

of *voudou* were confiscated and found their way to American museums where they remain to this day. Under Vincent, however, a need to build Haiti's reputation abroad became again paramount and the old need to distance Haiti from folk practices, including ritual, was re-asserted.

This brief overview of the text cannot do justice to Ramsey's meticulous reading of historical documents as she pieces together the ways in which the policing of "magic," "sorcery," "vodou," "ritual," "sortilèges," "vaudou," "voodoo," details continuous and invasive attempts to control the Haitian peasantry. Given its precision of detail, one wonders why Ramsey did not extend the study to include a consideration of the treatment of *vodou* beyond the Duvalier years, and, even, since the 2010 earthquake, but I suspect that the text will inspire study of ensuing periods as well as considerations of how the policing of Haitian spirituality has also, perhaps, altered its manifestations through time in ways that have yet to be measured or clearly understood.

**Monique-Adelle Callahan. 2011. *Between the Lines: Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 208 pp. ISBN-10: 0199743061.**

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**M**onique-Adelle Callahan's book, *Between the Lines: Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics* is a transnational, tri-lingual, and translational comparative study of an African American, Afro-Cuban, and Afro-Brazilian female poets. Callahan examines the language of the poetry of resistance, contestation, and construction of new identities within the liminal spaces allowed *Afrodescendentes* in the Americas. The three poets, she argues, engage the politics of racial transnationalism and trans-hemispheric struggles to define the globalized struggles of African Diaspora peoples for racial freedom and gender equality. Callahan historicizes her reading of the three poets within the immediate (post)slavery cultural and historical background of Cuba, USA, and Brazil, and argues that African struggles against their enslavement undermined European hegemonic narratives of their discovery and conquest of the Americas. She engages race and sex/gender theories very briefly to unpack the socio-political, cultural,

and economic constructs and applications marshalled against people of African descent in the three nations.

The work of Frances Harper is explored in her celebration of transnational heroes and heroines of *Afrodescendientes* such as Zumbi, the last king of the Palmares or Quilombo in Brazil, and General Antonio Maceo, an Afro-Cuban leader of Cuban independence movement to show her transgression of national, historical, cultural, and gender boundaries. Callahan argues that by celebrating Zumbi and Maceo, Harper appropriates and collapses their particular 1850s geo-political histories with the historical African American struggle for racial equality in the United States of America, complicated by a USA Fugitive Slave Law that threatened to delegitimize African free slaves and their communities in 1850. In the process, Callahan stipulates that Harper manages to enact a transnational re-conceptualization of identity for African Americans, while sowing seeds for Pan-African consciousness. Through poetic reconfiguration a Zumbi's best days, Callahan argues that Harper mythologizes and hence, transfigures Zumbi as a metaphor for all enslaved Africans who fought for their liberation from slavery in the New World. Similarly Harper eulogizes the Afro-Cuban *independendista*, Antonio Maceo y Grajales, and transforms him into a Pan-African Christ-like figure in the resistance against racial/colonial oppression. Through Maceo, Harper critiques the racial divide in the USA, and the re-imposition of white supremacy rules of social relations, and advocates New World Black transnationalism in national cultural and historical boundaries as modes of resistance to racial oppression.

In "Signs of Blood: Redemption Songs and 'American' poetry beyond Borders" (pp. 59-73), Callahan, advocates a reading of African Diaspora poetics of spirituality as a re-visionary appropriation of the history of the ancient Israelites, saturated with narratives of slavery and redemption in Egypt and Babylon, to globalize the history of Africans held in bondage in the Americas. The poems "Deliverance" and "Redención" engage the Book of Exodus in the Bible as an allegory to compare the post-abolition periods in Cuba and the USA, and to project prophetic histories of liberation. Callahan is careful to note that Ayala differs from Harper in their envisioning of the particular time frames when freedom will be achieved. Nonetheless, both express the collective desire of enslaved Africans for liberation and acts of collective forgiveness for their enslavers. Forgiveness is projected as the way forward for the reconstruction of national unities born of reconciliation not revenge or separation. Callahan points out that the two poets do not uncritically appropriate the Exodus narrative without qualifying the differences between the story of the Israelites and themselves. While the Biblical Exodus is facilitated by the sacrifice of innocent Egyptian children, the freedom of enslaved

Africans in Cuba will only come through self-sacrifice of the enslaved propitiate the sin of racism generated by the deliberate misinterpretation of the Bible to justify slavery. Christ like, the newly freed African must become the mediator between God and white Euro-Cubans who continue to languish in the sin of racism.

In “Write the Vision: Gender and Nation beyond Emancipation” (74-95), Callahan compares Ayala’s “A mi raza” (To My Race, 1888) and “El arroyuelo y la flor” (The Stream and the Flower, 1893) with Harper’s “We are Rising” (1876) and Eliza Harris (1854) to expose post abolition racism and sexism in both Cuba and the USA. By this time, Callahan states, the “transnational aspect of racial uplift theories in the USA” were already well rooted in Black conversation (75). Consequently, Ayala’s “A mi raza” is seen as a direct challenge and rejection of the racist pamphlet in Cuba that saw the Afro-Cubans as a moral blot on white supremacist ideology of *Cubanismo*. Thus, the poem becomes a “how to fix it” self-empowerment text for Afro-Cubans to enter the liminal spaces in Euro-Cuban politics of national identity. Callahan’s reading of this program advocated by Ayala is somehow glib, with only one criticism against Ayala’s phallocratic and Eurocentric reduction of Afro-Cuban women to unobtrusive roles of support of men. She fails to see Ayala’s uncritical advocating for a psycho-cultural immersion by Afro-Cubans into a system that negates their very history and presence as aberrations. Callahan fails to see that Ayala’s call for Black double-sacrifice for freedom while acquiescing to racist policies to assuage the guilt-laden consciences of white Cubans, in exchange for social acceptability and respectability within Euro-Cuban exclusionary spaces, creates serious contradictions. In Harper’s “We are Rising,” Callahan focuses on the linguistic and poetic paraphernalia engaged by Harper to accentuate her belief that the Blacks in post-abolition America will inevitably overcome their inherited historical low socio-economic statuses and spirit of underachievement from slavery days.

