August 30<sup>th</sup>, I had the pleasure of receiving your letter from the 16<sup>th</sup> of the mentioned month and in a certified package, Finally! A gift!, the promised libretto for *El Embó*, converted now for Carpentier-esque flow to *Manita en el Suelo* which I found stupendous and which I decided to work on immediately. I collected all your observations that I blended in the preliminary study of the book which I am already doing. The work will not be finished before next January or February because I want it to stay ‘impeccable’ and extract from the total of the score a usable concert suite. At the earliest I will send you the ‘gift’ that I want to make for Manita’s book and if it does not go out right away it is because in these months of ‘summer’ and ‘Revolution’ my pocket has been fairly poor.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Alejandro García Caturla, *Correspondencia*, ed. Rademes Giro (Ciudad de la Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1978).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 220-221. Original text: “*Y quiero antes de salir decirte que he encontrado tu proyecto de marionetas magnífico y que desde luego Lo acepto, rogándote la termines pronto y me la envíes para meterle mano. Te advierto que guardare la más absoluta reserva en cuanto a este asunto y te ruego que tú también la guardes. Hasta que no tengamos la obra terminada no se hará saber a la gente.*”

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 230. Original text: “*El día antes de salir de Remedios para ésta, o séase el 30 de agosto, tuve el gusto de recibir tu carta del 16 del mencionado mes y en un paquete certificado, ¡al fin! y ¡albricias!, el prometido libretto de El Embó, convertido ahora por*

## CULTURES AND TRADITIONS OF CUBA

*There is no longer any doubt that Cuba is a mulatto nation, and the Cuban is, if not biologically, at least psychologically a mulatto.*

-Pedro Barreda, Black Protagonist

Caturla worked tirelessly in both his legal and musical life to improve the lives of working class people in his country, especially following the abrupt end of General Gerardo Machado's dictatorship in 1933.<sup>54</sup> Carpentier shared this goal and made significant contributions through Afro-Cuban literature. *La Manita en el Suelo* is founded in part upon Carpentier's novel *Ecue-Yamba-O* in which Carpentier explored Afro-Cuban religion, culture, and music. It was later revised and published in 1933 under the title *Lord, Praised Be Thou*.<sup>55</sup> *La Manita en el Suelo* contains elements of rumba, són, and danzón, which Malena Kuss refers to as "the symbolic trilogy of identity markers in

---

*manes carpentierescos en Manita en el Suelo que he encontrado estupendo y que me propongo <<meterle mano>> enseguida. Recojo todas tus observaciones que mezclo en el estudio preliminar del libro que estoy haciendo ya. La obra no podrá estar terminada antes de enero o febrero próximo pues quiero que quede <<impecable>> y sacar del total de la partitura una útil suite de concierto. A la mayor brevedad te remitiré el <<regalo>> que quiero hacerte por el libro de Manita y si no va enseguida se debe a que en estos meses de <<verano>> y <<revolución>> mi bolsillo ha andado bastante mal."*

<sup>54</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, xiii.

<sup>55</sup> Malena Kuss, "Essays: Modernismo Rumbero in Carpentiers and Caturla's Puppet Opera *Manita en el Suelo* (1931–1934)," *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 44/1 (2011): 137.

[Carpentier's] typically iconoclastic and powerfully modernist musical language."<sup>56</sup>

Music has played a significant role in Afro-Cuban literature. According to Pedro Barreda, author of *The Black Protagonist in the Cuban Novel*, "...it is clear that the coexistence of various races within reduced geographical limits has favored a cultural interchange and a consequent creation of syncretic forms that to date have found their best artistic expression in music."<sup>57</sup>

### ÑAÑIGUISMO AND THE ABAKUÁ

One of the most prominent influences in *La Manita en el Suelo* is the Abakuá, a secret society originating in African regions of Nigeria. This brotherhood, which bears a strong resemblance to Freemasonry in the United States, was established in Regla, Cuba, in 1836. Street dancers of the society that were also known as *diablitos* were known for their participation in *The Day of the Three Kings* and checkered outfits with tall hats. Their music featured the *ékue* friction drum which was later combined with Bantu/Congo rhythms to form rumba. Recordings of chants that are assumed to document cultural history were commercially very popular as they were viewed as rebellious and anti-colonial. The *diablitos* can be seen in Landaluze's paiting of the Epiphany in Havana. According to Carpentier in *Music in Cuba*, "The *comparsas*, more than just a marching rhythmic collective, were like an itinerant ballet. They had their 'themes.' A spider or a snake, represented by a huge figure held on high by an expert dancer, served as the focal

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>57</sup> Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness*, 1.

point for dancing and singing. The *comparsa* members would ‘kill the spider’ or ‘kill the snake.’”<sup>58</sup> This recalls the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén’s well-known 1934 poem “Sensemayá, Un canto para matar una culebra” and Silvestre Revueltas’ 1938 symphonic poem which it inspired. Both describe through words and sounds that imitate the ritual killing of a snake. This was another collaboration which was a result of a close friendship between artists that were active in political issues and transcended the boundaries of literature and music.<sup>59</sup> Drawing from the works of Nathaniel Murrell, Keith Ellis and others, Helga Zambrano discusses the phenomenon of the ritual in her article “Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of ‘Sensemayá’.” According to Zambrano, “The word *sensemayá* is a combination of *sensa* (Providence) and *Yemaya* (Afro-Cuban Goddess of the Seas and Queen Mother of Earth). The poem poeticizes an Afro-Caribbean snake dance rite conducted by the practitioners of the Palo Monte Mayombe religion.”<sup>60</sup>

*Manita en el Suelo* was based on the real Manuel Cañamazo, who Carpentier describes as a “knife-wielder” and “terror of neighborhoods outside the city limits” in his book *Music in Cuba*.<sup>61</sup> Carpentier also states that “After severing the umbilical cord of

---

<sup>58</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *La música en cuba*. (La Habana, Cuba: Letras Cubanas, 2004), 260.

<sup>59</sup> Helga Zambrano, “Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of ‘Sensemayá’” in *Ethnomusicology Review* 19 (2014): 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>61</sup> Carpentier, *La música en cuba*, 256.

the slave trade, Cuban blacks lost their contact with Africa, conserving an ever hazier memory of their ancestral traditions.... This might explain why certain arcane aspects of black music have taken so long to interest more ‘serious’ composers, more directly drawn to what they immediately heard.... There was more. Much more.”<sup>62</sup> He comments also on the role of *ñañiguismo* in Cuban society, saying that “Although the *cabildos* composed of offspring of the ‘nations’—blacks from different regions/ethnicities—endured to our times, *ñañiguismo* spread throughout Cuban society, because it had a more inclusive notion of membership. They admitted people of all races and walks of life into their ranks, as long as they observed the established rules.”<sup>63</sup> By this definition, all of the races represented in *La Manita en el Suelo* could partake in *ñañiguismo* as members, including those of Spanish descent.

#### AFRO-CUBANS AND THE SLAVE TRADE

Barreda offers a brief history of Afro-Cubans, starting with the slave trade in 1501. According to Barreda, black slaves were imported in order to replace the native workers, who could not tolerate the demands of manual labor and too often died or fled. The landowners turned to African slaves as a replacement, a theme which would later repeat with Chinese workers following the ban on slavery. Cuba’s industry shifted away from mining towards sugarcane and by the end of the sixteenth century, the population of native Cubans had fallen and the African population in Cuba had risen significantly, as

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

had the number of freed slaves.<sup>64</sup> Although freed slaves were permitted to work as manual laborers or innkeepers, their status remained inferior to that of whites.<sup>65</sup> By the seventeenth century, sugar production had become the economic powerhouse of Cuba and the black population in Cuba surged to approximately half of the total population of the island. The eighteenth century brought about a rather unfortunate change which was the lift of the ban on the resale of slaves at a higher price. This meant that slaves could be traded at will, their economic value gambled upon. Barreda states that “This fact is of great importance in the history of Cuban slavery; because of it the country took on characteristics similar ‘to the other plantation colonies of the turn of the century.’” Due to the “ease of manumission,” free blacks soon outnumbered those enslaved.<sup>66</sup> The slave revolt in Haiti actually increased the value of tropical goods such as coffee and sugar cane from Cuba. “Traditionally, efforts have been made to understate the level of cruelty of Cuban slavery, as well as to claim that the blacks passively accepted an unjust system of exploitation that denied them the status of human beings.”<sup>67</sup>

Unable to resist the pressure from England for long, the Spanish compromised by prohibiting exportation of slaves from countries north of the equator but continuing south

---

<sup>64</sup> Pedro Barreda, *The Black Protagonist in the Cuban Novel* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

of it for a limited number of years. The proposition for abolition of the slave trade occurred in 1811. England had already abolished slavery in 1808. Many whites and clergymen circulated the information among the black population. This resulted in unprecedented levels of solidarity and laid the foundation for coordinated rebellion.<sup>68</sup> The impending shortage of slave labor prompted improvements in industrialization; however, illegal slave trade continued. The ban on slavery actually created a new class of citizens, known as the emancipated blacks.<sup>69</sup> Members of this new class actually fared worse than their enslaved counterparts as their “guardians had no interest in caring for ‘something’ that was not theirs, at least from a legal point of view.” By the early nineteenth century, the majority of the slaves who entered Cuba were brought in fraudulently to the benefit of colonial authorities.<sup>70</sup> Illegal importation of slaves to Cuba gradually decreased until it finally ground to a halt in 1872 due to “The Anglo-American cooperation in the pursuit of slave ships, the crisis in the coffee industry, the mechanization of the cultivation and harvesting of sugar, and the importation of Yucatán Indians and Asiatic settlers.”<sup>71</sup> For a time, plantation owners in Cuba considered releasing ties to Spain in favor of joining the Confederate states in an effort to maintain the institution of slavery but this plan fell through after they lost to the North in the Civil War. The first war for Cuban

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 11.

independence began in 1868 and resulted in a new constitution which guaranteed equality to all citizens regardless of race or creed, a policy which was reaffirmed in later constitutions.<sup>72</sup>

#### CHINESE MIGRANT WORKERS AND *LA CHARADA*

The great development that has taken the pernicious immoral game which the Chinese with the impropriety and ridiculous name of CHARADA have introduced in our public, that which has moved me to take up the pen to call the attention of this same people which ignoring the tricks of these astute sons of the Celestial Empire value some find themselves propitious victims in the clutches of these CHINOS who with their industry exploit the naivety of our fellow citizens.<sup>73</sup>

- Ramon de Perseverancia, *Los Chinos y su charada*, "Folleto de Actualidad," 1894

After the official and (much later) unofficial end to slavery that brought untold thousands of Africans to Cuba, business owners turned to another source of cheap exploitable labor. In the early nineteenth century, freed slaves were subjected to a period of apprenticeship which forced them to continue working for an additional four to six

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>73</sup> Ramon de Perseverancia, *Los Chinos y su charada*, "Folleto de Actualidad," 1894.

