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ROSARIO FERRÉ AND HER WRITING QUEST: A HOMAGE

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Streszczenie:

Rosario Ferré zmarła 18 lutego 2016 roku w San Juan w Portoryko pozostawiwszy po sobie spuściznę powieściową oraz eseje krytyczne dotyczące procesu twórczego pisarza, a także pism Sor Juany Inés de la Cruz, Felisberto Hernández i Julio Cortáza. W dzień po śmierci Ferré, świat literatury poniósł kolejną stratę żegnając zmarłych dwoje znakomych pisarzy, nagrodzoną nagrodą Pulitzera Harper Lee, autorkę słynnej powieści *Zabić drozda* (1960) oraz Umberto Eco, autora uznawanej za arcydzieło powieści *Imię Róży* (1980).

Słowa kluczowe: Portoryko, Rodrigo Ferré, literatura.

Abstract:

Rosario Ferré died on February 18, 2016 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, leaving behind a valuable fictional production and influential critical essays about her own creative writing process as well as on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Felisberto Hernández, and Julio Cortázar. One day later after the writer's death, the world of literature lost also two of its most celebrated novelists, Harper Lee, the Pulitzer award winner and author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, (1960) and Umberto Eco, author of *The Name of the Rose* (1980).

Keywords: Puerto Rico, Rodrigo Ferré, literature.

Rosario Ferré died on February 18, 2016 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, leaving behind a valuable fictional production and influential critical essays about her own creative writing process as well as on Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Felisberto Hernández, and Julio Cortázar. The same day of her death, the world of literature lost also two of its most celebrated novelists, Harper Lee, the Pulitzer award winner and author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, (1960) and Umberto Eco, author of *The Name of the Rose* (1980).

Since the beginning of her career Ferré was cherished because of her intense reflections on Puerto Rican culture, her portrayal of women, the use of sexualized language, and her determination to expose injustices through her work of criticism, narratives and poems. She published several books in Spanish and in English, among them *Sitio a Eros: Trece ensayos literarios*, *Papeles de Pandora*, *Maldito amor*, *The Youngest Doll*, and *The House of the Lagoon*.

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Rosario Ferré came from a wealthy and well-known Puerto Rican family that was prominent in both business and politics. Her father, Luis A. Ferré was the governor of the Island from 1969 to 1973 and her aunt, Sister Isolina Ferré, because of her humanitarian work in Puerto Rico, New York City, and the Appalachia area, received many honors and awards, among them the Albert Schweitzer Prize for Humanitarianism (1989). All these circumstances influenced Ferré's relationship with her own father, and inspired some of the conflicting points presented in her narratives. She rejected the statehood of Puerto Rico defended by her father, and later embraced it, and she often exposed some of the trivialities of the Puerto Rican affluent class, genders relations and women's lack of freedom to express themselves within own circle. When her mother, Lorenza Ramírez de Arellano, died in 1970 her father was still governor, and Rosario fulfilled the duties of First Lady until 1972.

Ferré received her primary education in Ponce, Puerto Rico, and in 1951 traveled to the United States to study in Manhattanville College, where she obtained a degree in French and English. She returned to the Island, married Benigno Trigo González, and had three children with him. The marriage was not perfect, and she became divorced ten years later. After that, she enrolled and received her master degree at the University of Puerto Rico and then returned to USA to work on her Ph.D. at Maryland University. The title of her thesis was *La filiación romántica de los cuentos de Julio Cortázar* (1987).

She began writing professionally at age fourteen, and her articles appeared in Puerto Rican newspaper *El Nuevo Día*. She also was the recipient of the first prize in a short story contest of the *Ateneo Puertorriqueño* in 1974, and two years later, the publication of *Papeles de Pandora* (1976), a collection of short stories launched her literary career.

A prolific writer, critic, poet, essayist, Ferré's valuable reflections about her heuristic process, as woman and Caribbean writer, exemplify that she not only recognized the work of other writers, but also developed her deep sense of belonging to the Island. She offers readers insightful interpretations about the "ups and down" of Puerto Rican wealthiest families in 1898 and 1952, after being confronted with the ramifications of the "new paradise" established by the Americanization of the Island. Her experiences in living inside and outside Puerto Rico helped her to define the way she viewed both historical events and reflected in the way in which she pinned down her subjects in her poems and narratives. Her feelings of how women have been subjected to authoritarian attitudes by fathers, husbands, school authorities, church, historians or biographers can be found in most of her work.

She was part of the 70's generation, whose members fought against authorities' indifference, workers oppression, the Vietnam War, and exclusion of women from

political and socio-cultural forums. She belongs to a generation that fell under the spell of Castro Revolution and the hippies, a generation that wanted changes. A generation, that understood, that as intellectuals, they needed to make space in their work to reflect and reveal the consequences of having to live in a world in which social hierarchies deprived women, afro-descendants, children and LGBT groups of their voices.

