

OFO: JOURNAL OF TRANSATLANTIC STUDIES
Volume 1 Number 2, December, 2011

ARTICLES

- Reading as Initiation: Ceremonial Metanarratives in Mayra
Montero's *The Messenger*
Monica Miller 1
- Global Flows: Ecotrauma, Dis-location and Diaspora Imagination
in Chika Unigwe's *The Phoenix*
Chris Chinemerem Onyema 23
- Memoir, Memory, and Mnemonic Device: The Yoruba in
Toyin Falola's *A Mouth Sweeter than Salt: An African Memoir*
Emmanuel Babatunde 55
- The Response of Benin Rubber Industry to Colonial and World
Demands, 1900 – 1945
Joseph I. Osagie and Frank Ikponmwosa 79

BOOK REVIEWS

- Chukwu, Donatus, Oluwa.** *The Church as the Extended Family
of God: Towards a New Direction for African Ecclesiology*
Raphael Chijioke Njoku 103
- Onwughalu, Obiefuna, J.** *Parents' Involvement in Education:
The Experience of an African Immigrant Community in Chicago*
Christopher I. Obiukwu 106
- Anyanwu, Ogechi Emmanuel.** *The Politics of Access: University
Education and Nation-Building in Nigeria, 1948-2000.*
Arua Oko 109

READING AS INITIATION: CEREMONIAL
METANARRATIVES IN MAYRA MONTERO'S
THE MESSENGER

MONICA MILLER
Louisiana State University

Abstract

Set in early and mid-twentieth century Cuba, Mayra Montero's 1999 novel, *The Messenger*, contains references to both Afro-Caribbean practices of Santería as well as Afro-Chinese spirituality. The novel not only presents scenes of ritual and ceremony from these traditions, but it also functions as a ceremony itself. It takes the reader through an initiation of sorts by means of a highly structured, multi-layered, and often polyvocal narrative. While the central story of the novel is that of the love affair between Aida Petrirena Cheng, a Chinese-Cuban woman of mixed ancestry, and the famous Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, the novel contains multiple interwoven metanarratives which supplement, analyze, and attempt to explain this central love story.

This article explores the specific ways in which *The Messenger* functions as a site of initiation, particularly through its evocation and delineation of sacred space, its frequent use of orality and polyvocality, and the cross-cultural elemental narratives which undergird the entire novel. Additionally, it examines how the novel foregrounds the idea of reading itself as an act of creation, forcing the reader into a more involved role in the unfolding of the story than is usually required by more straightforward, less narratively-layered novels. Especially as the novel is a multilingual text containing diverse literary allusions from Spanish poetry to Italian opera, it forces its reader into changing positions with respect to the narrative, depending upon the knowledge the reader brings to the text. Such changing positionality leads to a unique reading experience within the ceremonial confines of the text. Thus, it is argued that this ceremony allows for and leads to subsequently more nuanced and deeper readings of novels like *The Messenger*, with their complex portrayals of cross-cultural spirituality. Such initiation may *in the end* lead the reader to a direct experience of the ineffable.

INTRODUCTION

MAYRA MONTERO'S NOVEL *The Messenger*,¹ set in twentieth century Cuba, alludes to both Afro-Caribbean practices of Santería as well as traditions

which Afro-Caribbean scholar Lizabeth Paravisini-Geber characterizes as “Afro-Chinese magic”², or what Montero herself refers to as “Chinese Santería.”³ Both of these cultural traditions of spirituality not only propel the story forward but also reinforce their respective communities, the intersections and places of overlap between these communities, and the various characters’ ties to them. More importantly, the novel not only presents scenes of ritual and ceremony⁴ from these traditions, but it also functions as a ceremony itself, in the particular way that the novel involves the reader through the activity of reading. While the central story of the novel is that of the love affair between Aida Petirena Cheng, a Chinese-Cuban woman of mixed ancestry, and the famous Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, the novel contains multiple interwoven metanarratives which supplement, analyze, and attempt to explain this central love story.

These metanarratives frequently evoke the stories of the *Orishas* in the Santería tradition – specifically, the stories of *Changó*, *Oshún*, and *Yemayá*, as they undergird and echo the other stories being told – along with the direct invocations and references to these *Orishas* throughout the novel. The act of reading such evocations and invocations further implicates the reader in the performative traditions of Santería. Reading the novel becomes the performance of a ceremony, allowing readers of different levels of initiation and knowledge to access varying levels of mystery. The very structure of the novel itself evokes a form of ceremony, both in the specific words and rituals depicted as well as the series of thresholds through which the reader is led. In this article, I will examine the specific elements of the novel which provide such an experience of ceremony for the reader and show how these characteristics firmly embed the novel within current larger discussions of transatlantic identity.

Matt D. Childs and Toyin Falola, editors of *The Yoruban Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, point out that, while the growing study of the African diaspora in the context of Transatlantic studies has focused attention on what they refer to as the “Atlantic approach” – one which “contend[s] that in order to understand the history and struggles of Africans in the Americas, it is indeed necessary to study both sides of the Atlantic” – it is equally important to take into account a “Creolization model” – one which focuses on “the cultural changes and innovations that were fundamental aspects of the experience of Africans in the Americas.”⁵ In this collection of essays, the editors’ desire to put these two models in dialogue with each other leads them to focus on the Yoruba diaspora. As they note that those who identify as descendants of Yorubaland – the region of West Africa primarily in Nigeria and Benin, generally located between the southern

Nigerian border and the Weme River⁶—have often been singled out by scholars as a cultural group separate from other Africans (though recognizing that Yoruba identity itself, in fact, is quite diverse), the study of the Yoruba diaspora not only sheds light on the experiences of Africans in the Americas, but also allows “the common elements of Yoruba culture [to] stand out in sharp relief against other Africans they encountered in the New World.”⁷

Mayra Montero’s 1999 novel, *The Messenger*, not only contributes to this scholarly discussion, but complicates it further by focusing not only on characters who are Afro-Cuban descendants of Yorubaland, but also on Chinese-Cuban descendants of those who were a part of the coolie bondage system.⁸ Montero’s inclusion of the Cuban coolie system in her novel calls attention to its significance for Transatlantic Studies, as it “conjoins several areas of Asian, African, Caribbean, Latin American, and American studies . . . through concerns of racialization, subordination, and colonialization,” according to Lisa Yun in *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves of Cuba*.⁹ Yun suggests that the archive of testimony of these Chinese workers in Cuba should “be seen as archetypal in a long lineage of literature on slavery, freedom, and now modern slavery,” and encourages an interdisciplinary, multilingual approach to further study of slavery in the Americas which incorporates the history of these (as well as other) enslaved peoples brought to the New World. Though a novel, *The Messenger* provides an important locus for such study, as it provides a compelling model of the cross-cultural identities which resulted from the myriad enslaved peoples who were brought to the Caribbean. In this article, I will examine how the complex cultural foundation created by the descendents of these peoples provides a generative place for spiritual interactions, which in turn invokes a sense of ceremony for the reader. In fact, specific ceremonial attributes of the novel lead the reader through a ritualized experience invoked by the multilingual metanarratives which are necessary to convey the fullness of the Afro-Cuban and Afro-Chinese experiences in early twentieth-century Cuba.