Original text: "*El gran desarrollo que ha tomada el pernicioso cuanto inmoral juego que los chinos con el impropio y rídico [sic] nombre de CHARADA han introducido en nuestro pueblo, es el que me ha movido á tomar la pluma para llamar la atención de ese mismo pueblo el que ignorando las artimañas de que se valen esos astutos hijos del Celeste Imperio se entregan cuales víctimas propiciatorias en garras de esos CHINOS que con su industria esplotan la candidez de nuestros conciudadanos.*"

years while their former masters came up with a solution to the impending lack of labor.<sup>74</sup> To fill this labor gap, Chinese and East Indian laborers were imported as indentured laborers to European colonies, primarily those controlled by Spain and Great Britain, but also France.<sup>75</sup> Kathleen López, author of “Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History,” chronicles the history of Chinese migrant workers in Cuba from the early nineteenth century on. Although they were relocated all over Latin America, “the massive importations of Chinese indentured laborers to Cuba and Peru... drew the most attention and criticism, prompting decades of debate on the nature of foreign contract labor and the suitability of Asians for settlement in the New World.”<sup>76</sup>

These Chinese immigrants were called “coolies” and their experiences parallel that of Chinese workers in the United States and many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean before and after their breaks with their respective colonizing nations. Due to the huge influx of coolies and illegally imported slaves, Cuba became the number one producer of sugar cane in the world, and like many countries which relied on the importation of cheap or free labor, their population statistics began to show the impact of these new residents with African and Chinese populations surging to at least fifty percent

---

<sup>74</sup> Kathleen López, *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 16.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 17

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

of the island's total population.<sup>77</sup> This demographic shift occurred even in the face of a very high number of casualties. Chinese workers died at sea or as a result of the gruesomely inhumane conditions that they endured even after their arrival in the ports of Cuba by the thousands. Although Chinese workers were technically free, this freedom was an empty promise. Their contracts were rarely honored by those who purchased them and the "legal difference from the institution of slavery" justified and perpetuated this abhorrent treatment. The result was relationship between landowners and enslaved or semi-enslaved workers that was under constant threat of upheaval.

In *La Manita en el Suelo*, there is one character who appears once at the beginning of the opera to dupe the Captain General through the *charada* game and again at the end to usher in the happy ending through the use of Chinese magic that only he has access to due to his cultural and ethnic background. The use of actual magic rather than merely street magic or illusions speaks to the fact that Chinese Cubans had a certain cultural aura about them. Much like Roma in Europe, they faced persecution due to their rituals and superstitions which had entered the collective memory as folk magic. It is worth noting that although there is a Chinese character in the opera Caturla and Carpentier did not include Chinese as one of the three primary cultures of Cuba. There is no *Juan Chino*. Why is the Chino character relegated to a magic, comic character? Perhaps it was because Chinese immigration was the most recent and despite the influx of Chinese workers during the waves of immigration, their music and culture did not meld

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 18.

into the culture of the island as the music of the Afro-Cuban communities had. The Chinese migrant workers were the most *othered* others. “Cross-racial alliances... out of common oppression” were actively discouraged and López cites accounts of Chinese workers feeling that they were treated even worse than the African slaves that they worked beside in the fields.<sup>78</sup>

Stereotypes about Chinese Cubans began with their importation as indentured servants. According to López, “From the outset, contradictory images of Chinese circulated. Opponents of the importation of coolies believed they were physically weak and morally corrupt, while promoters perceived them as more intelligent and skilled than African slaves.”<sup>79</sup> Although Chinese workers were placed in manufacturing jobs due to their perceived cleverness and physical inferiority to African slaves, this did not stop them from being exploited as rail workers as well as copper mining and domestic labor.<sup>80</sup> Recontracting clauses made it “difficult, if not impossible, for a Chinese indentured laborer to become free on Cuban soil” and many turned to individual and group suicides as a means of collective protest. Opium, a substance used to control Chinese populations, was often used by indentured individuals as a means to end their suffering.<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 39.

In Cuba, Chinese immigrants had their own mutual aid societies known as *casa de socorros* where music and socializing often occurred.<sup>82</sup> One such society existed in Remedios, Caturla's birthplace and site for massive influx of Chinese and African laborers in the sugar factories. Chinese music was not nearly as well integrated in Cuban society as music as that of their neighbors of African descent, with complaints often citing the jarring and "inharmonious" sounds that emanated from the local Chinese theatre.<sup>83</sup> One of the most stereotypically defining aspects of Chinese communities was the *charada*, or Chinese lottery, which López says became a noticeable part of Cuban society in the late nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup> López states that "The Californian Chinese in particular became linked with vice by Cuban law enforcement, and later in folklore and historiography."<sup>85</sup> There were at least two different versions of the game, an authentic one which Lopez refers to as *chi-ffá*, which many Chinese mutual aid societies claimed was known only to Chinese, and another "semi-Creole" version "fabricated to swindle the unsuspecting."<sup>86</sup> This latter version was known as *la charada*. Although the libretto for *La Manita en el Suelo* never formally clarifies which version of the game is being played, one can easily guess that the *Chino de la charada* is playing the bootlegged

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 108

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

version in order to swindle coins from the Captain General. Either way, it is clear that *la charada* was closely associated with Chinese Cuban identity. Indeed, “an entire vocabulary developed around the symbols of the Chinese lottery as it transformed into an unofficial Cuban game played in neighborhoods across the island.”<sup>87</sup>

López mentions a pamphlet titled: *Los chinos y su charada* published by Ramón de Perseverancia.<sup>88</sup> After examining the original document further, I discovered a detailed description of *los chinos* including their customs, their character, and the numerous ways in which they have “contaminated” Cuban culture.<sup>89</sup> Perseverancia employs charged language to condemn the game. He characterizes Chinese people as “*astutos como ninguno de los otros seres que forman la humanidad*” but distinguishes educated, upper-class Chinese from those who immigrated to Cuba. He accuses Chinese Cubans of building their own banks in secret, which serve as the basis of their lottery, intentionally created to dupe the Cuban people and increase their wealth. The discourse about immigrants being the worst of a people is certainly timely and hardly unique. Unlike the African slaves who became integrated, if not properly respected or granted equality, many Chinese immigrants left the island. “Chinese participation in the independence wars and inclusion in a Cuban national narrative provided them with a

---

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ramón de Perseverancia, “Los chinos y su charada,” *Folleto de Actualidad* (Habana: 1894).

basis for citizenship in the new nation,” however, “restrictive immigration laws and anti-Chinese discourse at the outset of the Cuban republic continued to make belonging to that nation elusive.”<sup>90</sup> There was a grand exodus of Chinese residents following the revolution in Cuba in 1959 including those who had recently fled from the Chinese Revolution a decade before.<sup>91</sup> Cuban and Chinese communist groups shared a common enemy: censorship and repression by the Cuban government.

Despite Habana being one of the most prominent sites of Chinese immigration following the abolition of slavery, the China town as it exists today is nowhere near as vibrant as the China towns of San Francisco, or other places where Chinese workers and their descendants settled into permanent communities. While walking through *el Barrio Chino* in Old Havana, it was difficult to find traces of the once vibrant community, besides the welcome bridge and a few restaurants with Chinese signage. A few community organizations also remain. According to López, economic and political factors contributed to the exodus of manual laborers and small entrepreneurs. The workers who were able to stay in Cuba were predominantly in the retail and banking sectors. the *Barrio Chino* continued to grow in wealth and prestige. Many Chinese Cubans joined the revolutionary movement; however, the economic conditions under Castro’s leadership coupled with a “de-emphasis on ethnic identifications” broke up Chinese community organizations and forced many remaining Chinese residents to leave

---

<sup>90</sup> López, *Chinese Cubans*, 12.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

in waves.<sup>92</sup> According to López, just over four thousand Chinese people remain in Cuba as of 2013, a number which has most likely continued to drop since and is strikingly low considering that Cuba's total population is thought to be over eleven million.<sup>93</sup>

## CHARACTER ANALYSES

Of particular importance in the analysis of *Manita en el Suelo* is Carpentier's eclectic choice of characters, which Caturla dramatizes through his music. For the purpose of this analysis I have divided the characters into three groups—the same groupings that are specified in the *Personajes* list towards the beginning of the libretto. In the first group we have Papá Montero, Manita en el Suelo, El Capitán General de España, and El chino de la charada. Immediately following this list of characters is the instruction that “the following characters can be represented by miming actors, and doubled with singers in the orchestra.”<sup>94</sup> The placement of this instruction is misleading as it placed after a series of dashes and implies that the second grouping of characters, *Los Tres Juanes*, el Gallo Motoriongo or Enkiko, La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Candita la Loca, and Ta Cuñengue, are the ones to be doubled, even though later instructions in the

---

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 225-26.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>94</sup> Libretto, translated by autor. Original text: “*Los siguientes personajes pueden ser representados por actores mimos, y doblados con cantantes en la orquesta.*”

libretto suggest otherwise.<sup>95</sup> Of course, Papá Montero is a live actor throughout. It is the former grouping, *Manita en el Suelo*, *El Capitán General de España*, and *El chino de la charada*, that appear as “real” actors at the end of the finale. All other characters are depicted by puppets only rather than doubled by miming actors. Besides, it wouldn’t make much sense to have a live rooster on stage, nor would it be practical to construct a rooster costume. The third and final group of “characters” consists of the *personajes accesorios* which are eight civil guards and Luna 1 and 2. These are not so much characters as they are movable elements and will be discussed later in the next section which offers possibilities for stop-motion and live presentation staging.<sup>96</sup> In this section, I will present the characters one by one in order of their appearance in the action of the opera. First, I will cite descriptions from the libretto and other documents such as correspondence and photographs. Then I will offer my own interpretation of the character and justifications for their design and appearance. I sought out photos, drawings, descriptions in literature that I could find to piece together a *bricolage* of characters. For a list of character builds and reference sketches, refer to the appendix.

