Gammal-Ortiz, Sharif El

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que se observan tanto en los campos como en las ciudades”. La economía dominicana tampoco genera los empleos suficientes para disminuir el alto desempleo que agobia a casi la mitad de la población de la isla, mientras crece la informalidad para la supervivencia.

El libro ilustra sobre el cambio de políticas y sus consecuencias, sobre las transformaciones sociales y económicas, pero no se detiene a analizar ese modelo que se mide sólo con indicadores de crecimiento y no se centra en el factor humano. Es probable que si en otra oportunidad un escrito como éste comenzara por las paradojas de la llamada revolución capitalista, se buscaran sus causas y consecuencias, podamos tener un análisis crítico del modelo económico vigente en República Dominicana que tanta falta hace.


Sharif El Gammal-Ortiz
English Department
University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras
sharif.elgammal@gmail.com

“Ultimately, the reader recognizes that the performance of self is the self” (129)—the heart and creative engine of Edgardo Pérez Montijo’s analysis. The idea galvanizes what he initially set out to perform in his introduction, and which I will get to in short order. For now, the sentence—an axiom, if you come to think of it—ties not only the three novels under discussion together but also the theoretical groundwork making such a sobering exploration possible. Aside from applying the theories of cultural and social anthropologists, critics, and philosophers like Victor Turner, Joseph Roach, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler, among others, to lay the bedrock on which to build the scaffolding of the argument, Pérez Montijo uses the earlier works of Earl Lovelace to speak intelligently about The Dragon Can’t Dance (1979), The Wine of Astonishment (1982), and Lovelace’s 1996 novel, the one winning him the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize, Salt. Although he doesn’t directly analyze apprenticeship novels like While Gods Are Falling and The Schoolmaster, or 2011’s Is Just a Movie, Pérez Montijo
mentioning these alongside concise discussions of the play Jestina’s Calypso, the book of essays Growing in the Dark, and the short story “Joebell and America,” gives the reader a comprehensive overview—a feel—of Lovelace and his writing dexterously in only 174 pages, not including, of course, the bibliography and index.

Pérez Montijo breaks his book into five parts: an intro examining the critical corpus of Lovelace’s fiction, as well as an exposition of the theory to be implemented; chapter one titled “Doing Things with Words: The Performance of Language in The Wine of Astonishment”; “Witnessing the Performance: Actors and Spectators” in The Dragon Can’t Dance,” chapter two; and lastly, chapter three, “Playing Mas: Carnival as a Discursive Field in Salt.” A brief yet thorough conclusion (four pages) brings the study to a close. For those interested in meta-literature, Pérez Montijo accomplishes a feat similar to Italo Calvino’s in If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler, where, apart from the infinite procreation of mini-narratives manifesting themselves throughout the frame story, a quick glance of the chapter titles in the table of contents reads as its own narrative before the “actual” novel gets underway. Stories within stories. Substituting Calvino’s narratological achievement for Pérez Montijo’s exegetical one, the reader sees “Doing Things with Words” interlocking and creating a narrative sequence with “Witnessing the Performance,” in turn doing the same with “Playing Mas.” Thus, metonymically, the analyses of the different aspects of Lovelace’s oeuvre, panning in at times while out at others, impresses the notion that reading equates to seeing Lovelace’s fiction from an inscrutable distance as well as on a Petri dish, or on a slide under a microscope. Such detailed, conscientious criticism of Lovelace was lacking not only from the body of Caribbean but also from that of world letters. No longer overdue, the scholar and enthusiast alike have Pérez Montijo to thank. Yes, it has arrived.

So as not to rename the theorists the author in his study employs, or to randomly select a passage from the book suggesting I opened it haphazardly and started blathering, I let Pérez Montijo himself take center stage, and cite three instances from each of his three chapters combining complexity of thought with clear, succinct language. From “Doing Things with Words” dealing with Wine: “From the legislature, Ivan is the only one in a position to have helped in the legalization of the Spiritual Baptist Church...when Bee leads the congregation in the now legal worshipping ceremony, they fail to receive the Spirit. They ring the bells and sing as loudly as before, but they never attain the level of rapture for which they yearn” (75). Pérez Montijo states that, for as loud and exuberant a performance the Spiritual Baptists put on, it can’t but help remain, with its legalization, an empty show. Bolo dying, and how in life Lovelace juxtaposes his confident silence, brute force, cruelty, and
the importance the act of transgressing has for him in terms of his own personal autonomy, to the fear, submissiveness, and impotence embodied by, say, Bee Dorcas, places the reader in a headspace where these two dynamisms compete so heightening the other. Strong body language versus what the master (the Trinidian colonial government) permits you to do. Pérez Montijo, in quick sentences that snap shut jamming fingers, articulates this gradually, visibly in his scrutiny of Wine.