The literary work of Rosario Ferré, similar to that of the writer Jamaica Kincaid, whose novels are semi-autobiographical, is inspired by her own life experiences and family events. She followed the steps of José Luis González in *El país de cuatro pisos*; René Marqués in *El puertorriqueño dócil*, and Juan Pedro Soto in *Usmail*, among other writers whose work prioritize their feelings toward Puerto Rico's Americanization, peasant migration to the cities, and the influx of thousands of US marines to Vieques. Their narratives are accompanied by cultural, racial, and political conflicts that these events brought to the Island using both, strong black figures and Puerto Rico's imaginary.

Ferré also understood the role played by literary journals since the publications of *Azucena* (1870), the first literary magazine published in Puerto Rico, followed by *Revista Puerto Riqueña* (1878) and *Revista Puertorriqueña* (1887), which allowed intellectuals to write about their concerns on social and cultural issues of that time. Those journals opened their spaces not only to Puerto Rican writers such as Lola Rodríguez de Tió and Salvador Brau, but also to well-known Latin American and Spanish writers, among others to Rubén Darío, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, and Emilia Pardo Bazán. These magazines were seen as openings for writers who otherwise would have had limited opportunities to see their work published. For that reason, Ferré, who as student and a woman wanted to express her concerns on international policies, social justice and Puerto Rico's independence, enthusiastically accepted Dr. Angel Rama's invitation to become part of the literary journal *Zona de Carga y Descarga* (1972-1975).

Under Rama's guidance, not only unknown authors from the Island were able to publish their work, but rapidly the journal also became a public forum for students to voice their socio-political concerns. The journal welcomed many famous writers and intellectuals from Latin America and Puerto Rico. As Ferré did, these authors wrote on topics such as control of the lands by US banks, and emphasized the impact of colonialism, and the influence of the United States in Latin American and Caribbean political and economic matters. They wrote as well about the industrialization on the Island and the severity of having thousands of people unemployed in the cities, due to the depopulation of the rural areas mainly because of credit restric-

tions to sugar mill's owners and in consequence the sugar industry stopped being the biggest source of jobs in the Island.

Ferré also found satisfaction in being part of movements that were debating topics about homophobia, sexism, and the independence of Puerto Rico; subjects that were present in Ferré's literary production and critical articles over and over through the years. These subjects are the main points in her novel *Maldito amor*, her short narratives *El regalo*, *La caja de cristal*, *Isolda en el espejo*, *De tu lado al paraíso*, *Maquinolandera*, as well as in the critical essays published in her book *Sitio a Eros*. She described her feelings about this period of her life by writing, "Deseaba vivir, experimentar el conocimiento, el arte, la aventura, el peligro, todo de primera mano y sin esperar a que me lo contaran" (Ferré, 2017).

Ferré challenged the image of Puerto Rico as a "paradise" by exposing violence against women, social disadvantages, racial discrimination, poverty, power abuses, and emigration. From the very beginning Ferré shaped her work as a scrutiny of the life of women in patriarchal societies and her writings have been part of the critical interpretation of the silenced voices of women inside and outside Puerto Rico.

As Ferré confessed numerous times, she was an admirer of the work of Virginia Wolf, and Simone de Beauvoir, and tried to follow their advices by avowing feminine modes of writing, before recognizing that, she, as many Caribbean writers have done, could find her source of inspiration there, in her own town, in Ponce events and in the life of Puerto Rico people. Her desire to learn allowed her to write on Puerto Rican women financial struggle, racial discrimination and cultural alienation. Her craving for learning enabled her to shape her women characters with lot of sensitivity, accompanying their acts with intense details about how women have managed their lives under authoritarian scrutiny.

Ferré regarded Caribbean culture collectively and in her work, she embraced the same spirit of rupture that women writers have carried out to create their work outside marital relationships, fighting against racism, prejudice and bring to the readers their cultural and historical reflections about Caribbean's struggles to survive. Ferré, having learned how she really felt as a writer, and having seen women experiences within her own family, made her put aside the advices of Virginia Wolf and Simone de Beauvoir, and do everything possible to write from the experiences gained in her country, within her school years, her own culture and the reality of being a woman growing up and living within a patriarchal system. She wrote:

Quisiera hablar ahora de esa voluntad constructiva y destructiva, en relación a mi obra. El día que me senté por fin frente a mi maquinilla... [m]e había divorciado y había sufrido muchas vicisitudes a causa del amor o de lo que entonces había creído que era el amor: el renunciamiento a mi propio espacio intelectual y espiritual en aras de la relación el amado.