*La Manita en el Suelo* is narrated by Papá Montero, a *narrador cantante*, or singing narrator. In the original version, Papá Montero is said to be the only live

---

<sup>95</sup> Libretto, translated by autor. Original text: “*Los siguientes personajes pueden ser representados por actores mimos, y doblados con cantantes en la orquesta: ...*”

<sup>96</sup> Libretto, translated by autor. Original text: “*Ochos guardias civiles (muñecos de carton, en table de ruedas).*”

character.<sup>97</sup> What this really means, as I discovered later, is that he is the only character played by an actor who is not also represented by a puppet. The instructions call for the actor playing Papá Montero to sit on the stage, where he relates the narrative of the opera. At the opening of the piece, Papá Montero introduces himself in a recitative style. His speech is based on Afro-Cuban folk dialect. Later in the opera, Papá Montero blurs the boundary between his own narration and the action taking place in the little theatre by singing the sorrowful *Elegia del Enkiko*, which laments the death of the black rooster. This song is significant in more ways than one. Firstly, Papá Montero's eulogy serves as the dramatic turning point and formal center of the opera. It occurs in scene three, roughly half way through the performance. Secondly, *Elegia del Enkiko* is the only portion of the opera to have been published and performed internationally during Caturla's lifetime. Caturla sent away the score, which he dedicated to Henry Cowell, to be published as an arrangement for voice and piano.

The audience would have readily recognized Papá Montero, as he was a well-known ñañigo figure of Cuban folklore, often depicted as a *rumbero* or carouser in popular song.<sup>98</sup> Much like Manita, Papá Montero's character is generally believed to have really existed, most often described as a very old man who was present at every festival, often accompanied by beautiful women, dancing rumba in the streets. He was so beloved

---

<sup>97</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *Obras completas de Alejo Carpentier* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Ed, 1985), 242.

<sup>98</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, 174

that his funeral, a grand festival with music and dancing, lasted for days or weeks, depending on whose version of the legend you believe. Papá Montero appears in other literary and musical works of the twentieth century. For example, Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989), famed Cuban poet, former law student and social activist, wrote a poem called “Velorio de Papá Montero,” which chronicles the death of Papá Montero from a knife wound and contains imagery of a falling moon.<sup>99</sup> Eliseo Grenet, a composer of popular songs that often set Guillén’s poems to music, composed a song inspired by Papá Montero as he appeared in Guillén’s works called “Funerales de Papa Montero” which begins “*Señores*, the family of the deceased have entrusted in me to bid farewell to mourning of he who was in life Papá Montero.”<sup>100</sup> It is possible that Carpentier referenced this piece through Papá Montero greeting the audience at the beginning of *Manita en el Suelo*.<sup>101</sup> In both Guillén’s poem and Grenet’s song, the line “*izumba, canalla rumbero!*” is repeated. Those who earned the nickname *Papá Montero*, such as Adolfo Luque of baseball fame, were often known for their drinking and womanizing

---

<sup>99</sup> Nicolas Guillén, “Velorio de Papá Montero,” in *Sóngoro cosongo*, 1931. Original line from poem referencing the falling moon: “*Hoy amaneció la luna \ en el patio de mi casa; \ de filo cayó en la tierra, \ y allí se quedó clavada.*”

<sup>100</sup> “Funerales de Papa Montero” on *Cuba Son* by Quinteto Selección Latina. Original text: “*Señores, los familiares del cadáver me han confiado para que despida el duelo del que en vida fue Papá Montero.*”

<sup>101</sup> Libretto: “*Señores, señores...*”

tendencies. Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, author of *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball*, says that Luque was often compared to the “legendary Afro-Cuban rumba dancer and pimp originally from Sagua la Grande” in Cuba.<sup>102</sup> Echevarria translates the character as he appears in Grenet’s song as “Big Daddy Montero” who “won’t go to heaven” for being “a carousing bad dude.”<sup>103</sup> There is also a painting by the same name by Chilean painter Mario Carreño. Choosing Papá Montero, an already well-loved character, as the narrator for *La Manita en el Suelo* ensured that the intended audience would identify with the mischievous character and have certain expectations regarding the action of the opera. By introducing characters and elements of Cuban folklore, Carpentier and Caturla were able to blend and subvert these expectations.

Another character which might have been readily recognizable to the audience was Manita en el Suelo, a name which could be translated as “long arms” or “arms underground” and is said to have been a reference to his tall and lanky build. Manita is regarded as a powerful ñáñigo figure both real and mythical based on the real-life Manuel Cañamazo, who was killed “in a popular assault led by Abakuá members in 1871 to liberate medical students from allegedly the same Havana jail where Carpentier wrote *Ecue-Yamba-O*.”<sup>104</sup> Manita en el Suelo is the master of el Gallo Mororiongo, or Ekiko, a prized fighting rooster who is devoured by three hungry fishermen. Manita speaks in a

---

<sup>102</sup> Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pride of Havana: A History of Cuban Baseball*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 145.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>104</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, 174.

dialect that is also Afro-Cuban folk and the music which accompanies Manita is distinctly ñáñigo in nature. The ñáñigo nature of the musical accompaniment is especially prominent in the scene in which Manita goes to Candita la Loca and Ta Cuñengue to discover the identity of Enkiko's killers through a ritual involving drumming, dancing, and circling around in what Malena Kuss refers to as a Lucumí "*baile de santo*" or summoning of the saints.<sup>105</sup> In some translations, Manita knocked the moon out of the sky. The verb employed by Carpentier is *desinflar*, so it could also be read more like he deflated it with a stab wound.

Papá Montero and Manita are sharply contrasted with the Captain General of Spain, who speaks in an authoritative Spanish accent. The music of the Captain General of Spain and his civil guards was intended by Carpentier to be conservative and fugal, embodying the privilege and authority that come with his Spanish heritage and rank. When duped out of a gold coin by the Chino de la Charada, the Captain threatens to send him to the barracks. Indeed, this joking between the Captain General and el Chino de la charada symbolizes the tense relationship between Chinese immigrant communities and local law enforcement. Malena Kuss describes the role of el Chino de la Charada in the narrative of *Ecue-Yamba-O*, the novel on which Carpentier based much of his libretto for *La Manita en el Suelo*. "Carpentier summons the urban Chino de la Charada, the colorful character who roamed the streets in his mandarin suit, anticipating with cryptic riddles the lucky lottery number of the day.... Predictably, the Chino de la Charada resurfaces in

---

<sup>105</sup> Kuss, "Essays: Modernismo," 138.

our libretto, underscoring the surrealist juxtaposition of incongruous events and animistic beliefs that coexist in the popular imagination through the mediation of faith.”<sup>106</sup> In the libretto, el Chino ushers in a *deus ex machina* at the end of the drama in which he produces a new moon to replace the one that Manita destroyed in his vengeful rage.

Charles White adds that in the score, Caturla employed a pentatonic scale and rejected Carpentier’s suggested use of a Chinese trumpet. The *Chino de la charada* character puppet that I have devised is based primarily on the image of a Chinese man that appears on the guide for *la charada*, the gambling game which originated in Chinese communities but became popularized throughout Cuba. I thought it best not to think of *el Chino* as a regular Chinese Cuban but rather as an embodiment of the stereotypes that existed in the Cuban collective imagination. After all, it was this collective imagination that Caturla and Carpentier sought to channel into *La Manita en el Suelo*. One visual aspect of the Chinese character is the long braid, called a *queue*, that served as a symbol of cultural identity and symbol of allegiance to the Manchu Qing dynasty.<sup>107</sup> In a darker version of this opera, the Chino de la Charada character could be constructed to show the veneer as well as the suffering.

Malena Kuss offers the following analysis of the Gallo Motoriongo or Enkiko:

Completing our cast of characters is the omnipresent black rooster, the Gallo Motoriongo or Enkiko, which, as the animal most often sacrificed in Africa, provides the indispensable meat for the ritual meals of the *ñáñigos*. For Carpentier ‘to bring together on one stage all the characters from popular mythology for the first time in Cuba,’ he needed a nexus, an artifice that arbitrarily could link

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>107</sup> López, *Chinese Cubans*, 24.

traditions of distant ethnic origins. This role is assigned to the black rooster, who takes on a life of his own, sings, protests, demands reparation when cooked by the three fishermen caught hungry at sea...and appears in situations that tradition would not have foreseen.<sup>108</sup>

Charles White regards Enkiko as the real protagonist, due to his essential role in “bringing together for the first time in Cuba all of the characters from popular mythology.”<sup>109</sup> I would tend to agree with White’s assessment, although I would add that Enkiko also symbolizes the folly of pride. He struts about proudly referring to himself as a King in Guinea. Enkiko continues to assert his status as a sacred animal while the three fishermen are forcing him into the pot to cook him. The downfall of Enkiko occurs as a result of the greed of three fishermen, Juan Indio, Juan Odio, and Juan Esclavo. Each of these fishermen represent a race of Cuba: Indian, Spanish, and African respectively. For their music, Carpentier suggested a “rural and Creole element.”<sup>110</sup> While they mend their nets next to their overturned fishing boat, the three Juanes sing *guajira* music, referred to as *décimas populares* in the dialect of the *campesinos*. Following Manita discovering their identities through the *baile santo* and subsequently cursing them, the three Juanes find themselves caught in a vicious storm in the fourth scene of the opera. According to White, Carpentier suggested that Caturla compose music that suggested a “conventional and burlesque tempest with distant allusions to the Ride of the Valkyries.”<sup>111</sup> Character

---

<sup>108</sup> Kuss, “Essays: Modernismo,” 137-8.

<sup>109</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, 175.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

design for the Juanes was relatively straight-forward. I used three armatures of identical height. Their clothing is simple shirt and pants. The only distinguishing feature is their skin tone and facial characteristics.

