Dorothy E. Mosby

Quince Duncan: Writing Afro-Costa Rican and Caribbean Identity. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014. xi + 198 pp. (Cloth US\$ 44.95)

In July 2015, 13-year-old Emiliano Venegas, a Costa Rican student of African descent, was denied entrance to his middle school located in an upper-class neighborhood of San José. The reason: Emiliano was wearing dreadlocks. Quince Duncan, Afro-Costa Rican author and activist, has been writing about these sorts of everyday experience, which represent the persistent denial of Costa Rican black cultural heritage through the imposition of the myth of a white homogenous nation. Dorothy Mosby makes an important contribution to the field of Afro-Latin American Studies and literature by presenting the first comprehensive study of all of Duncan's published short stories and novels. Her book is composed of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion.

The introduction focuses on Duncan's life and his development as an author of a distinctive narrative style that he calls Afro-Realism. Afro-Realism can also be understood as a decolonizing literary device as it relates to "the search for an affirmation of a black identity that rejects identification with the colonizers by identifying with the colonized, and coming to terms with this history and the resulting social dynamics and hierarchies" (p. 14). Mosby's analysis of Duncan's short stories and novels provides a distinct view of the experience of first-, second-, and third-generation West Indian immigrants, their complex relationship to their distant native land, their contribution to the Costa Rican nation, and the role of language, oral tradition, and religion in the process of identity formation.

In the first chapter, "Short Fiction," Mosby analyzes *El pozo y una carta* ("The Pit and a Letter," 1969), a collection of ten stories entitled *Una canción en la madrugada* ("Dawn Song," 1970), and *La rebelión Pocomía y otros relatos* ("The Pocomía Rebellion and Other Stories," 1979). In "Dawn Song," she explores the voice of *samanfo*, an Ashanti term that describes the collective spirit and legacy of Duncan's ancestors. In "The Pocomía Rebellion ...," she analyzes Duncan's use of religion to describe the cultural diversity among West Indian immigrants and their common struggle against the hegemonic national government. She also examines the theme of resistance in *La leyenda de José Gordon* ("The Legend of José Gordon") and racial and gender dynamics in *Goo-o-o-o-al*. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Anancy stories, West African animal trickster tales that "teach survival in conditions of systematized oppression" (p. 46).

In Chapter 2, "Novels of Identity," Mosby's analysis of the novel *Hombres curtidos* ("Weathered Men," 1971), and *Los cuatro espejos* ("The Four Mirrors,"

1973) centers on cultural reconciliation: “the fact of being black of West Indian descent and Costa Rican, in defiance of *La leyenda blanca*” (p. 50). Chapter 3, “Dismantling Myths,” analyzes three novels—*La paz del pueblo* (“Peace in the Town,” 1978), *Kimbo* (1989), and *A Message from Rosa/Un mensaje de Rosa* (2007)—and focuses on the Ashanti religion and the honoring of the belief in the existence of ancestral spirits. The idea of *samanfo* is further explored in *Kimbo* through the analysis of the many voices present, those of ancestors and members of the community, providing a particularly inclusive and unbiased view of Costa Rican history. *A Message from Rosa*, subtitled “*An African Diaspora Novel in Short Stories*,” is especially significant as Duncan’s first published work of fiction written in English; the bilingual text represents Afro-Costa Ricans’ relationship to English as their heritage language. Divided in three parts, (“Roots,” “The Middle Passage,” and “The Diaspora,”), *A Message from Rosa* reflects on the historical experience that connects the African Diaspora in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. This connection is also seen in the common culture of resistance still present in the twentieth century through the story of Rosa Parks, the inspiration for the book title, and the short story “Young Martin,” based on the life of Martin Luther King Jr.

In the last chapter, “Dismantling the Myths,” Mosby analyzes *Final de la Calle* (*Dead-End Street*, 1979) and the dramatic text *El trepasolo* (“The lone climber”) as two novels that depart from Duncan’s previous work by centering on both cultural and historical studies of Costa Rican society. She focuses on the aftermath of the 1948 civil war to explore discourses of national identity and their subsequent consolidation as the “white legend” narrative. Mosby’s book describes an experience that echoes that of Afro-descendants throughout the Caribbean, from Belize to Panama, contributing to a better understanding of the commonalities as well as the divergences of the everyday experience of being black in Latin America.

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