(...) Me encontraba convencida de que el Paraíso era de los hombres y el Infierno de los malos (...) pero que en el Limbo sólo había mujeres y niños, que ni siquiera sabíamos cómo habíamos llegado hasta allí (Ferré, 2017).

In the same essay, we read one of Ferré's most compelling comments about herself being a Puerto Rican writer, and her efforts to conform to the advice given by other famous women writers without interiorizing her own experiences and those obtained by women in her family, and those living in her country. She expressed: "Virginia Woolf y Simone de Beauvoir eran para mí en aquellos tiempos algo así como mis evangelistas de cabecera; quería que ellas me enseñaran a escribir bien, o a lo menos a no escribir mal (...)" (Ferré, 2017).

She describes her experience of converting into words her intense feelings regarding the Island, and the broken image of her own marriage.

Hoy sé por experiencia que de nada vale escribir proponiéndose de antemano construir realidades exteriores, tratar sobre temas universales y objetivos, si uno no construye primero su realidad interior; de nada vale intentar escribir en un estilo neutro, armonioso, distante, si uno no tiene primero el valor de destruir su realidad interior. Al escribir sobre sus personajes, un escritor escribe siempre sobre sí mismo, o sobre posibles vertientes de sí mismo, ya que, como a todo ser humano, ninguna virtud o pecado le es ajeno (Ferré, 2017).

Ferre's narrative plots on women experiences and their daily struggles resonate in nearly all of them. Her characters remind us other, presented in classical ballets or children literature; through their voices we hear multigenerational contemporary voices. In rewriting the classic Charles Perrault's tale of "Sleeping Beauty," Ferré depicts some of the ways in which women could be estranged by her own family when they try to break with traditional class values. In the story, following family tradition, María de los Ángeles, a wealthy woman and the main character of Ferre's tale, married Felisberto who also belongs to the same upper class of hers. She has been a ballerina and in one of her anonymous letters to her own husband, she described how she found exciting that, she, a ballerina, was at the same time the wife of a financial magnate. She also dreams to be as Carmen Merengue, a circus artist, who symbolizes the freedom that María de los Ángeles wishes for herself. She got married because Felisberto, her future husband, has promised her that he would allow her to continue to be a ballerina. However, when they got married, he broke his promise, and he wanted to have a child. She explained to him that a pregnancy will probably end her dreams of being a ballerina, but despite her objections, she got pregnant. After several anonymous letters to Felisberto she hired a man, staged an affair with him, and when her husband arrives with a gun to the hotel, emerges a dispute between both men and at the end, María de los Ángeles and Felisberto are killed.

The ending of this "sleeping beauty" could be interpreted as a bildungsroman episode. María de los Ángeles is conscious that the "evil witch Maleficent" was not

only her own family and her husband, who believed that she should adjust to traditional values, but also a system that did not allow her to be what she wanted to be. María de los Ángeles wanted to feel free, as Carmen Merengue seems to be, and feel at peace with herself.

Ferré understood the influence of children literature on gender role and her narrative plots about women experiences recounted in *Papeles de Pandora* resonances through her other stories. Her children characters and titles remind us titles and characters from classical children books. We became witnesses of children's efforts in trying to be good, silent, and submissive; eager to adjust to the colonial or postcolonial mother and grand mothers' behaviors; their memories embodied in the contemporary ones.

In *Amalia*, which is also the name of the main character, a girl who was born through incest between her mother and her brother, due to an undisclosed sickness, has been condemned to live in isolation, and not allowed to go and sunny herself in the patio. Without any children's company, the little girl adopted a doll, naming her also Amalia, in order to understand who she is, and what was happening between his uncle, mother and women servants. Through her conversation with her doll, she understood that "Amalia, the doll" will be also another sexual victim in the hands of uncle and his friends. Seeing herself without any possibility of escape, she decided to expose herself to the sun and die to avoid having the same destiny of her mother.

Cuando el fuego se fue apagando me quedé mirando cómo el sol rebotaba de las paredes. Lentamente caminé hasta el centro del patio. Entonces me senté en él y cogí a Amalia entre los brazos y la comencé a acunar. Te acuné mucho rato, tratando de protegerte con mi cuerpo mientras te ibas derritiendo. Después te acosté a mi lado y poco a poco fui abriendo los brazos sobre el cemento que late y estiré con mucho cuidado las piernas para que no se me ensuciara la falda blanca y las medias blancas y los zapatos blancos y ahora vuelvo la cara hacia arriba y me sonrío porque ahora voy a saber lo que pasa, ahora sí que voy a saber cómo es (Ferré, 2000: 77).