Another iconic figure which was already widely familiar with the Cuban population was the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. This figure is regarded as the island's patron, and according to Kuss, simultaneously represents the European Virgin Mary, Atabex Mother of the Waters of native Indian lore, and Ochún of the orishas, an African water goddess.<sup>112</sup> The Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre is also "real" in that there is a doll enshrined in a chapel that is said to have been the original version found by the three fishermen in the legend. According to Kuss, this legendary event occurred as early as 1604 and would have been well established for centuries.<sup>113</sup> Paintings of the Virgen de la Caridad coming to the aid of three fishermen are widely available. These paintings, as well as photos of the relic itself, often appear alongside depictions of Ochún. In *La Manita en el Suelo*, los tres Juanes are worthy of her help because they carried a relic with them on their journey. Even though they had sinned by killing Manita's prized rooster, La Virgen de la Caridad, who also invokes Ochún, saw fit to deliver them from the storm, an act of mercy which only further enraged Manita.

---

<sup>112</sup> Kuss, "Essays: Modernismo," 138.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

## ANALYSIS OF CARPENTIER'S LIBRETTO

The difference between the collage of *Manita* and that of the surrealists is in the sense of political and social of the Carpentierian attack. The work of Carpentier does not possess the ironic gesture and near cynicism of the surrealists, nor the way in which they observe reality and culture.<sup>114</sup>

- Andy Arencibia Concepción, 2016

On the title page of the libretto, *La Manita en el Suelo* is described as an *Ópera bufa, en un acto y cinco escenas*. The main action of the opera is preceded by two documents; the first, immediately following the title page, is a *Nota* which provides context and expresses the intent of the composer and librettist in creating this work. Their goal was to “present on a stage, for the first time in Cuba, all the characters of popular creole myth.”<sup>115</sup> In the libretto, Carpentier states that the text of the opera contains fragments of *oraciones, cimas guajiras, and poemas baratos*.<sup>116</sup> He goes on to say that they referenced *la cadencia de refranes populares, locuciones típicas, canciones y sones* for the general rhythm of the language used throughout the piece, which were influenced by local dialects. The next small paragraph is a description of the requirements of the staging. One of the aspects that defines the puppet opera genre is the use of a small stage

---

<sup>114</sup> Andy Arencibia Concepción, *En un segundo de fulgurante revelación: Alejo Carpentier y Alejandro García Caturla en los cruces híbridos del nacionalismo y la vanguardia*, (La Habana: Ediciones Alarcos, 2016). Translated by autor. Original text: “La diferencia entre el collage de *Manita* y el de los surrealistas está en el sentido de político y social del acometido carpenteriano. La obra de Carpentier no posee el gesto irónico y hasta cínico de los surealistas, ni el modo con que estos observaban la realidad y la cultura.”

<sup>115</sup> Libretto, Museo nacional, trans. by author.

<sup>116</sup> Libretto.

with its own small curtain referred to in the text as *el pequeño teatro*. This small stage is to be situated in the middle of the larger stage. According to the *Nota*, the little stage must be designed in such a way that it be able to, “in an uninterrupted action,” facilitate a certain number of changes in scene and decoration. As far as decorations go, much is left to the interpretation of the decorator. The only specified aspect is that “everything that occurs on the little stage should be enveloped in an atmosphere of *oraciones*, tobacco box labels, images of Santería and magic altars.”<sup>117</sup> Later I will offer more thoughts on these *decoraciones*. The *Nota* concludes with an affirmation that *Manita en el Suelo* really did exist in *the middle of the last century* [emphasis added] and that all of the characters in the opera were borrowed from songs, stories, and afro-cuban rituals. The closing statement is a mention of *la charada china*... the game of riddles that the Chino de la Charada uses to dupe the Capitán General and bring about the opera’s surprise happy ending. He concludes by stating that the *charada* game continues to entertain even in the author’s life in the early twentieth century.<sup>118</sup>

The next page, *Disposicion de la escena*, describes the layout of the stage in greater detail. As I mentioned before, *La Manita en el Suelo* takes place on two stages, one large standard stage and another smaller one designed for puppets situated in the middle. According to this description, the curtain of the main stage is supposed to “rise right at the beginning of the action (maybe before the orchestra begins)” and will be

---

<sup>117</sup> Libretto.

<sup>118</sup> Libretto. Original text: “*esa se sigue jugando en la Habana, con el procedimiento de las adivinanzas, desde hace mas de un siglo!...*”

“adorned with balsa tree leaves, little paper flags, etc. as Cuban houses are decorated for festival days.”<sup>119</sup> The main stage will be decorated with “a background of vegetation, or of the environment of a small village, to the taste of the decorator.”<sup>120</sup> The small theatre, whose curtain bears the lithograph of a well-known tobacco box such as “Fonseca, Romeo y Julieta, etc. *de muchos colorines*. [emphasis added]”<sup>121</sup> is supposed to give the impression of a hut with a balsa ceiling. The action which transpires there is an illustration of the story narrated by Papá Montero who narrates from a platform to the side of the little theatre. Overall the decorations and scenery are meant to create a “general atmosphere of a tent theatre.”<sup>122</sup> Up next is a page which lists the *personajes*, or characters in the opera. I will discuss the characters in greater detail in a later section.

In the first scene, Papá Montero begins by addressing the audience and introducing Manita en el Suelo. In situating the opera during the time when *los trapiches eran de caballo* and *cuando los barcos eran de rueda*, the narrator confirms that the action takes place in the mid to late nineteenth century, a time when horse-powered mills and steam ships were in use. The little curtain rises to a scene in which El Capitán and the Chino de la Charada are meeting with Manita in the hallway of a *bodega colonial*, specifically in the *Bodega del Cangrejo de los Curros del Manglar*. A *bodega*, a term

---

<sup>119</sup> Libretto, *Disposición de la escena*, trans. by autor.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Disposición

<sup>122</sup> Disposición

which merits clarification, is “a kind of neighborhood general store that sold dry goods, food, and household supplies and in which patrons could also gather socially and drink.”<sup>123</sup> On the wall is a *dibujo ñáñigo—firma del Juego—adorna un testero*. A paper sack hangs from a ceiling rafter. The Capitán general and the chino de la charada are there at the right and left of Manita. Who are the *curros* of Manglar? Drawing from Ortiz, David H. Brown sheds some light on *curros* in his book “Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion.” Brown states that:

According to nineteenth-century accounts, the *negros curros* were loud, outrageously dressed men and women who hung out at local *bodegas* in the *barrios* Jesús María, Carraguao, and, especially, the low-lying, swampy Manglar by the shore of the bay. The *curros* were known for their flamboyant clothes and accessories, their outré hairstyle (*mancaperros*, which today we call dreadlocks), and their incomprehensible—to whites—pronunciation of the Spanish language. The men were known particularly for their filed teeth, drooping straw hats, flared linen shirts with high cuffs, stripped bellbottom trousers, lowcut canvas shoes with gold buckles, and gold earrings. The women were known for their silk shawls, masses of gold jewelry, and loud wooden clogs (*chancletas*). The *curros* dramatically marked their early-nineteenth century urban identity through dress, language, and the assertive occupation of public space.<sup>124</sup>

Brown says that “the *curros* exemplifies the *mala vida* and its associated varieties of *delincuencia* during the first half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>125</sup> This means that the bodega in which El Capitán General de España, El Chino de la Charada and Manita en el Suelo meet in the first scene was a boisterous and loudly decorated place. These

---

<sup>123</sup> David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 256.

<sup>124</sup> Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 33.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

particular *curros* were immortalized in other works. *Los Curros del Manglar* is the name of a piece by Ernesto Lecuona. Manglar is also the name of a street less than three blocks from the Conservatorio Amadeo Roldán.

These three characters claim their respective races in turn. Manita leads with “The blacks are mine,” followed by the Capitán, “The whites are mine,” and finally, the Chino de la charada, “The chinos are mine.” Manita goes on to announce that it is “*El día de Reyes*” and that the dead will eat. The Capitán responds, “And you will return to your home country.”<sup>126</sup> Manita, unfazed, continues with “*Bailando, bailando, a coger aguinaldo.*” Suddenly, el Chino interjects a riddle: “*Animá chiquito que camina por lo tejao!...*” which translates to “Little animal that walks on the roof.” The Capitán ventures a guess. “*Gato!...*” or cat; however, his guess is incorrect. El Chino lowers the paper sack and pulls from it a cardboard figure in the shape of an elephant, the animal that supposedly corresponds to the riddle. “It is heavily implied that the Capitán is betting on the outcome of the riddle and does not take his loss well. He furiously unsheathes his sabre and threatens to send el Chino to the barracks if does not cease with his riddles. El Chino relents and gives him an enormous piece of gold for having correctly solved the riddle, exclaiming, “Long live Spain! You’ve won, Capitán!” The Capitán is quite pleased with this recent development, now that the situation has turned in his favor. He takes the gold piece while chanting, “For the glory of the Metropolis, harmony between

---

<sup>126</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Y vendréis al hogar de la madre patria...*”

men!” What follows next from the three characters is a declaration of their sources of wealth. El Chino says, while lifting up the cardboard elephant, “Me with my anima’,” listing fish, cockles, peacocks, and other animals that appear on the *charada*. The Capitán follows with “I with my banner, the money of the slave traders, and the Motoriongo rooster!” Here we have the grand entrance of the opera’s protagonist, el Gallo Motoriongo, also referred to as Enkiko. The wall with the ñáñigo drawing opens like a cupboard and out of the opening which is surrounded with paper flowers and brilliance of the altar, an enormous black rooster steps out. The rooster has golden eyes and a halo of silver-plated paper behind the head. His status as a magical creature is immediately recognizable due to his stature and the supernatural light that fills the small stage.<sup>127</sup>

Manita, the rooster’s master, speaks proudly of his prized beast, “*Gallo Motoriongo*, your blood irrigated the palm trees, when the wisemen of Guinea, brought the Judge of Guinea *Gallo Motoriongo, malayo congo!...*”<sup>128</sup> At this point the music is supposed to accelerate to a *tiempo vivo, de arrolao*. Next the three fishermen chime in repeating the chant, “*Gallo Motoriongo, Malayo Congo.*” Manita continues to praise the rooster, each line alternating with the chant of the fisherman. The praises, which appear again later in the opera, are as follows “*Juego Santo, Juego Santo!...* You were born there in Guinea, Your feathers for the *diablito!* Your meat for the dead! Your feet for magic! Your eyes for

---

<sup>127</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: *Se abre, como un armario, el testero que ostenta el dibujo ñáñigo. Rodeado de flores de papel y luces de altar, aparece un enorme gallo negro, con ojos dorados y un nimbo de papel plateado detrás de la cabeza. Una luz sobrenatural invade el pequeño escenario.*”

<sup>128</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: *Gallo Motoriongo, tu sangre regó la palma, cuando los sabios de Guinea, trajeron el Juego de Guinea, Gallo Motoriongo, malayo congo!...*”

medicine!”<sup>129</sup> The three fisherman conclude their chant with an extended version, “*Gallo motoriongo, malayo congo. santo animá. échate a cantá!...*” The first scene concludes with the rooster singing three times while the characters raise their arms to the sky after which the curtain of the little theatre lowers.

