



La Presencia africana en el Caribe: Un análisis de la poes'ía afroantillana (The African Presence in the Caribbean: An analysis of African-Antillean poetry)

Curriculum Unit 97.01.03
by Elsa M. Calderón

*Yoruba soy,
cantando voy,
llorando estoy
Y cuando no soy yoruba,
soy congo, mandinga, carabal'.
—Nicolás Guillén*

Por la encendida calle antillana

*Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba,
Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula*

—Luis Palés Matos During the second decade of the twentieth century, a bold new sound was heard in the Caribbean, in Cuba and Puerto Rico. It was a new kind of poetry. It was a musical poetry, a *poema-son*. It borrowed the beat of the drums from the *bomba* in Puerto Rico and the *son* in Cuba. The poets used poetic devices such as onomatopoeia, repetition, rhythm, and rhyme to create a forceful, evocative, and at times playful language. They wrote in the language of the people, of the street; (1) they used African words; (2) they used musical, invented words. (3) The result was a lush sound, plaintive yet joyful. The poetry was sensual,

rhythmic, and percussive. As you listened, you could hear the Yoruba drums or *tambores*, you could feel the sadness and joy of a people, you could almost envision the Africa that your ancestors knew.

The poets who created this new kind of poetry called it *poes'a negra* or black poetry. Critics have referred to it as *poes'a afroantillana*, or African-antillean poetry. It was more than just a passing fad, a movement or a genre of poetry. It was part of the general acknowledgment in the Caribbean that the black race was central to everyone's identity. That acknowledgment persists to the modern day. In the 1920's and 1930's, the message was best articulated by two great poets: Nicolás Guillén from Cuba and Luis Palés Matos from Puerto Rico. This unit explores their poetry, their song.

This unit is written for students in Spanish 4, Spanish 5, or Spanish for Spanish-speakers. Students should have reached a level of Spanish 4 in proficiency, have had some exposure to Spanish poetry and music, and be familiar with Cuban and/or Puerto Rican culture. The unit examines various elements of black poetry from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean: *la poes'a afroantillana*, also called *poes'a mulata*, *poes'a negra*, and *poes'a negrista*. These elements are: the African sound and cadence of the poems, the African language and references, the poetic devices such as repetition and onomatopoeia, and the African themes or *temática*. The African themes are: a nostalgia for Africa, the land of their ancestors ; the exotic beauty of the mulatto woman or *mulata*; the suffering and oppression of the black man; and an Antillean identity.

This poetry had as a central theme the black race. Rather than being Euro-centered or white, it turned to the black race and examined its concerns. It embraced the African sounds, African music, and African traditions of those people of African descent living in the Caribbean. It praised the epitome of female beauty, the *mulata*. It acknowledged a new identity: an Antillean identity, an American identity. The movement was a bold one, and it included some French-speaking islands and some of the English-speaking islands. As Professor Sandra Ferdman-Comas said, it was as though the same poem were being written in different languages, in different islands.

Negritud and the Caribbean Movement

A word about the Caribbean movement. The word *negritud* , in Spanish, came from the French word, *négritude* , which was penned in 1934, by Aimé Césaire, a poet from Martinique. (4) It referred to the literary and artistic movement in the French Caribbean which affirmed and celebrated the contributions of the black race. The term *negritud* is not used by Luis Palés Matos or Nicolás Guillén ; they use the words *poes'a negra* or *poes'a mulata* . however, these two poets are part of the same movement which called itself *négritude* in the early phases and which was part of a larger movement. Jamaicans such as Claude McKay imported some elements of the black Caribbean perspective to the United States. Some Americans, such as Langston Hughes, visited Cuba and Latin America, and exported certain elements of the Harlem Renaissance to Nicolás Guillén in Cuba. In turn, Nicolás Guillén traveled extensively throughout Mexico, South America, and Europe. The black literature loosely defined as *negra* or *afroantillana* was not limited to the Caribbean, but rather was in many ways connected to and part of the black movements in Harlem and Latin America.

Modifying this Unit: Spanish Classes/ Interdisciplinary

This unit includes a background section on the two poets profiled: Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén, references to selected poems, a teacher outline, student objectives, three lesson plans, and a bibliography. The music of Celia Cruz and *El Conjunto Africano Tacuafán* and Gloria Estefan are recommended as an extension of this unit. Students will not only read poems, they will listen to songs, identify musical instruments, and perhaps make some musical instruments. They will have an opportunity to identify certain

poetic devices, write original metaphors, and compose original poems. If they are not well-informed on the history and geography of Puerto Rico and Cuba, they will study that as well.

My high school students in my Spanish classes are more than 90% African-American. They enjoy studying about their African heritage, whether in English class, History class, or Spanish class. As a Spanish teacher, it is my challenge to provide my students with authentic cultural and linguistic information. This unit includes music, which is selected according to the following criteria: it is authentic, it is readily available, and it is an example of or an adaptation of *poes'a afroantillana*. *La Danza Negra*, by Luis Palés Matos, is set to music by *El Conjunto Africano Tacuafán*; *Bemba Colorá*, sung by Celia Cruz, is a response to a Nicolás Guillén poem, called *Mulata*. This unit includes a very important theme for my students: the African presence in the Caribbean, as manifested by *poes'a afroantillana*.