Ferré's construction of Amalia, the little girl, differs from other women characters portrayed in *Papeles de Pandora*. Even though that women's death is a frequent act committed by women characters in her collection, and death has been one of the literary topics that women authors have embraced to allow their female characters to escape from rape, stigmatization, and humiliations. Here the story is altered. We have a little girl that has learned from her mother experiences and from her companies, the "other doll-prostitutes." She on her own, understood that there will be no Fairy Godmother, neither a Tinker Bell, nor a Wood Cutter to save them from her uncle's predatory behavior. She is able to recognize her situation, the meaning of pursuing her own liberation, to act, to taste her freedom, and this is the reason that she "smiles" at the end of the story. Her knowledge about who is the one to be blamed and her refuse to be another victim, her decision to be excluded from her uncle's paradise fills

her with peace and rejoicing: “Y me sonrío porque voy a saber lo que pasa, ahora sí que voy a saber cómo es” (Ferré, 2000: 77).

Since her first publication, *Papeles de Pandora*, Ferré presented us short stories and poems that show how their women characters tried to liberate themselves from cultural and oppressive verbal speeches and socio-economic situations that trapped them for centuries. In *Isolda en el espejo*, she presents us with others compelling images that emphasize the fierce of *machismo* and racism in women’s world. Similar as in other compositions, we see the false conceptualization of Puerto Rico as a paradisiacal place for tourists or for those who consider the country only as part of their financial point for their businesses.

In this story, Adriana, who is abandoned by his boyfriend Gabriel, sees herself sexually harassed by Don Augusto, her old boyfriend's father, a powerful man who is losing money due to his external debts. He sees her and her beauty as the best way to save himself and his fortune from North American bankers. Adriana, on her part, accepts his sexual advances, because she wants to obtain a scholarship in order to attend music school but lacks the money. The day of the wedding, the wealthy friends of Adriana and Don Augusto and the North American bankers get together, and the celebration serves to show the class division and racial tensions that took place in Puerto Rico after 1898. More, the wedding ceremony is happening in 1972, a year that makes reference to the year when the Decolonization Committee urged the General Assembly of the United Nations to recognize the Island's right to self-determination and independence, a political position that Ferré was embracing for many years.

En aquella noche de mayo de 1972 se reunirían en un mismo lugar norteamericanos y criollos, los nuevos potentados de la industria y los hacendados de la caña, comerían, bailarían, brindarían con champán y ron bajo el techo todopoderoso de don Juan Augusto Arzuaga (Ferré, 1992b: 113).

Ferré shows the wedding guests immersed in a world that has been shaped by colonialism and political status. The wedding celebration gave criollos the occasion to see themselves and the Island with pride but also with apprehension about their loss of identity and freedom.

Desde aquel lugar (...) se divisaban dos panoramas: por detrás del monte de piedra caliza; erizado de una vegetación siempre agreste de tintillos y de tamarindos espinosos, se multiplicaban las casuchas de tablonos y techo de zinc (pintadas por el municipio (...) de verde esperanza, de Amarillo canario, de rojo cundeamor, para que pareciesen palomares y cautivasen a los turistas.

Junto a los escombros de los edificios coloniales, (...) se levantaban los restos desafiantes de la Antigua ciudad, el esqueleto monumental, ya casi desvanecido en polvo, de la Perla del Sur (Ferré, 1992b: 114, 115).

Ferré was a thoughtful critic able to present the ambitions of wealthy Puerto Ricans, the perception of themselves, and capable to describe their feelings by inserting their voices in the language of her multiple characters. These voices are most of the times immersed in specific events, traditions, circumstances, that marked or changed the nature of their relationship toward each other or toward the Island. Here, in the same story, we read:

Se observaba (...) un constante ir y venir de gentes inquietas, de hombres y mujeres con paquetes de ropa bajo el brazo, los uniformes que seguramente vestirían aquella noche en casa de Don Augusto antes de comenzar a servir las mesas o a lavar los platos, a pasar las bandejas de psicolabis por entre los invitados, o a ayudar a los cocineros como pinches de cocina (Ferré, 1992b: 114).

Ferré, as a writer who frequently portrayed women struggle under patriarchal dominance, found herself sometimes criticized because of her sexualized language in portraying some of her women characters, particularly Isabel la Negra and Isabel Luberza in her short story *Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres*, one of Ferré's most reviewed of her short stories by critics, because of the way that she handled the relationship between race, class and gender. The story shows some aspects of the behavior of those who belong to the dominant sectors of society, and doing that Ferré wasn't afraid in using obscene vocabulary and sexualized language.