The second scene opens with Papá Montero’s narration, “Manita became great, All the Powers of the barrio were his. The Capitán gave him bonuses, the Chino gave him insects, Candita la Loca and Maria la O gave him clothes, they gave him everything, until one day...”<sup>130</sup> This remark implies that Manita had a lot of power in the neighborhood thanks to his lucky rooster. Of course, all of that was about to change when three familiar faces acted out of greed and took the source of Manita’s power and happiness away. The little curtain rises after Papá Montero’s finishes his recitative. The staging of this scene is landscapes of mangroves and swamps at the base of the port of Havana. Juan Odio, Juan Indo, and Juan Esclavo are there sitting in an overturned boat, sewing their fishing net with profound dissatisfaction.<sup>131</sup> After a long and disappointing day of fishing, they find a way to cope by taking turns singing a few popular songs, referred to as *décimas*

---

<sup>129</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Juego Santo, Juego Santo!...Naciste allá en Guinea. Tus plumas pal diablito!... Tu carne pa los muertos!... Tus patas pa brujería!... Tus ojos pa medicina!...*” In this case, *pa* or *pal* can be read as a shortened form of *para* or *para el*.

<sup>130</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Manita se hizo grande, Todas las Potencias del barrio eran suyas. El Capitán le daba aguinaldo, el chino le daba los bichos, Candita la Loca y Maria la O le daban la ropa, le daban de to, hasta que un día...*” Another case of words being shortened for the sake of dialect. In this case, *to* can be read as a shortened form of *todo*.

<sup>131</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Se alza el pequeño telon. Paisajes de manglares de fondo del puerto de la Habana. Juan Odio, Juan Indio, Juan Esclavo, sentados en una barca volcada, cosen una red con profundo desconsuelo.*”

*populares* for their ten-line stanza form. Juan Indio begins with the following tune, “Don’t rise up here mahogany trees, / cedars, ceiba/kapoks nor palms, but extend the search the flowers of Green ovules / Here I harmonize my verses / here I sing to you, my own good; / I hear from the sea the fluctuation / when the breeze sings it to sleep / the cawing of the cranes / and the babbling of the gnat.”<sup>132</sup> The repeated mention of trees in this popular song could be a reference to Afro-Cuban religious practices and attitudes towards the sacred nature of the trees. As Zambrano states, “The [Palo Monte Mayombe] religion operates in concordance with nature, and it places strong emphasis on the individual’s relationship to ancestral and nature spirits and its practitioners... *Palo* and *monte* are creole-Cuban creations that have a distinct connection to the religious import of trees for the Bakongo people.”<sup>133</sup>

Juan Odio follows with a brief line, “Sing, sing, he who does not trust el Chino de la charada.”<sup>134</sup> which indicates a shared lack of faith in the *chino* character. The next *décima* is uttered by Juan Esclavo and goes as follows, “They ordered in the circle, / twenty-five angels / and many other cherubs, / that will make an entire troop / and that brings its banner / without showing cowardice; / that all this company; / encourages my heart, / and will have resignation / to walk night and day.”<sup>135</sup> At the conclusión of Juan

---

<sup>132</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*No se alzan aquí caobas, cedros, ceibas ni palmeras, pero se extienden rastreras las flores de verdes ovas. Aquí entono yo mis trovas, aquí te canto, mi bien; oigo del mar el vaivén cuando el céfiro lo arrulla, el graznido de la grulla, y el murmullo del jején.*”

<sup>133</sup> Zambrano, “Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of ‘Sensemayá’,” 4.

<sup>134</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Canta, canta, que no por eso fia, el chino de la charada.*”

<sup>135</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Manden en la esfera, veinticinco serafines y otros tantos querubines, que harán una tropa entera. Y que traigan su*

Esclavo's *décima*, Juan Odio drops to the ground and laments, claiming that he will fish no more.<sup>136</sup> In this excerpt, the *s* appears to have been dropped from the word *más*, leaving only a stylized, shortened version of the word. It can easily be assumed that this, along with many such incidences in the text, were carefully chosen in order to give the impression of a local Cuban dialect. Juan Indio and Juan Esclavo then beg to God be free from their miserable situation by exclaiming "Free us, *señor*, of this misery, as you liberated Jonas from the belly of the whale."<sup>137</sup> Juan Odio continues the theme with one final complaint, "I throw myself to the ground and I work no more; I throw myself in the ground and hope that they come to kill me!"<sup>138</sup>

At this point, Juan Indio and Juan Esclavo look to their right and discover a *milagro* or miracle, in the form of Enkiko, the Gallo of Motoriongo, strutting about alone and vulnerable.<sup>139</sup> Enkiko's entrance is preceded by Juan Odio exclaiming, "*Habra rocío de gallo!...*" It is evident that the three fishermen intend to eat Manita's rooster. I doubt they were referring to the classic cocktail of coffee and rum in a literal sense though one could speculate that this might have been an intentional reference. The rooster enters from the right side of the stage, where he is promptly trapped by the Juanes in their idle

---

*bandera, sin demostrar cobardía; que toda esta compañía; anime mi corazón, y tendre resignación de andar noche y día."*

<sup>136</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: "*Yo no pesco má, o que pesque el Santo, o que pesquen las mujeres con su canto y llanto."*

<sup>137</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: "*Libranos, señor, de esta miseria, como liberaste a Jonas del cuerpo de la ballena."*

<sup>138</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: "*--- me tiro en el suelo y no trabajo ma[sic]; me tiro en el suelo y que me vengan a matá!...*"

<sup>139</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: "*Entra por la derecha el gallo Motoriongo, andando pemente. Los tres Juanes empunan la red de pesca y atrapen al santo animal."*

fishing net. Of course, Enkiko is not pleased and angrily protests. His argument against his capture point to his belief in himself as a sacred animal. Enkiko reiterates the many aspects of Afro-cuban folklore that he embodies, as previously articulated by his master. He also makes a direct reference to the *diablitos* of ñañigo fame. This is another instance in which the final consonant of the word *animal* has been dropped for stylistic purposes. The fishermen proceed to chant out the ways in which they plan to put *el gallo a la olla!* (the rooster to the pot). They intend to use a coal fire on the shore using guava leaves and lime juice.<sup>140</sup> Meanwhile Enkiko continues to protest. Enkiko must have deeply internalized his master's praise from the first scene, because he continues to cite it in full, reminding the fisherman that in Guinea he is king. He even refers to them as *criminales* as he suffers his final fate, but the fishermen are unrelenting in their chant of "*A la olla el gallo, el gallo a la olla!...*" With Enkiko's demise, the curtain of the little theatre is lowered and the scene ends.

Now comes the iconic scene in which Papá Montero enters the action to lament the death of Enkiko the rooster. He enters drying his tears and singing "Motoriongo has died, poor Motoriongo! How heavy are the pastures of Cuba without the song of a rooster! Four drums of black goat with a face of mourning and a neck of crepe. They cry for Motoriongo, tapping, and the tap and the tap of sobbing."<sup>141</sup> This excerpt from the

---

<sup>140</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: "Horno en tierra, fuego de carbón, hojas de guayaba, zumo de limón!..."

<sup>141</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: "*Motoriongo se murió, pobre Morotiongo!... Como medir ya los campos de Cuba sin al cantío de un gallo!... Cuatro tambores de chivo negro, con cara de luto y cuello de crespon, lloran a Motoriongo, en toque, y toque, y toque de llanto.*"

opera was the only portion to ever have been published. It was published separately as an arrangement for voice and piano under the title *Elegía al Enkiko*. As Papá Montero finishes his mournful tune, the curtain of the little theatre is drawn back to reveal the interior of a house owned by the witch Tata Cuñengue. In the room we find an altar with images of *Santa Bárbara*, the *Jimaguas*, and *San Lazaro*. In the center, Candita la Loca sits on a stool surrounded by black men and women. Manita en el Suelo is there, presumably having requested a “consultation” to identify the criminals who slaughtered his prized rooster, and he awaits the results of her reading. Candita chants in a dialect, “*Tiri bayiri, tiri naná. Tiri bayiri, tiri naná,*” then raises the question “Who killed him, who killed him? Manita is evidently convinced that this consultation shall prove fruitful saying that they already know and soon the dead one will speak. Tata takes up a different chant, “Tear with tear, tomb with tomb, with tomb and tear the dead lays himself down.”<sup>142</sup> Everyone chants “*Oleli!... Oleli!...*” Candita shouts “*Santo!...Santo! Que baje el santo!...*” There is an abrupt silence followed by the formation of a circle of black men and women who start to move in a circle around Candita. They continue the *Olelo, olela* chant interrupted only by a list of the divine entities which transmit the much sought-after answer to their question. This list includes Jesu Cristo, Obatala, Santa Bárbara, San Lazaro, El justo juez, and el Anima sola.