These metanarratives include: Aida’s and Enrico’s daughter’s search for the true story of her parentage; the story of Caruso’s appearance in Havana and the attempt on his life by the mafia; the subtext of the libretto of the opera *Aida*; and finally, a more fundamental story traced by the appearances and interactions of the elements of stone, fire, and water throughout the text. Montero imagines the novel around the historical events of Enrico Caruso’s 1920 visit to and performance in Havana, Cuba. The frame story of the novel follows his daughter Enriqueta Cheng as she

attempts to reconstruct the story of the love affair between the Italian tenor and her mother Aida Cheng, an Afro-Chinese-Cuban woman, who met after a bomb exploded in the Teatro Nacional Havana during Caruso's performance of the Verdi opera *Aida*. While Caruso was not seriously hurt, the explosion was never fully explained, though Montero picks up on the rumors that those behind the explosion had ties to the mafia.¹⁰ In Montero's imagining, Enrico Caruso flees the burning theater, fearing for his safety, and encounters Aida in the kitchen of the Hotel Inglaterra where she is delivering her mother's sewing. As Enrico's¹¹ appearance in Aida's life has been prophesied by more than one of her elders, she realizes the significance of his appearance and helps him escape from his enemies: first to her house; then to Regla, the home of her godfather José de Calazán, who was one of those who foresaw Enrico's appearance; to Cienfuegos, Cuba, their first destination after escaping from Enrico's enemies in Havana; to Trinidad, where Aida and Enrico are kidnapped and badly hurt, nearly killed; and finally back to Havana, where Aida struggles back to life, while Enrico is sent by cargo ship to New York, where he dies when Aida is six months pregnant with Enriqueta.

This story of Aida's and Enrico's love affair unfolds through a series of interviews, letters, artifacts, and stories; together these texts create a temporally non-linear narrative which features many scenes of ritual and ceremony. One of the earliest scenes of ritual in the novel occurs with José de Calazán, Aida's godfather, "looking into" Aida in order to see her future. A Santería¹² *babalaowo* (a priest), he throws the *ékuele*, a divination tool he uses in order to facilitate this process. From the very beginning of the novel, then, the mythic is manifest in reality (as opposed to being metaphorical or existent only in dreams), as the *ékuele* provides Calazán with a vision of Aida's and Enrico's tragic love which comes true.

When Calazán throws the *ékuele*, Aida describes the experience as uncanny: "I looked into his eyes and remembered what he had said, and that was like remembering what was going to happen: first the noise and then the wreckage, and the face of a man, his whole body, coming out of the smoke."¹³ The confused sense of time in this passage (and elsewhere in the novel) exhibits what anthropologist Victor Turner characterizes as the "multiperspectival consciousness," one which "undermine[s] the modern views of time, space, matter, language, person, and truth."¹⁴ In Turner's analysis of the performative aspects of ritual, he sees that time is "seen as an essential dimension of being as well as multiperspectival, no longer merely... a linear continuum conceived in spatial terms."¹⁵ Here, time does not progress in an expected, linear fashion, and this unusual tempo-

rality calls attention to the scene of divination it describes, setting it apart from a more expected, quotidian reality. In this way, such sacred time demarcates sacred space.¹⁶

READING AS AN ACT OF CREATION

The very narrative structure of the novel is itself a nonlinear, embedded one which folds back on itself and repeats the same story from different perspectives. As Enriqueta pursues her parents' story, she interviews people, recounts and remembers stories, visits different locations, and includes news stories, letters, and other personal accounts of events in her account of her quest for their story. These are all embedded in the larger narrative of Enriqueta's own story of her life and love, as she eventually marries Israel Trujillo, whom she meets while interviewing people in Havana about her father. That the roots of her own love in the narrative present story entwine with the past not only point to the interconnectedness of all of these stories, but more importantly highlight the complicated nature of time when considered in light of such sacred phenomenon as love: time does not behave in as orderly fashion as might be expected.

A scholar of Afro-Caribbean spirituality, Solimar Otero uncovers a similar phenomenon in the work of Cuban novelists Zoé Valdés and Guillermo Cabrera Infante. Specifically, she investigates "how epiphenomenal memory created through the experience and observance of spirit possession in Afro-Caribbean religion suggests a mode of 'reading' creative expression" in these works.¹⁷ Such "epiphenomenal memory" is also significant in *The Messenger*, as the intertwined memories throughout the novel allow the emergent phenomenon of this unique form of memory. Otero discusses the centrality of memory to this literature as a "kind of conjuring, where memory brings into being the senses that were once experienced. . . . [M]uch like a spirit re-inhabiting a body, the selective consciousness . . . is only temporarily being experienced in an act through which body and mind work together to imagine a new consciousness [in] an alternate and special reality."¹⁸ In other words, reading this kind of text creates an experience of possession for the reader, analogous to the spiritual possession she reads about in the text. Similarly, *The Messenger's* structure and focus on the nonlinearity of memory and sacred time functions as a metanarrative commentary on the very process which the reader is undergoing, as the reader and the text work together to create an "alternate and special reality."

THE NOVEL'S SACRED SPACE

The novel consists of a series of thresholds, through which the reader is led as though she is being brought into sacred space. Thresholds mark the distinction between different kinds of space, and often act as passages or places of communication between sacred and profane space. Further, such sacred space is a place of what Mircea Eliade terms hierophany, "an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different."¹⁹ *The Messenger* conveys both literal and metaphorical hierophanic experiences, as it not only contains depictions of literal spiritual threshold experiences, but also is structured in such a way that the reader is led through a series of narrative thresholds, from the prefatory material, epigraph, and dedications, through the different sections marked by Italian titles.