Ferré was scrutinized because she belonged to the Puerto Rican upper class and both characters cut deeper into Ponce's image and Ferré's social class as well. For some of her critics, she took upon herself to be a kind of instructor on sex, because she seized the opportunity to break with the social and linguistic censorship, and established rules how a respectful woman should talk and conduct herself as an "upper class lady." She employed vulgar and colloquial expressions in naming and describing Isabel La Negra, who she was, and what she was doing for living.

In the narration, Ferré gives us the priceless image of an old oxymoron by referring to a famous and legendary prostitute from Ferré's town, and plays with the real names that were known to the owner and madam of a brothel in Puerto Rico. The story argument reveals the fragility of Isabel Luberza and shows her inability to fight for herself as Isabel La Negra does against Ambrosio. Isabel La Negra resulted a winner by refusing to be Ambrosio's "whore" and by converting her ways of living in powerful tools against him and men similar to him. She displays that she has certain control of her own life, and as a result she was able to get certain financial stability by inheriting half of Ambrosio's states, due to his sexual dependence to her as his mistress.

In this narrative, we found that Ferré gave both women qualities of explorers, and because of that, they were able to look at themselves with envy, but also with

understanding. Looking at each other gave them space to vent their frustrations and at the same time rejoice their happiness or grieve their unhappiness. As it happens with most of Ferré's women characters, her two Isabel cut deeper into race relations and status hierarchy; we observe how both Isabel see themselves as individuals and as parts of two different groups. Both women have been classified on the basis of prestige acquired basically through economic success, and centered on models of social stratification. The wife, Isabel Luberza is portrayed as "la dama auxiliary de la Cruz Roja, (...) la dama popular, (...) recogiendo fondos para la Ciudad del Niño (...) el alma de Puerto Rico hecha canción en las campañas políticas" (Ferré, 2000: 24). On the other hand, Isabel La Negra is described as "el alma de Puerto Rico hecha mamprora, la Reina de San Antón, (...) la puta más artillera del Barrio de la Cantera... la chinga de Singapur" (Ferré, 2000: 24).

Both, Isabel La Negra and Isabel Luzerda, didn't deny to themselves that they wanted to be part of the other one; that both of them are the images of themselves in one mirror. Finally, they embrace each other, and accept the fact that social and economic circumstances are the forces that divide them. Ferré reminds us the biblical meaning of the word "whore" which can be translated as "idolatress" in the *Book of Revelation*. The author, by giving both women characters the same name encourage us to think about the enslavement of women through different kind of relationships since ancient times.

At the end, both women seemed to be at peace with their body, sexuality, and identity; they accepted that their "I" is really a "we." We read, "Nosotras, tu querida y tu mujer siempre hemos sabido que debajo de cada dama de sociedad se oculta una prostituta. (...) Porque nosotras hemos sabido que cada prostituta es una dama en potencia" (Ferré, 2000: 23).

The consequences of presenting Puerto Rico as an idyllic island, without references to its social and economic difficulties reappear again in Ferré narrative, *Maldito amor*, one of her longest narratives. In the introduction, the author alludes to the search and loss of the "paradisiacal image" that has accompanied Puerto Rico and its effects of those who live or have emigrated outside of the Island.

Al presente Puerto Rico es un país de aproximadamente seis millones de habitantes, tres de los cuales viven en la isla, tres en el extranjero. Los que sufren el insilio sueñan muchas veces con una isla que no existe más que en su imaginación; los que viven el exilio mueren soñando regresar algún día se pasan la vida viajando entre uptown NY y downtown (Ferré, 1992b: 11).

Ferré lashed out the contrast that exist between those who are still dreaming about Puerto Rico as the lost paradise, the vanishing of European influence against the treatment of Puerto Ricans and its economic dependence to US after 1898, using

the voices of her characters in narratives like *Isolda en el espejo*, and *Maldito amor*. In the first, we read:

Eran los tiempos en que la burguesía criolla de la capital había bailado codo con codo junto a los Roosevelt y los Ford; en que los hijos de la crema y nata, vestidos de dril cien, habían jugado al tennis y al backgammon, y paseado gentilmente (...) a orillas de los jardines versallescos de los Vanderbilt, antes de darse cuenta irremediablemente de que jamás serían invitados por ellos ni a beber un vaso de agua (Ferré, 1992b: 129).

In *Maldito amor*, whose title gives name to the whole collection of narratives, Ferré debates the aesthetic of European culture embraced by the white wealthy class and the Caribbean culture entangled with African roots and syncretism. In her introduction to the book, she explained why she decided to give this title to her novel: “tomé el título de mi novela de una danza de Juan Morel Campos, nuestro compositor más prolífico en el siglo XIX, porque los conflictos a los que me refiero comenzaron precisamente en ese siglo (Ferré, 1992b: 11).