Suddenly Candita lets out a loud scream, falling to the ground moving her arms and legs. The circle breaks, Manita leans in to inquire yet again, and everyone in

---

<sup>142</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Llanto con llanto, tumba con tumba, con tumba y llanto el muerto se tumba.*”

attendance pauses to hear the words “*En boca de la loca!...*” or, “In the mouth of the crazy one.” Candita finally speaks, saying that “You cannot know it, you cannot know it.”<sup>143</sup> Candita’s answer comes as a series of clues which gradually reveal the identity of Enkiko’s killers. The first clue is as follows: “*Bote y caracó, odio y pescado...*” This means a small boat and a seashell, which also translated as a winkle, snail, or conch, hate (also a reference to one of the Juanes) and fish. The second clue: “*Odio y pescado, Esclavo y caraco. Indio lo mató*” translates to Hate (or Juan Odio) and fish, A slave (Juan Esclavo) and a seashell, an Indian (Juan Indio) killed him. Candita weaves the names of the killers into her clues but saves the most crucial piece of information, the name *Juan* which unites all three fishermen, for last. Once everyone understands the name *Los tres Juanes*, Manita is understandably furious and howls a series of curses. With this statement, Manita curses the fisherman hoping that the sea will swallow them and that lightning smite them.<sup>144</sup> This curse foreshadows the next scene in which the three fishermen atone for their sins, though not in the way that Manita would have wanted. The scene concludes with everyone marching in a *guerrerra* style to the chant, “*Masongo abasongo ericondó!... Enkiko Motoriongo eridondó!...*” a linguistic blend of Spanish and African dialect.

The curtain of the little theatre falls and there is sudden darkness on the larger stage accompanied by lightning and thunder. Papá Montero lights up a *trabuco*, or rather

---

<sup>143</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Tu no pue sabel, tu no pue sabel...*” which can be read as *Tu no puedes saberlo*, again with certain letters missing for stylistic measure.

<sup>144</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Camanihá!...La sangre les bebo y el corazón les parto!... El mar los trague, el rayo los queme!... Caminaba!...*”

large-sized cigar, and continues with the narration: “The three Juanes fished in the middle of the Carribean, when when the horses of Chango were let loose with the thunder. The waves were going, the waves were coming, and the three Juanes, how they were submerged! This was how the curse for the hungry fishermen armed the tremendous hurricane of the year 1800!”<sup>145</sup> Papá Montero references a specific storm, which occurred in 1800. The staging directions for this scene are quite curious and merit deconstruction.<sup>146</sup> The curtain of the little theatre is supposed to rise to reveal the three fishermen in their boat being tossed about on top of a green blanket held at each corner by a *diablito* who shakes it. Every now and again the audience catches a glimpse of the ghostly Gallo Motoriongo looking down from the heavens on the scene below with reproach. The voice of Manita re-iterating his curse on the Juanes can be heard away from the stage.

Here we observe a scene in which characters besides Papá Montero are permitted to exist as real human actors. Manita barges onto the main stage, observes the storm occurring in the little theatre with his back to the audience, issuing the same curse to the fisherman as usual, punctuated by lightning and thunder. Papá Montero sings another popular song, which describes the legendary appearance of the Virgen de la Caridad: “The

---

<sup>145</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Los tres Juanes pescaban en medio del Caribe, cuando los caballos de Chango se soltaron con el trueno. Las olas iban, las olas venían, y los tres Juanes, que se hundían!... Así fue como la maldición a pescadores hambrientos armo el tremendo ciclón del año mil ochocientos!...*”

<sup>146</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*se alza al pequeño telón. Sobre una manta verde, agitada en las esquinas, se encuentra la barba de los tres Juanes. Cada estremidad de la manta, es sostenida por un diablito que la sacude. De vez en cuando, asoma la cabeza sobre la tempestad el Gallo Motoriongo.*”

three Juanes navigated by the sea, and then came a and a rainstorm came and they were drowning and as they were devotees of the Virgen of the Caridad, and they carried her in a relic, when they saw themselves lost, they called for her, and she appeared before them in the canoe.”<sup>147</sup> La Virgen de la Caridad appears in the back of the little stage carried by three cherubs with the child in her arms as she appears in images. The *diablitos* cease their tossing of the blanket and stand there petrified. The three Juanes prostrate themselves before her, the sea becomes calm and all is covered in moonlight.

La Virgen de la Caridad sings her song: “Know, dear sons, that I am Queen and Mother of God Almighty, and those that believe in my great power, and are my devotees, will be free of bad things. Rabid dogs will not bite them, scorpion nor vermin. Nor will they have visions of the dead or of ghosts.”<sup>148</sup> The three fishermen respond in a chorus, “All the walkers, and mariners, by the sea and roads go without fear, as it values itself to carry at the chest the beloved virgin. They are big the mysteries of this relic and we all say that to be a little group so that hell shivers and the people shiver that it has inside!”<sup>149</sup> Manita remains vengeful, drawing a knife from his belt and singing the following menacing

---

<sup>147</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Los tres Juanes navegaban por el mar, y vino una tormenta de agua, y se estaban ahogando, y como eran devotos de la Virgen de la Caridad, y la llevaban en una reliquia, cuando se vieron perdidos, llamaron por ella, y se les apareció en la canoa.*”

<sup>148</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Sabed, queridos hijos, que soy la Reina y Madre de Dios Todopoderoso, y los que crean en mi gran poder, y sean devotos míos, ostarán libres de cosa mala. No los morderá perro con rabia, alacrán ni alimaña, ni tendrán visiones de muertos ni fantasmas!...*”

<sup>149</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Todos los caminantes y marineros, por el mar y caminos andan sin miedo, como se valgan de llevar al pecho la virgen amada. Son grandes los misterios de esta reliquia, y digamos todos que sea bandita, para que tiemble el infierno y tiemble la gente, que dentro tiene!...*”

threat, “I do not shiver nor do I fear. The hell and the prison, for which the men themselves became! If the Juanes come ashore, four candles I give them and beneath the moon, to the knifewound I go!”<sup>150</sup> On the big stage, the moon lowers towards Manita who proceeds to stab it causing it to deflate and fall to the floor. The whole stage is plunged into darkness and the curtain of the little theatre falls for a final time.

The finale of the opera takes place on the larger stage with miming actor. The Capitán General of Spain enters with an enormous *cocuyo* in his hand, which emits a green light. Eight civil guards of cardboard follow him all lined up facing the audience and mounted in a tabletop of circles, like rustic puppets. These civil guards sing as a chorus with the instruction *letra de Acuña* and lament everything that they have lost as a result of the fall of the moon. “Goodbye for the final time, masters of my loves, the light of my darkness, the essence of my flowers; my poet’s lyre, my youth, Goodbye!”<sup>151</sup> The Captain General agrees: “To live without a moon! To live without serenades! The dark swallows will never return to my balcony to build their nests!”<sup>152</sup> Manita, on the other hand, is ashamed but stubborn, claiming that the moon was evil and that many have gone mad by talking to it without wearing a hat. Suddenly the Chino de la Charada reappears, having been absent from the drama ever since the first scene. He takes out an enormous

---

<sup>150</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Ni tiemblo ni temo. El infierno y la cárcel, pa los hombres se hicieron! Si los Juanes vienen a tierra, cuatro velas les doy, y si baja la luna, a puñalada voy!...*”

<sup>151</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Adios por ultima vez, amos de mis amores; la luz de mis tinieblas, la esencia de mis flores; mi lira de poeta, mi juventud, Adios!...*”

<sup>152</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Vivir sin luna! Vivir sin serenatas! Ya no volveron obscuras golondrinas, de mi balcón sus nidos a colgar!*”

white paper sack and presents another riddle for everyone to solve: “Round animal, that goes out at night in the lagoon!”<sup>153</sup> Everyone shouts at once *Sapo!* (toad). El Chino tears open the white sac to reveal an enormous moon which floods the scene with light as it ascends to the top of the stage to replace the one that Manita knocked out of the sky. El Chino loudly announces the true answer, “LUNA!” and reminds the Capitán General that he owes him yet another ounce of gold. Manita gets angry all over again, exclaiming, “As it goes down again, I return to kill it!”<sup>154</sup> However, Papá Montero comes forward to reassure the audience that this *ñáñigo* never killed the moon again after his initial attempt. The opera ends with a general toast to the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, her image, her three Juanes, and her sacred song. Manita delivers the final line, “And while the world is the world, the *ñáñigos* of Regla live!”<sup>155</sup> The large curtain drops to signal the end of *La Manita en el Suelo*.

## PERFORMANCE POSSIBILITIES AND CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES

Caturla’s musical setting of Carpentier’s libretto is as eclectic and synchronistic as the staging and cast of characters. In addition to the music written for the five scenes, there are two additional sections: a lively overture which precedes Papá Montero’s opening recitative and a mournful interlude following the death of Enkiko that precedes

---

<sup>153</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Animá redondo, que sale de noche en la laguna!...*”

<sup>154</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Como vuelva a bajar, la vuelvo a matar!...*”

<sup>155</sup> Libretto, translated by author. Original text: “*Y mientras el mundo sea mundo, vivan los ñáñigos de Regla!...*”

the *Elegía al Enkiko*. Although Caturla's orchestration follows Carpentier's libretto, there are a few differences between the text as it appears in the libretto and the score, besides simple repeats of phrases, but they do not significantly alter the meaning or intention of the original text. In chapter seventeen of Charles White's biography, White includes a table of the orchestration for the voices in *La Manita en el Suelo*. The male-heavy cast means that most of the voices are tenor or lower, the only exceptions being Virgin of Caridad del Cobre, Candita la Loca and Ta Cuñengue. In listening to one of the very few existing recordings of the opera and comparing it to the score, Caturla's nationalist style comes to light. The claves that accompany Papá Montero's narration are a signifier of a "strong nationalist spirit," and their rhythm is supposed to evoke the *cinquillo*. Malena Kuss states that "this central motif also plays a generative role in Caturla's "Motivos de danzas" from his *Tres danzas cubanas* (1928)."<sup>156</sup> A much more complete analysis of the score can be found in Silke Meier's German edition of «*Manita en el suelo*» von *Alejandro García Caturla und Alejo Carpentier*. Malena Kuss and Charles White have also conducted thorough score analyses so I will not include one here. The focus of my analysis is the staging of the opera and its characters.

*Manita en el Suelo* was performed by the Ballet Nacional de Cuba in the 1970s.<sup>157</sup> Photos from this performance appear in the appendix to Silke Meier's book on the opera,

---

<sup>156</sup> Kuss, "Essays: Modernismo," 139.