From “Witnessing the Performance” exploring Dragon: “[Aldrick] finds a fundamental contradiction with the dance of the dragon. Although he has always considered it a symbol for rebellion and assertion, he realizes it has always been performed in an attempt to attract attention and appeal to others...rather than bringing them respect and a sense of identity, it has served to keep them subject to a power that is not their own” (111). You can’t find fault with the master here, Pérez Montijo appears to be voicing. Aldrick blames no one save himself. He desires the very self-rule Bolo with his warrior spirit—the true Spirit, really—experienced, but which, unfortunately, also cost him his life. The tension, no longer between the Trinidian colonial government and the Spiritual Baptist community, now resides in the minds of the Dragon’s characters. Pérez Montijo psychoanalyzes Aldrick, Sylvia, Fisheye, Philo, and Pariag, picking their brains—as Lovelace before him—apart. The reason for him purposefully committing the anachronism and deciding to analyze the 1982 novel first, and the 1979 novel second, maps out the less complex sociocultural conflict dealing with freedom of religion in Wine, exercises, and finally prepares the reader’s sensibilities for the more abstracted subtleties found in the heads of Dragon’s characters. Both novels, however, treat freedom and the lack thereof as themes, and Pérez Montijo emphasizes this in chapters one and two. Salt, the most complex and schizophrenic of the three novels examined, couples Wine’s sociocultural conflict with a propensity towards the psychoanalyses of Dragon’s protagonists. So you can say chapter three orchestrates a fugue between the preceding chapters.

From “Playing Mas: Carnival as a Discursive Field in Salt”: “A scandal about corruption among National Party officials is debated in public as a battle of symbols and representations. While Sonan’s supporters point to supernatural events that indicate the end of the National Party and its government, the official party fights back by inviting leaders from Africa and India to visit Trinidad. Political issues are replaced by slogans, and superficial gestures. Sonan’s entrance into the world of politics is really an entrance into the world of Carnival” (169). Pérez Montijo figures Bolo and Aldrick into Sonan. He argues, “Sonan continues his never-ending performance of self, always looking for a place to insert himself in a nation where Carnival reigns supreme” (168-169). A blend
between Bolo hell-bent in resisting the Trinidadian colonial government so it all goes down HIS way, and Aldrick who, aware his dragon dance only wrests from and contributes nothing to his identity, splits himself in half becoming the actor/spectator of his person during Carnival, Sonan plays the cynic par excellence. The cynicism operating here devastates the way an obliging politician devastates, acknowledging the illusion—the bullshit! Pérez Montijo, knowing Lovelace’s implied author wants to make this apparent, fleshes out these and other ideas without ever sounding pedantic or resorting to essentialist notions.

Sobering. Sobering and delightful. My answer, were you to ask what I felt reading Pérez Montijo’s study of Lovelace’s fiction. Abstract tension tempered with clear, accessible language. English that flows. Another answer, were you to ask me the same question twice. And if a third I’d say rigorous, but not for once making me feel I wasn’t breathing in copious amounts of fresh Atlantic—or, for that matter, Caribbean—air, or sitting with my sweetheart by the seashore, taking in the sun and having the ocean lapping my feet and tickling my toes. Pérez Montijo makes the reader an onlooker, as s/he sees beyond the boundary, so to speak, to nod respectfully C.L.R. James’s way, since he amply uses cricket the Performance when analyzing Lovelace’s writing (146-147). Please note the capital P, and the fact the author doesn’t confine his exegesis strictly to the longer narrative works. I stated this before. He just really turns Wine, Dragon, and Salt inside out. And not by any means of mental acrobatics, but by saying the following: “As the novels develop, the reader is drawn by the implied author’s performance onto the stage where the characters perform their own lives, and struggle with the choices and possibilities available to them” (25). How Pérez Montijo positions the act of “to perform” in the sentence—“where the characters perform their own lives”—has mountains to do with the correlated act of “to explore.” How through the performance they’re exploring who they are, and who they’re not. The word for the day, ladies and gentlemen—Explore! Explore Caribbean writers who are not your usual subjects, and you’ll see the world not only of West Indian writing but of writing in general break so hard it will have no choice but to fall asleep satisfied.