Getting some distance between the time that I read, analyzed and taught Ferré's work and the time that Ferré wrote their short stories and novels, I can see that she was able to offer merciless eyes when she wrote about the racism that permeates not only Puerto Rican society, but Latin American society as well. In “Maldito amor,” we see how Don Hermenegildo Martínez, a lawyer, who considers himself the chronicler of Guamani's history and culture, emphasizes, not only that he belongs to the Puerto Rican affluent society, and that their sons studied in Europe, but also his disparagement toward those who are blacks, to those whose have or hide their “raja”; an Americanism that infers that the person is not “pure white,” a word associated with racial difference.

Don Hermenegildo's efforts to hide the “raja” of De la Valle family underlies the racist practices regularly found in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and Latin America. His tales about Guamani's family is part of his strenuous labor to conceal the fact that his friend, Don Luis Font, the patriarch of the De la Valle family was an afro-descendant. Don Hermenegildo offers the “official” version of the De la Valle family's saga, and in doing this; his “act” became similar to the ones perpetrated by historians, novelists, and the government in pursuing the policies of cultural and racial “whitening.”

Ferré's development of Titina, and Gloria, two other characters in this narrative, and their recounts about how Don Hermenegildo and some members of De la Valle family have been constructing their world by denying the fact that Don Julio was black, exemplified how identities have been constructed on the Island. Ferré allows readers to understand the cultural and social ways in which Puerto Ricans and the Caribbean people are trying to hide the wounds and the consequences of slavery and

colonialism, systems that remind about subjugation and exploitation of the people. *Raja* is a term charged with memories of atrocities, pain, prejudice, racism, repression; a term that refers to the fact of not being able to have better living conditions, or being ignored in courts as Titina feared in the novel.

Don Hermenegildo thinks that hiding Don Julio's blackness, the *raja* is the best way to give himself, as friend of a "white wealthy person," more prestige and acceptability among those who were richer than he was. His contemptuous attitude toward those who are not white is also shown when he refers to Titina as the "everlasting servant." Despair permeated Titina's words when she found that she and her brother could be expelled from the little house that was supposed to be theirs, if Laura's testament falls into the hands of Niño Ubaldino's children.

Titina went to him because she is hoping that, Don Hermenegildo, who is white and belongs to the upper class, will be able to help her in keeping her little plank house. She is also conscious that the courts will not consider her and her brother's word about Doña Laura's testament if they decided to confront Ubaldino's children. To inscribe her distrust of a system that does not give blacks the same opportunities as white people, she, in her justification of why she decided to see the lawyer, she confessed that despite his brother advice to consult the lawyer because of his credentials, she felt uneasy to and consult him. Her experiences as a Black person have told her not to trust "white people."

Insistió [her brother] (...) en que viniera verlo y yo por fin lo he complacido (...) pero le confieso que venir a verlo, después de todo, no me salió de muy adentro, porque los blancos, por más simpáticos que sean, siempre son blancos, y entre ellos se entienden (Ferré, 1992b: 27).

We see, in the story, that the revelations and opinions of Titina, Gloria, Don Hermenegildo and other characters, about how the De la Valle family has gained their social advantage in Guamani's society allow us to understand how historically the middle and upper classes have been looking at those who are poor and black. We can understand the effects of race relation, class, and cultural division in the Island through the actions and confessions of each character. Don Hermenegildo refers to Titina as "the eternal slave": "Ni una sola pasa blanca, ni un solo corresponde color ceniza salpica su densa secreta negra. Titina, la última esclava del pueblo, la criada sempiterna de los De la Valle. Titina la eterna," even when he knew that her mother was not a slave, she was a *liberta* and therefore she was free when she was born. The way that the lawyer sees Titina and his attempts of hiding the De la Valle's *raja*, allow us to examine the harsh treatment that millions of people have received based on race, and help explain why Titina states that she "knows white people behavior." Her experience has been gained not only by living with her mother, but also learning from and appropriating the experiences of those black women who were slaves, and

were sold, or separated from their family and children. She learned from black women and men who were deprived of their rights to have courts' representation (Ferré, 1992b: 36).

Gloria, an important character in the narrative, who is a mulatto, expressed her experiences of being seen and treated as a sexual object, a prostitute, seducer of men, image that has accompanied women mulattos since colonialism and offered over and over in Hispanic literature. Even when Gloria is a nurse, and Doña Elvira's secretary and wife of Nicolás, Doña Elvira's son, she is still associated with licentiousness and avarice. Elvira's other son, Arístides, insisted that Gloria was unsuitable to be part of the family, and accused her of having sexual relation with his father, who suffered of syphilis. Even Titina admitted that she heard what the townspeople have been saying about Gloria's moral conduct, accusing her of being a "streetwalker and crazy."