<sup>157</sup> Miguel Cabrera, *El ballet en Cuba: nacimiento de una escuela en el siglo XX* (Buenos Aires, Balletin Dance Ediciones, 2011).

and although this performance seems to have adhered to many of the staging and character instructions laid out by its creators, it was not staged as a puppet opera. Instead, the characters were all portrayed by live dancers. Recordings of *Manita en el Suelo* are rare; however, there are a few in circulation. A compact disc was made by the *Orquesta y Solistas del Gran Teatro de La Habana* under the direction of Gonzalo Romeu.<sup>158</sup> There is also a vinyl record of *Manita en el Suelo* performed by the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional y Coro Nacional under the direction of Rembert Engüe.<sup>159</sup> As I mentioned in the introduction, I was enchanted by the idea of staging a puppet opera from the moment that I first read about *Manita en el Suelo* in White's biography of Caturla. My contribution is to create an adaptation of the work rather than a literal reading. If I were to follow certain instructions too literally, my character and scene designs would be far less complex. The reason for the extrapolation is to better fit the demands of stop-motion animation, a format which is well known for its vivid colors and exaggerated character design. Of course, one cannot think of stop-motion without crediting some of its masters. I drew most of my inspiration from stop-motion directors who favor especially exaggerated character design, often featuring tall puppets with limbs almost impossibly

---

<sup>158</sup> Orquesta y Solistas del Gran Teatro de La Habana (1ª obra) -- Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo, *Manita en el Suelo*, directed by Gonzalo Romeu (2002; la Habana) Compact Disc.

<sup>159</sup> Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional y Coro Nacional, *Manita en el Suelo*, directed by Rembert Engüe (Year unknown; la Habana: Egrem), vinyl LP.

thin and others that are short and stout. Carpentier wrote the following in regards to character construction for the purposes of live performance:

The puppets can be made with a cardboard tube and some rags... A group of friends can be in charge of the action in a small theatre... The costumes are elemental; the only difficult one (the Captain General can be made with colored paper and with some great mustaches... And there is no backdrop, which is always difficult to obtain, since no painter would decide to put out twenty square yards of decoration.<sup>160</sup>

If I were following the intent of the authors too strictly then everything I have done above and beyond “cardboard tube and some rags” would be unnecessary. I chose to add much more detail than those specified by Carpentier in my character creation. The armature (the puppet “skeleton” which forms the basic shape beneath the clay and allows for movement) of the characters are made from ModiBot customizable figures. These armatures are inexpensive and easy to cover with modelling clay. With a larger budget, these could be replaced with professional-grade fully customized metal armatures covered with molding or carved foam, which could make for a cast of puppets that cost hundreds of dollars each.

The stage that I created for this purpose is *el pequeño teatro* and *el gran teatro* all in one. Initially it has red ruched curtains and white molding to resemble the curtain and façade of *el Gran Teatro de la Habana: Alicia Alonso*. The puppet depicting Papá Montero walks out onto a black stage with the background of leaves, as suggested in Carpentier’s libretto. In the center stands a miniature stage resembling a hut, as

---

<sup>160</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, 173, quoted from Henriquez, *Correspondencia*.

Carpentier also specifies. For perspective, the stage (a modified shelving unit) is thirty inches wide and fifteen inches tall. The miniature version keeps the same proportions but stands at only six inches wide and three inches tall. When the scene is set to change, the curtains and molding can be removed to reveal balsa-siding which matches the miniature stage. As such, the large stage transforms into the small one and the action can occur on a larger scale. On the interior of the stage there are LED lighting strips mounted to the ceiling which function very similarly to stage lights on the life-size version. The lights can be set manually but can also be controlled via smartphone. This allows for a virtually limitless range of lighting possibilities, including controlled dimming and hue choice. The curtain is mounted on a removable dowel rod. In order to draw back the curtain, simply turn the crank which pulls two cables attached to each curtain at the center, threaded through the fabric and around a pulley. This same crank can be reversed to push the curtain closed again. The entire stage is mounted onto a twelve-inch turntable (or “lazy Susan”), a feature which is crucial to seamless scene changes. To change a scene, first close the curtain via the pulley system. Lower the black curtain on the back of the stage to cover the “guts.” Then turn the stage on the turntable so that the back of the stage is now facing the audience. Remove the fancy ruched upper part of the curtain (Switching out the main curtain is also an option provided that the rigging will allow it) and the cardboard molding. Place the balsa wood shell (which simulates *el pequeño teatro*) on top of the stage. Turn the stage back around so that the front is facing the audience again. While the audience is distracted by this change, lift the black curtain on the back of the stage and pull out the scene, which is constructed from black foam poster board and

measured to fit snugly inside the main stage. Replace it with the new scene and draw the curtain back to begin telling the next section of the story.

An advantage of this automated system and relative ease of scene changes is that this allows for *La Manita en el Suelo* and other puppet operas to be performed as an educational story-telling show especially for small children. One of the ways that I have already shared the joy of this work is through the Gluck Fellows Program of the Arts, an arts outreach program at the University of California, Riverside. As a Gluck fellow, I created two five-week music programs for five kindergarten classrooms at Towngate Elementary. The first, “Cadence and Bolero: A Musical Journey Through Space,” introduced students to basic musical concepts guided by an illustrated story book that features two space adventurers who travel to new planets to discover different soundscapes. I then developed a second program based on Alejandro García Caturla’s Afro-Cuban puppet opera *La Manita en el Suelo*, which drew heavily from my early thesis research. This program included workshops with real and homemade Afro-Cuban musical instruments and focused on the ways in which music affects the mood and drama of a performance. Both programs featured an emphasis on working together and demonstrate the viability of an inter-disciplinary and cooperative approach to elementary arts education. The staging and characters that I have created for this thesis project facilitate “live” performance in a version that emphasizes story-telling over the full musical experience. Please refer to the appendix for a sample program plan and link to a video of me, the meta-narrator, demonstrating the scene changes. The puppets, of course, will wear out with extended use, as will the scenes and other parts. For this reason, it

would be best to complete animation before utilizing the stage for this purpose; however, I did my best to design all components of the project with this in mind, keeping the cost and time involved in part replacement and repair is relatively low.

In the *bodega* of the first scene, I had to think very carefully about the furniture and supplies. If the shelves of the bodega are to be full then it is important to avoid include anachronistic items. I decided to add a dimension of time by painting the backdrop of this first scene in a sunny afternoon. In the film version, it would be possible to animate background characters such as patrons and musicians to give the impression of a busy bar. For a presentation, it would be sufficient to give the impression of a busy, well-used space through details such as overturned chairs, cups and dishes on tables, disturbed clothes and worn floors. In this first scene, the Capitán nearly loses a bet to el Chino de la Charada, who raises a paper elephant from his bag. This paper elephant can either be held by the puppet himself or lifted above the characters with a set of rigging that will be discussed in greater detail later. At the back of the *bodega* there must be a cabinet-like opening from which the Enkiko rooster makes his entrance. There should be a corridor in the space behind the cabinet doors that goes through the wall of the bodega, the space between the bodega wall and the background wall at the back of the scene. This space should be accessible from the back of the stage. This would allow the rooster to stand there as the doors open slowly and the magical light enters the room. A window on either side that shows the backdrop would add to the surprise and add an even stronger illusion of depth.

The second scene, in which the three Juanes and Enkiko clash on the coast takes place in the swampy region outside of the port of Havana. I designed the backdrop of the scene to look like an old vintage postcard or colorized photograph of the port of Havana. There is a mountaing made from plaster cloth with cardboard houses and buildings along its coast. These houses have a tiny light inside of them. Much like the stars which will appear in later scenes, they can be manually controlled via a battery-powered switch located under the mountain and accessible from the back of the stage. The foreground consists of a raised plaster platform with balsa wood decking on one side to resemble a dock and a grouping of mangrove trees which I fashioned out of pipe cleaners. One advantage of pipe cleaners is that the wire can be poked through the poster board walls of the scene giving the impression that the roots are growing through the water and into the soil. I decided that the scene should take place in the early evening, just as the sky is getting a little orange at the horizon. This sets up the remaining scenes so that they occur at night when the moon is at its brightest, making its fall all the more dramatic. If the action of the opera does indeed take place in the mid-1800s, that means that items such as buildings, advertisements, clothing, and modes of transportation (including ships in the harbor) must adhere to this time period. I decided to paint in the Morro Castle which was built in 1589 and depict it as it might have looked in the late nineteenth century.

I designed the third scene, in which the consultation occurs in the interior of the witch Tata Cuñengue's house, in a similar fashion to the *bodega*, with a dollhouse-like room placed inside the constructed scene. This means that some of the exterior of the house is visible as is the sky with bold purple and orange hues, the last remnants of the

setting sun. Some stars appear in the sky. These stars are another set of LED lights which are set in holes through the back wall of the set. The altar dominates the scene; its height is greatly exaggerated and may give the appearance of nearly toppling over, its many colorful objects overwhelming the senses. Candita la Loca sits on her stool beneath it slightly to one side, with Manita on the other. Approximately eight puppets representing the black men and women stand by looking toward the center of the room. There needs to be enough room around Candita's stool for the puppets to move around her and Manita when the ritual begins. There must also be enough room for the circle to break and for Candita to flail about on the floor while Manita looks on. An alternative to individually animating the background men and women of this scene is to place them on a circular railing, similar to the civil guards that appear in the finale.

The fourth scene consists of the hurricane that traps the three Juanes at sea after Manita curses them. The setting for this scene is midnight when the moon is out and the sky is at its darkest. Until the arrival of la Virgen de la Caridad enters, the only light source is the stars, the occasional lightning bolt, and later the moon. This was a tricky scene to design due to the fact that part of the terror of it is that the scene itself is every bit as dynamic as the puppet characters on it. Carpentier opted to simulate the storm by placing the three Juanes on a green blanket which is tossed around by four *diablitos* at each corner. Enkiko the rooster has to appear in a ghostly fashion and, to make it even more complicated, the entire scene is supposed to occur on the small stage while Manita appears on the large stage as a miming actor. This poses a problem for the stage builds that I discussed earlier in which the large stage switches facades in order to give the

appearance of switching to the smaller stage. My solution to this problem is to create a miniature scene of the tempest within the miniature stage, the one which appears when Papá Montero delivers his narration. This can either be done with a physical recreation, which would be needed for live presentation, or through a green screen during the animation process. This would allow the entire tempest action of the fourth scene to be filmed separately then edited into scene in which Manita barges in (as a puppet rather than a miming actor), sees what is happening on the little stage, and stabs the moon. Even though moonlight fills the space with the appearance of la Virgen de la Caridad (indicating her holy status) the moon itself would have to appear only on the large stage. The moon is supposed to move toward Manita before he strikes it, so ideally the moon needs to be attached to hidden rigging that pushes it from the back of the stage towards the front. This same rigging could be re-used later for the *deus ex machina*. Even better, the moon could be a three-dimensional orb. When punctured, it could crumble or deflate; an effect which would be more suitable for stop-motion than live presentation. An alternative for live presentation mode would be to have the flat moon attached to a magnet so that it can be easily knocked off of its rigging. The lightning bolts can easily be simulated by quickly increasing the brightness of the LED lights on the ceiling of the stage.

