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Author: Camilo González

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Review on Marco Katz Montiel's *Music and Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature from our America*.

Camilo González¹

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Cultural studies have become more common in contemporary scholarly publications as academics dig deeper into the importance of understanding society through its cultural elements. Movies, paintings, books, and songs embody phenomena such as colonization, imperialism, chauvinism, poverty, discrimination, assimilation and other issues that need to be discussed at an academic level to expand our understanding of society. In 1916, Albert Duncan Yocum argued that a taste for music, literature and art plays a vital role in the development of a national identity that includes all the members of a nation. This taste, he stated, “furthers this national unity both through the promotion of the common culture which is essential to a truly social democracy, and through the creation of collective pride in

¹ Camilo is a student of English Language and Literature, and as such, his areas of interest are discourse analysis and cultural studies, respectively. He intends to continue his studies in the field of Linguistics.

national aesthetic achievements that constitute one of the finer phases of patriotism” (341). Although his stance was based on nationalistic ideas that characterized the early 20th century and the ideal of a homogeneous nation, referring specifically to the United States, his recognition of cultural elements, such as music and literature as essential to the formation of a cultural identity is relevant when reading Marco Katz Montiel’s work on American identity.

Yocum’s words are echoed in certain parts of Katz’s work, as the latter is well aware of the cultural and social power that the music industry has had for the last centuries. As he states, “the other effects [of culture control], such as promotion of national superiorities and the maintenance of ethnic stereotypes, whether planned or coincidental, arise as a corollary to these business plans” (7). Regardless of the different ideologies that could back up the claims of each author, both Yocum and Katz properly recognize the multicultural basis of American society. The discrepancies arise when one considers the use of the word ‘America’, as Katz understands it, not from the nationalistic point of view of Yocum. On the contrary, he understands it from a more culturally sensitive perspective, in which America refers not only to the whole continent, but to the various ethnic and cultural groups that have contributed to the creation of a heterogeneous identity, which can be understood through a study of musical influences. The influence of the Spanish language on the differences between the United States and America in Katz’s work is evident when one attempts to provide a continental analysis of a phenomenon. As Katz writes, “American music (...) encompassed the vast array of styles we had been trained to consider as distinctive forms. And then an obvious thought occurred to us, one that we had never heard expressed by our teachers of music or history: America is not a country but a continent” (xvii). This review will use the concepts of America and American at a continental level, while the concepts related to the United States will be referred to when referring to the context of *No-No Boy*.

In *Music and Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature from our America*, Marco Katz is concerned with how American identity is influenced by literary and musical works and “showing how the perspectives of ethnic disparagers on one side and exotic enthusiasts on another all unravel under scrutiny” (3). Cultural influences, he notes, go both ways and that is something that is not always considered by academics, making this book a valuable addition to cultural studies. United States’ imperialism has manifested through cultural means such as the ones mentioned at the beginning of this review and has influenced Latin American culture in several ways. Through different methods, and in a much more passive way, Latin America has influenced the formation of the American identity as a whole, as Katz writes in the prologue of his book about “Music of the Americas”, a project he developed with some friends to educate young students on the multicultural nature of such an iconic genre as jazz. Reflecting on that project he says “our scripted show and related study guides pointed out how jazz and rock as well as salsa and merengue came about as a result of events around the Caribbean, such as the Spanish-American War of 1898 (...)” (xvii). The importance of music in terms of the literary analysis is accurately explained by Katz when he states that “a reading of American music serves to pull the main character out of the narrow confines of a single nation and into a continental view that imbues the text with new meaning” (133), highlighting music’s vital role for the understanding of American culture and history.

In order to support his argument about music being a key component of American culture and that can be identified in literature, Katz refers to various American writers. As the title of the book indicates, the relationship between music and American identity is seen through literary works such as Gabriel García Márquez’ *El Amor en los Tiempos de Cólera*, Alejo Carpentier’s *Concierto Barroco*, and John Okada’s *No-No Boy* to name a few. In the first two chapters, Katz discusses the creation and legitimization of stereotypes, mainly due to marketing strategies (37). The film adaptation of *El Amor en los Tiempos de Cólera*, Katz argues, provides a representation of a Latin America filled with stereotypes

that only serve to deepen an already widespread idea of the southern hemisphere as a place of exotic cultures that are attractive to the North American readers of books such as Márquez's. In addition to Katz's arguments, other authors outside of Katz's theoretical framework have noted that this is a cultural phenomenon in which the Government of the United States played a central role by pushing musicals and films that would portray Latin Americans as exotic during the first half of the 20th century. For example, Philip Swanson writes, "such musicals could showcase Latin Americans as lively and happy, sexy and spectacular – the sort of people you could have a good time with or just gawp at in awe" (73), emphasizing the otherness that made the represented cultures so appealing.

Katz delves into the character of Filomeno's Master in Carpentier's *Concierto Barroco*, to describe the undefined space that Criollos (ethnic Europeans born in America) inhabit beyond America and Europe, a reference that provides Katz's arguments with depth. Katz explains that Americans of European descent are seen by other Americans as foreign, mainly due to their skin color and, sometimes, their privileged social status. As Americans, they are seen in Europe as foreign and exotic, a treatment that both Carpentier, in real life, and Filomeno's Master, in *Concierto Barroco*, experienced. It is through music that we can understand the character's experience, and Carpentier's to a certain point, as he shares his story with his friend Vivaldi, the baroque composer. Using Vivaldi's "Motezuma" as an intertext, Carpentier makes the Mexican Criollo realize that there is a connection between himself and America, even though he does not want to acknowledge it. This connection through baroque music, which he ignores while in America, mainly because he appears to be a foreigner in his native country, makes him realize that he does not belong in either culture; he is a hybrid just like American culture.