At the end of the story, Gloria torches the De la Valle's house, the sugar mill, and befriends and protects Titina. She also reminds her about the family and how candid Titina and her brother have been in their relationship with De la Valle family, something she has been telling her for a long time. Gloria also recriminated Titina for going and asking Don Hermenegildo for help; for her, De la Valle family, Don Hermenegildo and his friends are "vultures."

Te lo dije, Titina, te lo repetí mil veces, cómo eres de mensa con tu ideal de fidelidad a la sagrada familia, con tu fe ingenua en que el Niño Ubaldino les dejaría a ti y a Néstor la casita de tabloncitos y techo de zinc al fondo del patio. (...) No debiste nunca traerlo aquí, necia que fuiste, creyendo que iba a ayudarnos, que nos iba a defender de esa manada de buitres, cuando los De la Valle y sus amigos todos son aves de un mismo pelaje y de una misma garra (Ferré, 1992b: 75).

We can observe that Ferré insisted through the story, several times, to describe the house in which Titina and her brother lived and would have inherited as a way to show the disparity between being poor and being wealthy. Arístides wants to have the sugar mill and the house in order to sell them to the North Americans and leave the country; he doesn't care about what will happen with Titina or her brother. For Arístides, they do not count, they do not mean anything; they are like furniture that after being used can be thrown away.

In Ferré's novel, we also can detect Don Hermenegildo struggle between being an admirer of European culture and being a wealthy *criollo* born on the Island and able to attend to Patti, de la Duse and Ana Pavlova recitals. He is proud of living in Guamaní, and describes the valley as one of the most fertile in the world, that allows African plants to grow and their fruits and vegetables to be served as delicacy on the tables of Puerto Rican families. For him, the entrance of North American capital

transformed Guamaní and instead of being a “paradise,” it has become a huge funnel through which the riches of the Island disappear.

Don Hermenegildo admired Don Julio Font and Niño Ubaldino because they fought against the usurpation of the sugar mills by the North American banks. Don Julio, refuses to sell his sugar mill, “venderles a los extranjeros un solo tablón de caña” (Ferré, 1992b: 37). They didn’t accept North American claims of racial superiority, but at the same time they comprehended that their own government had facilitated the entrance of North American banks and the Americanization of the Island. The fact that they don’t believe that North Americans are racially superior is expressed when Don Robaldo, an “indiano,” former president of one of the banks in the town, and long friend of Don Julio, is forced to sell and leave the Island because of the “Nueva Banca Norteamericana”.

Don Robaldo expressed that he didn’t want to change who he is and consider himself part of the Island, he wants to maintain his racial and cultural identity, and expresses, “Ya sabes que moro Viejo mal Cristiano. No quiero que mi familia y a mí nos vuelvan orgánicamente diferentes (...) ya yo estoy demasiado viejo para dejarme hacer gringo a la fuerza”² (Ferré, 1992b: 38).

It is clear that Ferré wanted to bring to this narrative some of the effects of the political status of her country starting in 1898 and how they saw themselves and Puerto Ricans. She also intended to voice what Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans mean of those who saw how Puerto Rico didn’t become an independent nation, neither in 1898, nor in 1952. In the novel, we see that when Don Julio returned to Guamaní, after his meeting with his friend, Don Robaldo, he decided to attend the inauguration of the Central Ejemplo, the new sugar mill, constructed by North American bankers. The narrator described that a zeppelin carried a banner with the color of North American flag and the phrase “April 15, 1918 - Follow our Example.” During the inauguration, Don Julio Font, the father of Ubaldino decided to attend the festivities as owner of Central Justicia, his sugar mill, to see if he could make some business with the bankers. There, he tried to have a polite conversation with two of the North American bankers, and through the conversation we witnessed how the bankers see themselves as well as their opinions about Don Julio and the Puerto Ricans in general. One of them, Mr. Durham, who at first didn’t recognized Don Julio, brought out immediately his “resistance” to sell his sugar mill, and Durham’s comments are followed by those offered by his partner, Mr. Irving, who refers to Don Julio as

² The word “indiano” refers to the colloquial name of the Spanish emigrant in America. The denomination extended to its descendants, with admiring or pejorative connotations according to the case.

“native” a colonial form that has been used in derogative ways toward people born in the Americas and who were not whites.

The pestering comments of racial and political contents continue between Don Julio and the two bankers, and this time is Don Julio's turn and he makes references to North American invasion to Puerto Rico in 1898. Mr. Durham takes his comments as a complement and he not only accepts it, but also emphasizes that there have been two of them, claiming that in the first one they brought “order” to the Island and in the second “progress.”