The fifth and final scene, the finale, is also set to occur on the big stage. Once the fourth scene has ended, the curtain on the little theatre lowers for a final time. The Captain General of Spain enters with an enormous *concuvo* in his hand, which emits a Green light. Cocuyo is a province near Havana and also a type of tree; however, a

*concuvo cubano* is a type of beetle, specifically a rather large “click” beetle with two glowing spots on the side of its head. In this sense, the glowing green object that the Capitán is carrying could mean either one large *cocuyo* beetle or a lantern full of them, much like a jar full of fireflies which appears in popular stories in North America. The eight civil guards that accompany the Captain are supposed to be *de carton*, meaning made from cardboard. These simplistic, two-dimensional characters are all supposed to move as a unit lined up with their faces to the audience, *montados en una table de ruedas, como juguetes rústicos*. A “table with wheels” could anachronistically be interpreted as a skateboard but more realistically means a wheeled platform in the style of antique toys. Perhaps their legs and arms move together via a simple mechanism in the wheeled platform, giving a more realistic appearance of a march. Either way, this could be achieved through a relatively simple device, similar to antique *funnidoo* toys that bob as they roll, that could stand alone from the stage itself. The last component of this scene to be reckoned with is the *deus ex machina* brought on by el Chino de la Charada. The rigging previously mentioned can be used again to make the moon rise but it does not account for pulling the moon out of the bag. If the moon has been deflated for the purpose of stop-motion animation, then it can be re-inflated as it is drawn from the bag. This would allow for the moon to be much larger than the bag itself and more easily concealed, thereby making the ending that much grander. In a live presentation setting, the bag containing the moon could be held by the presenter, extracted by hand, then placed on to the magnetic rigging allowing to rise on the stage itself.

## CONCLUSION

*“In the poem, the snake is portrayed not only as the snake on earth to be killed, but as the sacred Infinite represented by the Snake itself—a spiritual entity with which the mayombero or Palo infuses the snake. The killing of the snake, a sacred creature, symbolizes renewal, fertility, growth, and wisdom... The snake acquires a status of symbolizing imperialism and the need for definitive liberation.”<sup>161</sup>*

-Zambrano, on Nicolás Guillén’s poem *Sensemayá*

In the *Nota* section of the libretto, signed and written in 1931, Caturla and Carpentier call for decorations that demonstrated a clear sense of the amalgamation of cultures that they wished to convey including “an atmosphere of prayers, cigar box labels, images of *santería*, and altars for witchcraft.”<sup>162</sup> A major inspiration for my depictions were the paintings of Víctor Patricio de Landaluze, a nineteenth-century Spanish painter who lived and worked in Cuba for much of his career. These *costumbrista* paintings, which David Brown cites frequently in his book, depict the lives and *costumbres* (customs) of the Cuban people.<sup>163</sup> Alejandro García Caturla was successful in his goal of “transcending the barriers of Eurocentric influence,” as mentioned by White. He accomplished this in *La Manita en el Suelo* by collaborating with Alejo Carpentier to create a syncretic imagined world that paralleled the traditions

---

<sup>161</sup> Zambrano, “Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of ‘Sensemayá,’”4.

<sup>162</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *Obras completas de Alejo Carpentier* (México: Siglo Veintiuno Ed, 1985), 241.

<sup>163</sup> Marta Garsd, "Victor Patricio de Landaluze," in *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture* 3, 381.

of a people who were undoubtedly influenced by Eurocentric ideas but were not permitted to express their syncretic music and beliefs on the concert stage on their own terms.<sup>164</sup> Caturla and Carpentier undoubtedly shared a similar political goal with Revueltas, Guillén, and many other artists and intellectuals in Cuba and abroad during the early twentieth century. Through the writing of *La Manita en el Suelo*, Carpentier and Caturla made a collaborative effort to “kill the snake” of repression and silencing of Afro-Cuban people and their music.

The purpose of staging *La Manita en el Suelo* in this manner is to not only immortalize the opera buffa through film but to use modern technology to link the older genre of puppet opera with stop-motion animation creating a vibrant new medium to stage classical works. For example, another puppet opera for which one could apply similar techniques is Manuel de Falla’s 1923 puppet opera *El retablo de Maese Pedro*. The two works share a similar narration style in which the narrator, in the case of Falla’s work Trujamán, enters the main action later in the opera; therefore, many of the staging techniques presented in this study could be used for that opera as well. Unlike Falla’s *El retablo de Maese Pedro*, Caturla’s *Manita en el Suelo* has received relatively little critical attention from scholars. One reason for this lack of attention is that the score itself is unpublished and difficult to access even for music scholars. By presenting *La Manita en el Suelo* through stop-motion animation and educational presentations allows for Caturla and Carpentier’s work to be shared over and over again.

---

<sup>164</sup> White, *Alejandro García Caturla*, xii.

## Bibliography

### Scores

- Carpentier, Alejo. "Manita en el Suelo, opera buffa in one act and five scenes, with music by Alejandro García Caturla." Preface to the typewritten libretto (1931). Manuscript. Museo Nacional de la Música, Havana, Cuba.
- Caturla, Alejandro. *Manita en el suelo*. Unpublished manuscript. Museo Nacional de la Música. Havana.
- Caturla, Alejandro, Hilario González, and Carmelina Muñoz. Reconstructed score. Museo Nacional de la Música, Havana.
- Caturla, Alejandro. *Elegia del enkiko*. Canciones para voz y piano. Score. La Habana, Cuba: Ediciones del Departamento de Música de la Biblioteca Nacional "José Martí," 1960.

### Audio

- Orquesta y Solistas del Gran Teatro de La Habana (1ª obra) -- Conjunto Instrumental Nuestro Tiempo, *Manita en el Suelo*, directed by Gonzalo Romeu (2002; la Habana) Compact Disc.
- Orquesta Sinfonica Nacional y Coro Nacional, *Manita en el Suelo*, directed by Rembert Engüe (Year unknown; la Habana: Egrem), Vinyl Record.

### Books

- Barreda, Pedro. *The Black Protagonist in the Cuban Novel*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979.
- Brown, David H. *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Carpentier, Alejo. *Ecue-yamba-ó; Novela Afro-cubana*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Xanandú, 1968.
- Carpentier, Alejo. *Obras Completas De Alejo Carpentier: Ecue-yamba-ó ; La Rebambaramba ; Cinco Poemas Afrocubanos ; Historia De Lunas ; Manita En El Suelo ; El Milagro De Anaquillé ; Correspondencia Con García Caturla*. México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983.
- Caturla, Alejandro García, and María Antonieta. Henríquez. *Correspondencia*. Ciudad de La Habana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1978.

Kuss, Malena. *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Encyclopedic History*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

López, Kathleen. *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History*. University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Moore, Robin D. *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

White, Charles W. *Alejandro García Caturla: A Cuban Composer in the Twentieth Century*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003.

Young, Elliott. *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era through World War II*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Meier, Silke. *Manita en el suelo von Alejandro García Caturla und Alejo Carpentier*. Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften Perspektiven der Opernforschung.

### Articles

Aurelio de la Vega. "Roldán, Amadeo." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Web. 15 Jun. 2017

Carpentier, Alejo, and José Piedra. 1980. "Tale of Moons". *Latin American Literary Review* 8 (16). *Latin American Literary Review*: 63–86.

Carpentier, Alejo. *Ecue-yamba-ó; Novela Afro-cubana*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Xanandú, 1968.

Carpentier, Alejo. *Obras Completas De Alejo Carpentier: Ecue-yamba-ó ; La Rebambaramba ; Cinco Poemas Afro-cubanos ; Historia De Lunas ; Manita En El Suelo ; El Milagro De Anaquillé ; Correspondencia Con García Caturla*. México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1983.

Carreira, Xoan M.. 1989. *Revista De Musicología* 12 (1). Sociedad Española de Musicología (SEDEM): 303–5.

Echevarría, Roberto González. 1980. Review of *The Black Protagonist in the Cuban Novel*. *Journal of Spanish Studies: Twentieth Century* 8 (1/2). Society of Spanish & Spanish-American Studies: 181–84.

- Kuss, Malena. 2011. "Essays: Modernismo Rumbero in Carpentier's and Caturla's Puppet Opera *Manita en el Suelo* (1931–1934)". *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas*, 44:1, 136-142, DOI: 10.1080/08905762.2011.564877
- Kuss, Malena. 1993. "The «Invention» of America: Encounter Settings on The Latin American Lyric Stage." *Revista de Musicología* 16/1, 185–204.
- Kuss, Malena. "Western Thought from a Transcultural Perspective: Decolonizing Latin America." *Enciclopedia della musica: L'unità della musica*, 5 vols., edited by Jean-Jacques Nattiez. Italian edition (Torino: Einaudi, 2005), vol. 5, 32–62; French edition (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007), vol. 5, 68–102.
- Rae, Caroline. 2008. "In Havana and Paris: The Musical Activities of Alejo Carpentier." *Music & Letters* 89/3, 373–95.
- Stevens-Arroyo, Anthony M. 2002. "The Contribution of Catholic Orthodoxy to Caribbean Syncretism: The Case of La Virgen De La Caridad Del Cobre in Cuba." *Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions* 47/117. EHESS: 37–58.
- Zambrano, Helga. 2014. "Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of "Sensemayá"." *Ethnomusicology Review* 19. Accessed August 17, 2017.

### **Other**

- Guillén, Nicolas, "Velorio de Papá Montero," in *Sóngoro cosongo*, 1931.
- Perseverancia, Ramón de, "Los chinos y su charada," in *Folleto de Actualidad*. Habana, Cuba: 1894.