There are literal depictions of spiritual threshold experiences, such as that which occurs when Aida takes Enrico to her Calazán's house. As Aida describes the process:

I found my way by keeping my eye on a certain ceiba tree. But it was growing dark, and I had a hard time seeing the ceiba. I told Enrico I had to find a certain tree in order to find the house, and that was when I saw the light, a little light moving toward us along the path. Behind that light, the light of a kerosene lamp, I could see the figure of Calazán.²⁰

If thresholds mark the break between different kinds of space, then their trip through both woods and darkness to reach the *babalawo's* house certainly registers as such a transformative passage. In this way, Aida's description of this travel marks this paragraph as a portal in the text, a literal passage between two different worlds: that of the outside world, where Enrico is in danger, and that of the sacred world where Calazán lives, which holds the possibility of safety and healing.

Such crossing of thresholds does not always have such a positive valence, though it does usually designate a mythic register. For example, Aida's earlier trips with her mother to Calazán's require that they cross the bay to get there. It is after this crossing that Calazán throws the *ékuele* and foresees the explosive love affair with Enrico in Aida's future. Aida's crossing of the bay prepares her to enter the sacred space of Calazán's home and allows her to share his vision of Caruso emerging from the wreckage. It also enables her to have her own experience of possession, as

she “screams a scream of an animal,” as though “a poisoned dog had control of my throat.”²¹ After this experience, Aida and her mother each throw seven pennies into the bay during their crossing back, which further designates the significance of this crossing.²²

There is a similarly marked threshold experience depicted later in the novel, after Aida and Enrico flee Havana in an attempt to preserve his health and safety. Unfortunately, though a transformation occurs, it is one of sickness and pain: “Since his escape he was a different person, as though some witchcraft had created a deep canyon between the man who ran away from Cienfuegos at night and the one who reached Trinidad before dawn.”²³ Enrico is no longer the discriminating aesthete who only sleeps on high quality linen sheets, but an exhausted, dying man tortured with nightmares. Such drastic changes do not happen in a linear progression in the novel, however, but occur among vague political plotting, spiritual ceremonies, seemingly otherworldly sexual encounters, and the premonitions of these same events before they happen.

ORALITY AND POLYVOCALITY

The novel’s complex, temporally nonlinear narrative structure rejects authorial authority and instead involves the reader in constructing the narrative, which functions to foreground the construction of the story. Its use of reported speech and dialogue emphasizes the oral performance aspect of the narrative and connects the novel to the oral performance of traditional religion. Specifically, the novel’s orality is emphasized in the polyvocality evident throughout the work. The text of the novel itself is in a sense polyvocal, in that *The Messenger* is an English translation by Edith Grossman of the novel *Como Un Mensajero Tuyo*; thus, the act of reading this translation means that, at the very least, two voices are being invoked.²⁴ Further, though the novel has been translated into English from Spanish, many words remain in their original languages of Chinese, Cuban Spanish, or Italian. The section titles, for example, are all in Italian and from the libretto of the Verdi opera *Aida*.

Many considerations of polyvocality in literature focus on a Bakhtinian reading of the carnivalesque nature of polyvocality and the implications of heteroglossia which often result in a text.²⁵ In *The Messenger*, however, it is not the carnivalesque aspects of polyvocality in which I am interested—at most, I would concur with Stallybrass and White’s consideration of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque as more of a “mode of understanding” rather than a ritual feature.²⁶ Instead, I wish to focus on poly-

vocality as an attempt to overcome the limitations of language when dealing with the ineffable—what Eliade described as the “human inability to express the *ganz andere*;²⁷ all that goes beyond man’s natural experience, language is reduced to suggesting by terms taken from that experience.”²⁸ In *The Messenger*, Montero uses different languages and voices to more fully portray the sense of sacred time and place.

Additionally, Montero’s use of polyvocality works at times to privilege the *sound* of language over its content, especially in the preservation of the language of origin of the Italian *Aida* titles, the words used in practices and stories of Santería, and the words describing the work done by Yuan Pei Fu, as he calls upon the power of the Chinese spirit Sanfancón. One striking example of the novel’s polyvocality is its very first page, as opens with an epigraph by the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti which is left in the original Italian: “*Brucio sul colle spazio e tempo, / come un tuo messaggero, / Come il sogno, divina morte.*”²⁹ Following this Italian poetic epigraph is the title page for the first section, which is titled, “*A Messenger s’avanzi!*”³⁰ As a novel translated from Spanish into English, by opening with two pages of Italian, *The Messenger* presents itself as a polyvocal text from the very beginning. An English-speaking reader, expecting to encounter English, is confronted from the start of the text with non-English words, which makes for a different reading experience than if the entire book were in one language. The reader must either make an extra effort for understanding (calling upon her own translation skills, using context clues, or consulting outside reference material) or become comfortable with not understanding the specific meaning of every word encountered, only experiencing the sounds of the words and a changing sense of proximity to the meaning of the text.

Frequently, different languages are used in the novel in contexts of spirituality and the mythic. For example, after Aida’s first husband’s wife, Ester, kills herself as a result of discovering her husband’s adulterous affair with Aida, Aida says that her mother “began to prepare an *omiero*, a potion to purify the house. When it was finished she said a few prayers, and for the first time in years I heard her say some phrases in the old language, the Lucumi [sic] language that my grandmother had taught her.”³¹ Here, the use of the word “*omiero*” signals the turn to the sacred, especially as it is followed by her mother’s use of the Lucumí language,³² which is not only linked to prayer, but to the past through her grandmother.³³ Here, polyvocality demonstrates a hierophanic moment, one in which the past manifests itself in the present in a manifestation of sacred time.