[Mr Durham] – Ah sí, ¡ya recuerdo! – (...) Don Julio el de los cañaverales incomparables! (...) [Mr. Irving] – Quizá ha ya cambiado de parecer- (...) Necesitaremos toda la ayuda de los nativos para llegar a hacer de esta empresa un Ejemplo. Y no sólo para el Caribe, sino para el mundo entero (...).

[Don Julio] – Parece una nueva invasión, ¿no es cierto?

[Mr. Durham] – No lo parece lo es (...). En la primera le trajimos el orden, y ahora les traemos el progreso de nuestra gran nación (Ferré, 1992b: 42-43).

Through this novel, we understand that “both invasions” and their effects continue to be a source of anguish and happiness for all the characters that appear in the novel, even the music and lyrics compositions. Their entangled voices uncover Ferré's political and socio-cultural position toward her compatriots and Puerto Rico's political status, underline her emotions toward her birthplace and Puerto Rico's history, lyrics and music compositions.

I should also refer briefly to Ferré's work as translator of her own work. She translated some of her work from Spanish to English, an activity that she labeled as “essential.” She stated that she has great respect for bilingual translators and wrote about her experiences as self- translator. Talking about poetry and translation she stated, “Poetry where meaning can never wholly be separated from expressive form is a mystery which can never be translated. It can be only transcribed, reproduced in a shape that will be always a sorry shadow of itself.” (On Destiny: 161-162). Ferré wrote *House of the Lagoon*, first in English and later in Spanish as *La casa de la laguna*; she translated her own collection of stories, *Papeles de Pandora* as the *Youngest Doll*, and her novel *Maldito amor* from Spanish to English under the title of *Sweet Diamond Dust*.

Ferré recognized the value of work translation and saw it as an effective way to reach thousands of her “compatriots (...) estranged in the barrios of New York of Los Angeles.” Self-translation allowed her to “navigate different views of the world,” but she also admitted that the characters of her original work came out differently; “translating has taught me that it is ultimately impossible to translate one cultural identity into another.” She also expressed, that:

(...) writing in English for me is like looking at the world through a different pair of binoculars- it imposes a different mindset. English forces me to build each paragraph like a beam placed across the ceiling to be covered with bricks of meaning³ (Muñoz-Calvo, Buesa Gómez, 2010: 26).

Ferré understood that even though she has studied and lived for many years in the United States and she was translating her own work, she saw herself not as copyist and her effort to “translate” *Maldito amor* into English was a very difficult undertaking, as she explained it in the quoted work.

As I began to translate my novel, *Maldito amor* (...) the first serious obstacle I encountered was the title. Maldito Amor in Spanish is an idiomatic expression that is impossible to render accurately in English. It is a love that is halfway between doomed and damned and thus participates in both without being either. The fact that the adjective “maldito,” ... is placed before the noun “amor,” gives it an exclamative nature, which is very present to Spanish speakers, in spite that the exclamation point is missing. “Maldito amor” is something very different from “Amor Maldito,” which would be clearly the connotation of “devilish love (...)” the title is also the title of a very famous danza written by Juan Morel Campos, Puerto Rico’s most gifted composer in the nineteenth century, which describes in verses the paradisiacal existence of the island’s bourgeoisie at the time. As this complicated wordplay would have been totally lost in English, (...) I decided to change the title altogether in my translation of the novel, substituting it with the more specific “Sweet Diamond Dust.” The new title (...) touches on the dangers of a sugar, like diamond dust, poisons those who sweeten their lives with it (Ferré, 1992b: 26-29).

Ferré was not afraid of giving readers two versions of her own work; she found satisfaction in admitting that some parts of her narratives or poems were “untranslatable,” a fact that allowed to give her license to transform her original written work in order to convey specific cultural identity to the “new” one. She understood that by doing that she will not diminish the authority that the original work has had, either in Spanish or English.

There is no doubt that Rosario Ferré’s death has produced great sadness among critics, educators, and readers. She was a powerful writer who brought to Puerto Rican letters fresh air in her approach to racism, women characters, and historical events. Her way of revealing dominant structures rooted in traditions and colonialism was accompanied by stylistic innovations and creative re-constructions of plots and topics. Her work captured the attention of readers, publishers and literary critics not only in Puerto Rico, but also in the United States. Rosario Ferré showed us the progress that woman writers reached in the 1970’s, and her influence on the literature written by women in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and Latin America is undeniable.

³ See the work of Santoyo, which brings an insightful perspective about Ferré’s perspectives in her self- translation from one language to another in.

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