However there is no questioning of how this can be achieved by Blacks alone, without addressing the consequences of 200 years of white racism, slavery, oppression, and continuous vilification and negation of Black culture. In “Elisa Harris” (1884) Callahan suggests, Harper revisits her theme of the precarious location of the free slave during the pre-abolition period. The poem exposes the hypocritical stance of white America that preaches freedom and equality for all peoples, yet holding Africans in bondage. Callahan reads well Harper’s dynamic between mother and child relationship that calls for recognition of the freedom of the mother (America) as tied to the freedom of the child (Blacks). The idea of the landscape as suggested in motherland image of America is captured in Ayala’s ecological piece, “El arroyuelo y la

flor.” Here, as Callahan observes, the physical landscape is constructed as a pastoral ideal unlike Harper’s “Eliza Harris” forest landscape that symbolizes a post-lapsarian environment polluted by the dominate evil of racism, and slavery. Here Callahan fails to engage the rhetoric of Black eco-feminist or Black feminist theory, and hence reads the poem merely as a critique of Cuban nationalism in which the role of women are objectified as reproductive and supportive bodies created to fulfill a divine destiny in the linear march forward to the nebulous idea of a male-centered idea of nationhood. She progresses to evaluate what she calls “Auta de Souza’s poetics of freedom” in Brazil from Auta’s tone of racial and political neutrality situated within Brazil’s post-abolition racist ideology of racial democracy. Callahan then suggests that Auta de Souza’s “Frio Partido” and “Minh’alma e o verso” should be read along the same “trans hemispheric” perspective and the slippery liminal spaces presented in Harper’s poetry which defuse the meaning and implications of slavery and freedom in death through the metaphoric struggle between the flesh and the spirit in spirituality. Here the spirit like the slave yearns for freedom but only through death. The dream-like vision caught in incantatory language reveals the way the earth is seen as a place of suffering for the African enslaved in the new world, which is counterbalanced by the promise of death as a breaking forth of the spirit imprisoned by slavery, racism, and sexism. Seeking to break the colonial bondage from Portugal, Brazilian nationalists feminized Brazilian national consciousness, through the invocation of the iconic figure of Princess Isabel, and consequently women, like the enslaved Africans, became identified solely as bearers of children, supporters of white male pride, and playing the role of the nurturing maternal figure in the shadows.

Callahan concludes *Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics* by emphasizing the recognition of the pluralistic nature of African-diaspora positions and histories, yet the thematic and typological commonalities that bind the poetic landscapes of these three poets to attempt to construct a transnational pan-African “black aesthetic.” She canvasses also for the adoption of plural- and -cross-disciplinary strategies of reading. Though Callahan does not criticize the ideologically phallogocentric and racist positions taken by these poets, she nevertheless exposes their elitist arguments and styles as problematic and done merely to appeal to non-*Afrodescendente* audiences. Interestingly, Callahan avoids overwhelming the reader through the book with heavy theory until we reach the “Epilogue” “*Afrodescendente* History As/And Transnational Poetics” (pp. 123-147). Here we get a panoramic glimpse of the broader theoretical positions that underpin her style of reading Harper, Ayala and Auta. However, because this is not effectively reflected in the main

body of the book, it seems to have come as an afterthought. One would have loved to see these theories applied early on.

Nonetheless, *Literary Transnationalism and African American Poetics* is a good book for researchers and students interested in exploring the pan-African diaspora nature of African diaspora poetry. It articulates well how African diaspora poetry has always been a battleground: to restore the language of individual and national racial identities. This language begins as a recording of presences through mythic mediation as creative and performance history in the work of Francis Harper, Cristina Ayala, and Auta de Souza within a larger process of thinking and enacting the drama of African liberation in poetry.

**Marion Bethel. 2009. *Bougainvillea Ringplay*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press. 87 pp. ISBN: 9781845230845.**

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In Marion Bethel's latest poetry collection, *Bougainvillea Ringplay*, the poet takes us back to our childhood days when we could not wait for the school bell to ring to have our own personal carnival in the schoolyard where we would rebel and revel through song and dance. In an interview broadcast in *Tongues of the Ocean*, Bethel was asked about the role of the poet; she quickly replied that it should be able to surpass that of the preacher, priest and politician by being able to "hold ambiguities in order to make life more elastic; life is not rigid" (Writers on Writers 2009). This is precisely the journey in which the Bahamian lawyer turned poet takes us, to a world of performance and duality, where all things show one thing while concealing another. Where the traditional game of ringplay becomes an adult's weapon of choice for revealing what lies beneath our innermost depths, but is able to "get away with it" by disguising it behind the seemingly harmless children's game. But immediately into the collection, it is quite noticeable that this is not the traditional game of ringplay, for there is the nominal adjective of the bougainvillea flower preceding it, letting the reader know that thorns, vines and potential danger are behind an otherwise alluring plant. Hence, the collection mostly alludes to the existential fact that all things under the sun have two stories, including flora and the natural phenomenon