Aida has a similar experience of sacred polyvocality upon her first encounter with Enrico in real life, after she has been prepared for his arrival by the myriad visions and premonitions which have prophesied their meeting. A bomb explodes in the theater in which Enrico is performing, literally rupturing time and space,³⁴ making the subsequent events themselves seem to be of another time and place. After the explosion, Aida can hear the voice of Yuan Pei Fu in her head, telling her that, "He's very close."³⁵ The cook then "exclaim[s] Holy God" (in some sense, a direct evocation of the divine), which is followed by Aida whispering "the litany my godfather had told me to say: '*Iyá nlá, Iyá Oyibó, Iyá erú, Iyá, mi lánu...*,' that's the prayer that means: "Great Mother, Mother of the whites, Mother of the blacks, have mercy."³⁶ I admit that the fact that the cook's exclamation is translated into English does encourage me to read his words as less a conscious evocation of the divine than a shout of profanity in response to his great fear from the shock of the explosion. Still, that both he and Aida call upon divinities at this moment is significant, and that Aida's prayer is a Lucumí litany shows the importance of polyvocality in marking the sacred. It is at this point, as well, after Aida's prayer that Enrico appears, signifying the manifestation in reality of the many premonitions and visions which foresaw his explosive role in Aida's life.

Aida herself is a polyvocal character: she speaks in different languages, she is identified by different names, and she is described as having literally different voices. Aida claims to have two names, as her mother wanted to call her Aida and her grandmother wanted to call her Petirena.³⁷ However, I count four names, including the nickname "Chinita"³⁸ and Caruso's addressing her as Aida (43);³⁹ the dieresis added here not only signals her relationship to the mythic opera character, but also signals a different pronunciation.⁴⁰ Those who call her "Chinita" do so because of Aida's appearance: she says that "my Chinese part was the first thing people saw."⁴¹ Aida's ethnicity is complex: her father was a Chinese immigrant to Cuba, and her mother, "a mulatta who was a love child" of a black Lucumí woman and a Spanish man.⁴² Specific aspects of Aida's past or present come into focus through the particular name she is called by at any given moment; further, the variety of names by which she is known draws attention to the multiple identities reflected in her different voices.

For example, during the *ebbó* healing ceremony at the lagoon which Calazán enacts for Enrico, Aida runs into the water to save her lover after she realizes that her godfather is attempting to drown him. Aida's narration of the scene describes "my voice screaming, 'Enrico! Enrico!'"⁴³ It is significant here that it is Aida's voice which is screaming, not Aida herself.

That she distinguishes this particular voice as separate from herself emphasizes her own polyvocal capacities. Similarly, when Calazán mocks her for crying for Enrico, she answers him not in the voice of the obedient girl she usually is, but “like the widowed and hungry woman I carried inside me.”⁴⁴ Here again, the sacred requires polyvocality in order to more fully be expressed.

In addition to the carnivalesque implications of polyvocality in Cuban literature, Otero discusses the ties between meaning and sound in the context of ritual: “the ‘word,’ as both uttered and heard, as written and read, makes for meaning. Un-understood, or dense and secret meanings, are brought into ritualistic uses of how the word makes meaning. Initiation to how to grasp meaning, through ritual and education, is the arena in which the socio-cultural idiosyncrasies of *Orisha* traditions are expressed.”⁴⁵ The very act of reading through such unfamiliar words, then, acts as an initiation on a number of possible levels. For example, the experienced—or *already initiated*—reader (whether initiated into the particular language on the page, the world of opera, Santería, or even the case of a reader who has read the book before) will have access to a certain level of understanding when she encounters these words or scenes on the page. Otero characterizes the use of such esoteric language as a “mounting of the reader by the text”: the “‘initiated’ reader, at the point in the text that would become unfamiliar to those unfamiliar with the ritual of spirit possession, is drawn deeper in still, and asked to finish unlocking the meaning of phrases and deeper semiotic intentions with their own ‘sacred’ knowledge or knowledge of the sacred.”⁴⁶ The dedicated (though less experienced or “initiated”) reader may glean a certain amount of understanding from context clues or by researching words or scenarios she is unfamiliar with, thus gaining more access to these meanings. However, even for a more casual reader, the actual experience of the words—both the different voices and the different languages—creates a different imagined space than one in which only English is presented.

Otero identifies a similar kind of polyvocality in the Cuban texts by Valdés and Infante, a polyvocality which she identifies as a signification of the sacred: “The text, therefore, like the opening of a religious ceremony in Santería, is layered with selective information that gears it for multiple and shifting audiences simultaneously.” Additionally, she identifies it as a specifically Cuban tradition which is evoked by this polyvocality. Otero says that, “this kind of combined presentation is typical of Cuban folk religious expression, especially as found in the arts and literature, [which] celebrated the polyphonic and polyvocal aspects of what, really, is the

merging of many world traditions."⁴⁷ Certainly, *The Messenger* exemplifies such a tradition. Not only does it depict the interaction and merging of these world traditions, but Montero herself has a multiethnic background, as she was born in Havana and describes herself as having "strong roots in Cuba," though she has lived in Puerto Rico for close to forty years.⁴⁸

Both polyethnicity as well as polyvocality are components of the important theme of music which runs throughout the novel. Aida's name has such a strong connection to music that it even affects the language of the tools of divination, as the *ékuele* that Calazán throws for Aida plays music, which is an unusual event. Aida's mother tells her that Calazán "heard your name in the *ékuele* ...music that said your name. He told me it's very strange because the *ékuele* never sings."⁴⁹ An astute reader might pick up on the fact that what Calazán is actually hearing is the opera, or what we later learn is Enrico singing *Aïda*. Not only is Enrico performing the opera of the same name as the woman who is to become his beloved, but the presence of *Aïda* runs throughout the novel. Not only is the opera performed, but the opera's libretto echoes many stories of the *orishas*. Further, the libretto is also emblematic of the tragic love between Aida and Enrico and becomes yet another metanarrative of the sacred which runs throughout the novel.

When Aida and Enrico first meet, he is in costume for his performance in *Aïda*, wearing a cloak over a white tunic. To Aida, "in that tunic he looked to me like a king from another time, a warrior *orisha* running from the fury of another *orisha*."⁵⁰ In addition to his first appearance being one of a doubled identity, Aida's perception of him here highlights the way in which multiple mythic stories layer, reflect, and invoke other mythic stories throughout the novel. For Enrico, their meeting was equally mythic, as he had been in the middle of performing *Aïda* when the theater exploded. After he blindly flees, he is whisked into a taxi by a stranger who, when asked her name, identifies herself as "Aida." His response (which Aida notes she was "too ignorant to understand") is to introduce himself in character: "I am Radamès."⁵¹ From both of their points of view, the explosion has blown a hole in quotidian reality—a sense which is emphasized textually, as the scene of their meeting is actually interrupted by a break in the narrative with an italicized journalistic account of the Enrico Caruso's performance in Cuba. The layering of these scenes in this way implies the emergence of a place and time outside of the ordinary.