Related to Filomeno's experience in *Concierto Barroco*, Katz analyzes Zora Neale Hurston's *Seraph on the Swanee* in order to effectively illustrate her view of American culture as a mixture of influences, which he certainly achieves. Katz states that "throughout her career, Hurston demonstrates

how music and language emphasize imbricated identities in the Americas, with overlapping sites in which cultural transformations can take place without one group subsuming another” (101). According to Katz, the representation of coexisting cultures is seen through the character of Arvay, a young girl whose interests are not aligned with her cultural identity. Similarly, in Carpentier’s work, characters with African heritage, like Filomeno, are often associated with a more primitive musical culture, which is in clear contrast to the organized and evolved musical culture of Europe, an idea that Katz effectively disputes throughout the book. In Hurston’s book, she “makes it clear that Arvay does not love music or do well at it out of any physical similarity to African America stereotypes” (102). Such a different approach to cultural identities and racial stereotypes marks a clear contrast in the way different authors deal with those topics through music, even though Arvay’s musical interests are developed through religion.

Marco Katz also addresses the problem of a cultural identity that affected Japanese immigrants in America during the early 20th century and the following generations of Japanese Americans until after the end of the Second World War. Along with the cultural stigma carried by Japanese Americans during the conflict between the U.S. and Japan, their traditions made it hard for the Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans) to either integrate themselves into American culture or keep their Japanese heritage. The identity problems confronted by the Nisei are caused by political and cultural factors. As it was said before, the Japanese offensive in WWII against the United States prompted the latter to take preventive measures at a local level by imprisoning most Japanese immigrants, effectively isolating them from the rest of the population and stigmatizing a whole cultural group by casting a shadow of doubt onto their loyalty towards their new homes.

Katz refers to the conservative values of the Niseis’ parents , who not only disapproved of romantic relationships with non-Japanese Americans but who also resented their children for trying to assimilate to American culture, as Nisei from the United States, Canada and Peru can confirm. The

cultural dimension of the Japanese American struggle is identified by Katz in the musical elements of John Okada's *No-No Boy* and its protagonist, Ichiro. One of the points of convergence between *Seraph on the Sumanee* and *No-No Boy*, Katz argues, is "the seeming disappearance of the child as 'an unrecognizable shadow among the other shadows' also marks the parent as a shadow, a relic of a past that no longer matters" (123). This shadow of the past, works as one of the biggest influences in the formation of a Japanese American culture, as the Nisei see their parents' disapproval and wonder where they really do belong. Here, the role of music is key, as Katz argues that "Ichiro's performance of 'Sentimental Journey' simultaneously connects these young Japanese Americas with a hit of the era, and evokes a lyric associated with returning war veterans", showing a clear link between the inclination for American music and a sense of belonging. Moreover, the reluctance of the Japanese immigrants to adapt and accept American culture is portrayed through Ichiro's mother, as she resents him for his dedication to fit in, even to the point of destroying the music player she herself had bought for him.

Along with the pressure from their parents, the Nissei, and specifically Ichiro in *No-No Boy*, had to deal with a hostile attitude from other cultural groups from the United States as Katz explains. The importance of said hostility lies within its agents, who are not only white people but also other minority groups such as African Americans. Here, language plays a central role. "Okada's employment of vernacular terms for minority groups provides an example of the difficulty this text creates in academic situations in which readers are determined to believe that only white people engage in bigotry and that all others have been linked in solidarity by the common experience of oppression" (147). In this sense, Katz argues that *No-No Boy* reflects a reality that might not fight the established discourse of racial relations that Katz references, as the hostility and violence between ethnic minorities gave them a sense of legitimacy, by giving other minorities the responsibility of being 'the other', the actual minority that does not fit in the cultural scheme of the Americas. Moreover, Katz justifies his use of

Okada's work by stating that "*No-No Boy* strikes all the right chords to record the consonances and dissonances of life in America" (152), as it provides insight into cultural relations that might still be open to discussion.

In the final chapters of his book, Marco Katz reaffirms the importance of understanding musical identities when studying American culture, as, according to him, "the past creates new possibilities for an American future" (157). The universal value of music, regardless of stereotypes that place more value on certain musical practices, allows both the reader and the writer to relate to different cultures that, after all, might not be all that different. In this regard, and as Katz argues throughout the book, the colonization of America not only created a new culture from a variety of European and African cultures but also influenced the development of a European culture. This argument is well developed throughout *Music and Identity in Twentieth-Century Literature from our America*, as Katz provides various relevant examples to explain how music, literature, culture, and identity are intertwined. His musical background provides his theory with an interesting perspective, as Katz structures his arguments similarly to a music concert, making it as enjoyable and insightful as any professional orchestra piece. On a more personal note, Katz's *Music and Identity from our America* serves as a point of convergence for identities from all over America. In this sense, Katz writes towards the end of the book that the analysis of *No-No Boy* by his Chilean students "point out moments of emotional identification with these characters created so long ago and so far away" (153), a process that we, in Chile, can all read and experience through Katz's work.

In his closing thoughts, Katz refers again to the relevance of music when discussing sociopolitical phenomena in literary texts, as the musical identity of the American continent provides "non-hegemonic connections between nations of the Americas [that] would discover places of mutual interest or similar activity without insisting that these links remain permanent or that they apply in every case" (168). These connections, then, would strengthen the idea of American identity as

discussed in Katz's work. The enterprise of finding an identity for the Americas is not an easy feat, and it is not free of opposition from nationalist and particularist ideals. As Katz writes in the closing chapter of his book, "a rewarding musical composition should require time, effort, and some degree of discomfort" (174), requirements that make it worth working for, if we are truly looking to overcome the frontiers established by colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism.

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