Enrico later tells the story of the mythic Aïda to his beloved Aida and those who take part in the *ebbó* healing ceremony at Calazán's: "It was the

Ethiopians and Egyptians. The Ethiopian slave, called Aïda, loved the warrior Radamès. Amneris, the daughter of Pharoah, loved Radamès too."⁵² Calazán thinks Enrico is talking about the warring *vodú* of Dajomi, while Conga Mariate says that Radamès is like the *orisha* Changó. Enrico goes on to explain that once Amneris discovers Aïda's love for Radamès, she threatens Aïda. His listeners compare the story he tells of Aïda to the stories of Allágguna and of Oshún and Yemayá, as well as the *vodún* punishment of burying alive. These other stories are interjected in the midst of Enrico's account of *Aïda*, resulting in the sense that there is one larger story being told, an underlying, foundational metanarrative that directs and informs all stories everywhere.

CROSS-CULTURAL ELEMENTAL NARRATIVES

Such cross-cultural mythic similarities are discussed early on in the novel, when Aida's mother brings together the holy men who are her godfathers, Calazán and Yuan Pei Fu, to discuss the premonitions about Aida's future. Calazán and Yuan Pei Fu decide that "The saints are the same everywhere, they're the same in China and in Guinea."⁵³ Aida's mother also reports that they informed her that the saints of different traditions are "blood brothers."⁵⁴ Thus, it is appropriate that the stories which are told should overlap and echo each other. Further, an even deeper, elemental narrative undergirds these all, as throughout the novel there are frequent references to stone, fire, and water. These elements are connected to the *orishas* and can be traced in the text, providing yet another metanarrative of meaning throughout the novel.⁵⁵

Enrico is associated with heat and fire in the novel, particularly with respect to his singing. His performance of the aria after he tells the story of *Aïda* functions as a mini-ceremony in the story, as before he sings, Calazán shouts, "Olofi is great," and the lights are turned out.⁵⁶ His shout here functions as an invocation, a sanctification of the space of the singing. Enrico's singing is so loud and impassioned that Aida is sure that it provokes the divine; she says, "I'm certain the sound woke the *orishas* in the woods, startled the animals and men who were sleeping, reached the lagoon like an arrow: Yemayá must have come up to the surface, trembling with hunger in the trembling water."⁵⁷ The performance causes Conga Mariate to cry strangely and tell Enrico that, "You are the stallion of Changó, musyú, and his fire burns your throat."⁵⁸

As Enrico is connected to fire, so is Aida connected to water. Calazán sees this, and uses it to give a simplistic explanation of the tragedy of their

love, telling Aida that “the man was a child of Changó....But now you see that water puts out the flame.” Aida, however, says that her godfather is wrong, that the interaction was not that simple; instead she sees that Enrico’s flame was burning in the people and places their love touched.⁵⁹ Despite her emphasis of the fiery nature of their love, it is Aida’s connection to water which plays a much larger role in the elemental metanarrative of the novel.

Water itself is an important element in mythic (as well as biological) terms. Critic Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez identifies water as a central symbol in much of Montero’s writing, as “it appears to represent a mediator, even a border between life and death.”⁶⁰ After many crossings of water and ceremonies in and involving water, Aida herself identifies her connection with the element. Aida, like the element of water, functions as a mediator in many ways: her own polyethnicity enables her to travel between and communicate with diverse groups in the novel. She says directly, “water is my element, the kingdom of Yemayá, the place where I cast out but also gather in.”⁶¹ Water is what connects Aida directly to the Santería deity Yemayá, with whom she is not only directly identified – as when she is directly addressed as “Lady Kedike, one of the many names of the Yemayá of the lagoon”⁶² – but is directly mounted (or possessed) by in the ceremony at the lagoon. Shortly after Conga Mariate addresses Yemayá at the lagoon, saying, “*Yemaya atara...Iya mio Olokun*,”⁶³ Aida realizes that she has been mounted by Yemayá, as she runs for the water and grabs the black duck being prepared as a sacrifice, killing it herself.⁶⁴

What complicates what might otherwise be a simplistic, binary battle between fire and water is the intriguing stone imagery apparent throughout the novel. In Miguel De La Torre’s explication of Santería imagery, he characterizes stones (*otanes*) as central to rituals of Santería:

[W]hen the orishas left their community of Ilé-Ifé, what remained were stones resonating with their ashé. Today these stones can be found scattered among ordinary rocks....these special stones are likely to be found near each orisha’s habitat: one can expect to find Ochosi’s stones in the forest, Yemayá’s by the seashore, and Oshún’s by the riverbank.⁶⁵

For the *orishas*, stones are a way of moving *ashé* (power). In *The Messenger*, stones are most often connected to words and expression. When Aida’s mother meets with Calazán, for example, “their words turn to stones.”⁶⁶ Also, Enriqueta explains that Aida finally dies when she

"brought up the unbroken stone of her great love."⁶⁷ After great injury, Aida says that, "My tongue was a brick, one of those stones on the ground. It was painful and hard to do, but I moved the stone and said I wanted to see Enrico."⁶⁸ In an intriguingly multi-elemental, synesthetic depiction, Aida's friend, Amable Casanova, describes seeing Aida's story in an aquamarine stone. She says, "When the stone's ready to open—that's what it's called when the stone's going to show you the future—then a kind of mist comes out of the aquamarine, a smoke like wine; it gives you the feeling the stone is turning to liquid. And in that liquid all things are seen."⁶⁹ Here, the aquamarine stone—a combination of water ("aqua") and stone—gives off a mist (which is evocative of fire) and changes into a liquid in which the story is revealed.⁷⁰ This connection of stones to words and expression supports the idea of text itself constitutes a form of ritual, and that the pronunciation or reading of words is a similar movement of *ashé* as that which might be accomplished in a more traditional form of ceremony.

Ultimately, these metanarratives highlight the tragic love between Enrico and Aida, as Dominga whispers to Aida that "Yemayá is a queen...but she bows in reference to King Changó."⁷¹ Dominga's whispers add to the polyvocality of the novel, providing another register of voice—a storytelling one—in the novel, one which frequently whispers the stories of the *orishas* to Aida. These whispered stories illuminate the parallels between the novel's overlapping and echoing narratives. Whispering is an important register of voice in the novel, not only in Dominga's stories of the *orishas*, but also in the hoarseness and the meaning which can be read at the microcosmic level of the throat.

An example of this drama takes place when the journalist, Peter Navarro, reads a letter he received from Enrico. According to Enriqueta's account, "his hoarseness occasionally disappeared, and then his true voice could be heard, a deep voice that didn't sound particularly old. But this wouldn't last very long, and in a few minutes he became tongue-tied, the rest of his words trapped in his throat. Then his voice became raspy, as hoarse and ragged as before." She says that, "it was as if the mere mention of the name, Enrico Caruso, strangled him."⁷² Here, the throat is the source (or at least location) of the identity, the "true voice." Given the polyvocal nature of overall novel, the claim that such a thing as a "true voice" exists is a great one, which makes what happens at the level of the throat crucial. Thus, when Caruso describes his own throat as "sacred,"⁷³ it is not only that his throat is the source of his art and his livelihood, but shows that he recognizes the throat as the location of his very identity. Similarly,

during the ceremony at the lagoon, Aida describes feeling a “stabbing pain in my throat again, my whole body shuddered with pain: it was my life, not Enrico’s, that was changing at the bottom of the lagoon.”⁷⁴ Aida, too, acknowledges that her identity is located in her throat, the source and locus of voice and individuality.

If, as I have claimed above, words themselves can constitute the movement of *ashé* as in a Santería ceremony, then the reading of a book can itself be considered a performance of a ceremony. This is particularly true of *The Messenger*, which evokes the sacred through polyvocality and embedded, nonlinear narratives and metanarratives (narrative which themselves invoke, reflect, and mirror sacred time and space). In addition to these more rhetorical elements, there are other aspects of the novel which lead the reader through overtly ritualistic acts. The first text the reader encounters after the title page and publication date is a dedication page—usual in a novel—but this dedication page first expresses gratitude and then honors the memory of a loved one.⁷⁵ Beginning with a statement of gratitude positions the reader with a certain state of mind with which to begin the reading, a state of mind appropriate for beginning a ceremony. By acknowledging the ancestors, in a sense, the dedicatory page evokes sacred time, by acknowledging the existence of the past in the present time.

Following the dedication page is a page with three lines of the Ungaretti poem⁷⁶ I have already discussed. As the epigraph calls attention to sacred time and space (the “burning on a hill” evokes for me a scene of ritual), the epigraph functions to demarcate the sacred space of the text. The following page is another ritual act, as it has the exclamation, “*A Messenger s’avanzi!*” (“Messenger, come forth!”).⁷⁷ This exclamation functions as an invocation, calling forward this messenger-being. In my reading of the text as a ceremony, this is similar to the invitation made to the *orishas*, or any other mythic beings, in the context of a ceremony or prayer. Such a messenger figure is directly addressed twice in the novel: first, when Enrico asks about the drum which Aida characterizes as a messenger during the *ebbó* ceremony at the lagoon,⁷⁸ and later when Felipe Alam, the man at Yuan Pei Fu’s house, explains Fu’s message to Aida as being that “you cannot struggle against the messenger that is yours.”⁷⁹ The messenger is the vehicle for the message, not the message itself—as the physical object of a novel is the messenger of the larger experience of the text, or the message, which is constructed and experienced by the reader.

The very presence and interaction of the deeply situated metanarrative within *The Messenger* echoes Eliade’s description of what happens to a

participant in a ceremony taking place within sacred space: “he reproduces on the human scale the system of rhythmic and reciprocal conditioning influences that characterizes and constitutes a world, that, in short, defines any universe.”⁸⁰ In other words, the microcosmic alignment of the participant in the ceremony with the larger “rhythmic and reciprocal conditioning influences that characterizes and constitutes a world” – what I argue is analogous to the metanarratives contained within *The Messenger* – puts the participant in a position for direct communication with the divine. This allows the reader to perceive the message as it is made manifest through the enactment of the reading process.

That the (re)construction of a story is a collaborative process is emphasized in the novel not only by the polyvocality of the texts and the number of people and sources Enriqueta must consult in order to learn about the past, but also in her direct encounters with these people. Her mother denies the possibility of any ultimate authorial authority when she tells Enriqueta in the midst of telling her story, “I’m not the one telling you this story, Enriqueta, because when I look into your eyes you’re the one telling it to me.”⁸¹ At the end of this section, Aida elaborates on the process of storytelling, saying, “I’ve told you the story knowing that deep down you already knew it. I’ve pulled one thread, pulled it out of your soul. Your memories and mine came together and walked together all these months, and today the story is finished, it ends here, with me. . . . Let’s write the words together. *The End*.”⁸² Here, she emphasizes not only the collaborative nature of storytelling, as the reader of the book is responsible for her own construction of meaning through her interaction with the author’s text, but also the multiplicity of locations at which stories occur: they are experiences of embodiment, as the story takes place in Enriqueta’s eyes (as it does in the reader’s eyes, taking in the words on the page);⁸³ but they are also spiritual experiences, with their ultimate residence in the soul.

Though Aida speaks the (textually) magic words “*The End*” here, there is a final section in Enriqueta’s words. This coda of sorts reinforces Aida’s claim that stories reside in the soul – or rather, that stories are encoded in our very existence. Benito Terry, a physician familiar with Enrico’s death, describes the mystery of his death in specifically literary terms: “for those who believe in destiny, things happened as they had to happen. Caruso couldn’t escape the libretto, he couldn’t skip a line. Fatality is the only opera we never have to study: we’re born knowing it by heart.”⁸⁴ Story is destiny: it structures our expectations and experience of life.

In Otero's consideration of the Cuban diasporic literature written by Valdés and Infante, she says that "the re-creation of ritual also invokes the possibility of the transformation of the initiated reader into a different imaginative field. . . . The relationship of powerful words, as uttered when read by an audience, to transforming the moment of inhabiting a text, is an important matter to consider when dealing with texts that indeed *evoke* this response."⁸⁵ I argue that Mayra Montero's *The Messenger* is a text which similarly evokes this response, in the ways in which it, like the work of Valdés and Infante, is inscribed by ritual and religion in its content, rhetorical strategies, and narrative structure. Especially in its use of Santería practices, the novel exemplifies the dynamic nature of traditions emergent from transatlantic diasporic cultures, as Santería itself is a religion "emerging from Yoruba-and Catholic-derived forms of religious expression . . . a New World, neo-African religion."⁸⁶ In her application of what Falola and Childs characterize as the Creolization model of African diaspora analysis, Reid describes Santería as "forged by . . . a meshing based on adaptation, mutual influence, combination, and representation of the sacred[.] Santería evolved from polycultural African and European belief systems by worshiping the orishas, the pantheon of Yourba gods, behind the image of Catholic saints."⁸⁷ When Montero shows the interactions of Santería (with its polycultural foundation) with the Chinese and Chinese-Cuban spiritual traditions, she undergirds her novel with a complex foundation requiring that the reader understand not only the historical foundations of Cuba's complicated cultural and ethnic composition, but the ways in which these components have interacted and resulted in uniquely Afro- and Chinese-Cuban cultures.

The very reading of such texts function as an initiation, as the more one reads of such texts, the more comfortable one is with history, languages, layered narratives, and presentation of ceremony and ritual. By being so densely packed with these elements, *The Messenger* creates a form of initiation for a reader; by the end of the novel is reached, the reader has been led not only through depictions of ceremony, but received personal insights as well. Even for the reader who only reads *The Messenger* once, the novel has trained her to navigate and negotiate among these diverse languages and ceremonial practices. For the next book she reads, she will be a much more informed—or initiated—reader. As one reviewer explained, the multiple narratives themselves "create a chain-like *ékuele* connecting past to future."⁸⁸ In Otero's analysis, the "reader and author, then, with each reading, invokes a sacred memory, or memory as a sacred bridge to the past."⁸⁹ In the case of *The Messenger*, the sacred bridge

evoked is not only to the past, but to the larger *ganz andere*, or ineffable realms. In the bigger context of culturally hegemonic forces, the maintenance of such bridges are crucial for the continuation and preservation of individual cultural identities. The ceremony enacted by the readers' interaction with this text provides a unique path not only for the reader but also the *orishas* of which she reads. This path, together with the reader's initiation which takes place within the ceremonial confines of the text, allows for and leads to subsequently more nuanced and deeper readings and experiences of the ineffable.

NOTES

1. Mayra Montero, *The Messenger*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.), 1999.

2. Lizabeth Parvisini-Gebert, *Literature of the Caribbean* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Publishing Company, 2009), 149.

3. Mayra Montero, "The Great Bonanza of the Antilles," in *Healing Cultures: Art and Religion as Curative Practices in the Caribbean and its Diaspora*, ed. Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, (Palgrave Macmillan: New York), 199.

4. Though "ritual" and "ceremony" are often used interchangeably, they are different etymologically, and should be differentiated in their use. "Ceremony" comes from the Latin *caerimonia* (via Middle English), which had meanings of sacredness and reverence, while "ritual" is from the Latin *rituālis*, "relating to religious ceremonies." In my usage, I use ritual when referring to actions (the rites) and ceremony to refer to a performance of these activities. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "ceremony *n*," "ritual *n*."

5. Matt D. Childs and Toyin Falola, "The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World: Methodology and Research," in *The Yoruban Diaspora in the Atlanta World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 4.

6. For a more detailed discussion of how scholars have designated Yorubaland, see, e.g., Michele Reid, "The Yoruba in Cuba: Origins, Identities, and Transformations," in *The Yoruban Diaspora in the Atlanta World*, ed. Falola and Childs, 111-129.

7. Childs and Falola, "The Yoruba Diaspora," 5.

8. My use of the word "coolie" here reflects the reclamation of the word by scholars of the nineteenth century Chinese slave diaspora, who use it to designate a historically and racially specific group of slaves brought from China to the Americas. See Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves of Cuba*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008) for a thoughtful discussion of scholarly use of the term.

9. Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, xxi.

10. The Teatro Nacional was in fact bombed during Caruso's 1920 performance of *Aida*, and there were rumors of mafia involvement as well as of Caruso having a secret love affair with a Cuban woman. However, the rest of the story is Montero's own creation. See Paravisini-Gebert, *Literature of the Caribbean*.

11. In this article, I refer to Enrico Caruso by his last name when referring to the historical figure, but by “Enrico” when referring to the character of Enrico Caruso as imagined by Montero.

12. As in much of Montero’s work, Santería is described in and informs much of the novel. (See Elizabeth Coonrod Martinez, “Passion on the Page,” *Américas* (September-October 2008): 46-51.) As much of Santería culture borrows from Yoruba culture—*orishas*, *babalawos*, *Yemayá*, to only name three of countless examples—it is a key example of the transatlantic transmission of cultures embedded in the novel. See, e.g., Reid, “The Yourba in Cuba: Origins, Identities, and Transformations.”

13. Montero, *Messenger*, 11.

14. Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, (New York: PAJ Publications: 1986), 79.

15. Turner, *Anthropology of Performance*, 79-80.

16. Turner’s discussion of the intersections between performance and ritual is particularly useful in my consideration of *The Messenger*, given the significance of opera and music throughout the novel. See Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*, and *The Anthropology of Experience*, eds. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner.

17. Solimar Otero, “Spirit Possession, Havana, and the Night: Listening and Ritual in Cuban Fiction,” *Western Folklore* 66: 1&2 (Winter & Spring 2007), 45.

18. Otero, “Spirit Possession, Havana, and the Night,” 45.

19. While I recognize that Eliade is a controversial character in the fields of history and comparative religion, I find his definition of “hierophany” to be useful in my consideration of the novel’s sacred space. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard Trask, (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, Inc., 1987), 26.

20. Montero, *Messenger*, 38.

21. Montero, *Messenger*, 11.

22. Montero, *Messenger*, 12.

23. Montero, *Messenger*, 175.

24. My own reading and analysis of the novel was of the English translation, which is why I make reference to the English title “*The Messenger*.” The idea of polyvocality in translation offers many possibilities for analysis, starting with Bakhtin’s theories of heteroglossia, in terms of how these different voices emerge and influence each other and the overall meaning. For my purposes here, however, it must suffice to only point out the potential polyvocal nature of translation. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky, 1965 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009).

25. See Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, and Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986).

26. Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 6.

27. Rudolf Otto’s term for the “wholly other.” See, e.g., Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy; An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey, 1923, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958).

28. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 10.

29. Montero, *Messenger*, n.p.

30. Montero, *Messenger*, 1.

31. Montero, *Messenger*, 17.

32. "Lucumí" is the term used to designate the Yoruba diaspora in Cuba. According to Michele Reid, while many historians attribute the name to the northeastern Yoruba kingdom known as Ulkuman or Ulkami, other scholars speculate that the word "derived from the Yoruba common greeting, 'oluku mí' (my friend), and that slaves used this phrase to communicate to the new Yoruba-speaking captives arriving in Cuba to indicate that they were not alone in a foreign land." See Reid, "The Yoruba in Cuba," 115. See also, David Eltis, "The Diaspora of Yoruban Speakers, 1650-1865: Dimensions and Implications," in *The Yoruban Diaspora in the Atlanta World*, ed. Falola and Childs, 17-39.

33. Prayer itself illustrates the important point that a speech act itself can be a form of ritual.

34. The explosion itself, in its massive rupture of time and space (and acting as a marker of time before and time after the explosion), might itself be considered a kind of threshold. Indeed, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert identifies the inscription—"In Memory of the Bomb that Made Us Burn"—on the gold nugget embedded with a shard of wood which Enrico gives to Aida to commemorate their meeting as the novel's leitmotif which ties all of the locations and events together. See Paravisini-Gebert, *Literature of the Caribbean*, 150. In light of her determination of this inscription as central to the novel, the explosion certainly qualifies as a form of threshold experience.

35. Montero, *Messenger*, 25.

36. Montero, *Messenger*, 26.

37. Montero, *Messenger*, 12-13.

38. Montero, *Messenger*, 13.

39. Similarly, Aida's daughter Enriqueta (her name itself significant as a form of her father's name) adopts different names in her quest for her story, such as the scene in which she introduces herself as "Enriqueta Gómez" (instead of her given name, Enriqueta Cheng) to Pérez Navarro, the journalist who knew her father. It is telling that, while he accepts her pseudonym in person, he later sends her a letter addressed to her real name, showing his familiarity with multiple identities and polyvocality. See Montero, *Messenger*, 101.

40. Aida notes that the first time she tells Caruso her name, he repeats her name as, "'Aïda' ... putting the stress on the *i*." Montero, *Messenger*, 34.

41. Montero, *Messenger*, 13.

42. Montero, *Messenger*, 13.

43. Montero, *Messenger*, 89.

44. Even more revealing in this scene is Calazán's use of a tone of voice which Aida recognizes as "the proud, mocking tone he used when he spoke in the name of the warrior *orishas*" (69)—not only is this scene one of complex polyvocality, but it also illustrates the direct connection between polyvocality and the divine. See Montero, *Messenger*, 69.

45. Otero, "Spirit Possession, Havana, and the Night," 49.

46. Otero, "Spirit Possession, Havana, and the Night," 48.

47. Otero, "Spirit Possession, Havana, and the Night," 51.

48. Additionally, Montero's journalism work has led her to travel around and write about the Caribbean islands as well as Central America. See Martínez, "Passion on the Page," 48.

49. Montero, *Messenger*, 12.

50. Montero, *Messenger*, 34.

51. Montero, *Messenger*, 34.

52. Montero, *Messenger*, 73.

53. Montero, *Messenger*, 22.

54. Montero, *Messenger*, 23.

55. While I briefly trace this drama elemental interaction, it is a strong metanarrative that it offers much promise for future work, tracing the appearance and movement of stone, water, and fire throughout the novel and interpreting these movements in the context of their connection to the *orishas*.

56. Montero, *Messenger*, 75.

57. Montero, *Messenger*, 75.

58. Montero, *Messenger*, 76.

59. Montero, *Messenger*, 204.

60. Martínez, "Passion on the Page," 51.

61. Montero, *Messenger*, 176.

62. Montero, *Messenger*, 91.

63. Montero, *Messenger*, 86.

64. Montero, *Messenger*, 86.

65. Miguel A. De La Torre, *Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 135.

66. Montero, *Messenger*, 20.

67. Montero, *Messenger*, 114.

68. Montero, *Messenger*, 196.

69. Montero, *Messenger*, 181.

70. That Casanova sees this story take place in a liquid is reminiscent of the earlier *ebbó* ceremony at the lagoon, where Enrico sees the story of his life in the water: "his homeland in Naples, his dead mother and father, and his own throat, the flame that the water of death would soon put out." See Montero, *Messenger*, 90. Enrico, like Calazán, cannot see beyond the binary conflict between fire and water.

71. Montero, *Messenger*, 89-90.

72. Montero, *Messenger*, 96.

73. Montero, *Messenger*, 26.

74. Montero, *Messenger*, 89.

75. A loved one who shares the name "Enriqueta Cheng" with one of the novel's main characters, which starts the book by complicating the binary of fiction and nonfiction, as it will later complicate the binary of water and fire.

76. My own very loose translation of the epigraph:

Space and time burned on the hill,

As your messenger,

As the dream, divine death.

77. Montero, *Messenger*, 1.

78. Montero, *Messenger*, 42.

79. Montero, *Messenger*, 163.

80. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 173.

81. Montero, *Messenger*, 200.

82. Montero, *Messenger*, 204.

83. How this interaction would function differently if this novel were being listened to as an audiobook or being read aloud is a slightly different question, though as they both involve sense-experience, I think they would be similar (or at least analogous) situations. In the situation of an audiobook, perhaps, the loss of the tactile and visual experience of the arrangement of words on a page might be compensated by the extra emphasis on and experience of the aural sound of the words.

84. Montero, *Messenger*, 212.

85. Otero, "Spirit Possession, Havana, and the Night," 50.

86. Reid, "The Yoruba in Cuba: Origins, Identities, and Transformations," 119.

87. Reid, "The Yoruba in Cuba: Origins, Identities, and Transformations," 119.

88. "The Messenger (Book)," *Publishers Weekly* 246.12 (1999): 69.

89. Though Otero's discussion is specifically focused on the construction of memory for an exiled community, I would argue that all generations share a relationship of exile to their past, in that complete knowledge or recovery of it is ultimately impossible. See Otero, "Spirit Possession, Havana, and the Night," 54.