Therefore, a Spanish teacher could introduce this unit as part of a unit on poetry, or a unit on Latin American poetry, or a unit on Caribbeann poetry. A different slant would be to introduce this unit as part of a larger unit of the African presence in the Caribbean, which would focus on Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, and would cover such topics as religion (*santer'a*), music (the *son* in Cuba, the *bomba* in Puerto Rico), and other themes. I propose using this unit in two ways: while studying the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico, whether in Spanish 4 or 5, and as a separate unit after we have studied Cuba and Puerto Rico. I have used parts of this unit during this year in my Spanish 4 and Spanish 4, Honors classes and have found the students respond enthusiastically to the poetry of Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén, and to the music of Celia Cruz.

This unit is part of a continuum of units that I have written about the Caribbean during the last three years at the Yale New Haven Teachers Institute. The 1995 unit, entitled *A Taste of the Caribbean*, explores the theme of food in the oral and written literature of the Caribbean. The 1996 unit, entitled *Voices of the Caribbean* , examines immigrant groups from the Caribbean, specifically Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, via literature by and about these immigrant groups. This is the first unit to cover poetry exclusively : *la poes'a afroantillana*. The three units have in common the literature and music amid some historical and geographical data from the Caribbean, mostly Puerto Rico and Cuba, and, to a lesser degree, the Dominican Republic and Mexico.

This unit lends itself to an interdisciplinary unit with an English class. The interdisciplinary unit would consist of studying and comparing the poems of Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Derek Wolcott, and other members of the Harlem Renaissance, with the poems of Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén, of Puerto Rico and Cuba, respectively. Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén were not only contemporaries, they were acquaintances who shared a passion for writing poetry, a love of music, and a pride in their African heritage. A useful book for teachers and students, that contains information about the Hughes-Guillén friendship is *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941-1967, I Dream A World* , by Arnold Rampersad.

Connections to the Harlem Renaissance

When Langston Hughes and Nicolás Guillén met in Cuba, they found they had much in common: Langston Hughes was inspired to write poetry by African-American music: the blues and jazz. Nicolás Guillén was transformed by this powerful author and started to use Afro-Cuban music, the *son* , as inspiration for his poems. Guillén's poetry underwent a substantial and dramatic transformation as a result of meeting Langston Hughes, a poet of the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance was a movement in the United States, most specifically in Harlem, from the 1920's to the late 1930's. Some critics state it began in 1918 with the publication of Claude McKay's *Harlem Dancer* and

ended with Richard Wright's publication in 1938 of *Uncle Tom's Children*. The movement encompassed literature, music, and art. This movement captured the imagination of the world with its dynamic and multifaceted style, reminiscent of earlier literary renaissances. It was a period of great intellectual activity and of unprecedented black creativity. It was a flowering of the arts, an explosion of literary ideas and themes. Henry Rhodes, a distinguished Yale New Haven Teachers Institute Fellow, wrote in 1978:

The Harlem Renaissance was the first period in the history of the United States in which a group of black poets, authors, and essayists seized the opportunity to express themselves. . . . The Harlem Renaissance was not a renaissance in the literal sense of the word. . . . The Harlem Renaissance can be more accurately described as a period of vigorous activity and intellectual activity on the part of the Negro intellectual.

Poes'a Afroantillana: Beyond Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén

In the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959, 1902-1989, Puerto Rico), and Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989, Cuba), are considered to be the most outstanding examples of *poes'a afroantillana*. However, they are certainly not the only contributors of this poetry in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Other notables include: Evaristo Rivera Chevremont (1898-1959, Puerto Rico), Manuel del Cabral (1907, Dominican Republic), Ramón Girao (1908-1949, Cuba), José Zacarías Tallet (1893-1962, Cuba), Emilio Ballagas (1908-1954, Cuba), and Nancy Morejón (1944, Cuba). Generally speaking, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela are the major contributors to this kind of poetry.

A more exhaustive study of *poes'a afroantillana*, beyond Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén, is beyond the scope of this unit. For those teachers who want a more extensive survey, I suggest reading *Iniciación a la poesía afro-americana*, by Oscar Fernández de la Vega and Alberto N. Pamies, and *Raza y color en la literatura antillana*, by G. R. Coulthard. Both are listed in the attached bibliography. Those teachers who want to read more about the black literature of Cuba should read Vera Kutzinski's *Sugar's Secrets*, also included in the bibliography. Chapters 5 and 6 of her book analyze the black poetry of Cuba, including Nicolás Guillén. Those teachers who want to read about the black prose in the Caribbean, should start by reading *Lo Afronegroide en el cuento puertorriqueo*, by Rafael Falcón.

Whether Spanish, French, or English, these poets of the Caribbean come from countries that shared certain characteristics: they have substantial populations of African origin; they have maintained their African legacy as manifested in music, speech patterns, rituals, and religion; and they have maintained a sense of pride in their identity as people of color whether *negros* or *mulatos*. Whatever their racial reality, it includes people of African origin; it includes *negrismo* or blackness.

Both Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén saw *negrismo* or blackness as a positive theme, as an integral part of the Caribbean or Antillean identities. They interpreted this general theme in different ways. However, they both viewed their African roots as an integral part of Cuban and Puerto Rican national identities. They celebrated the African presence in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. This unit is written for my colleagues, so that they may celebrate the African presence in their classrooms.

UNIT OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will listen to and read poems in Spanish by Nicolás Guillén and Luis Palés Matos.
2. Students will identify and define the African words in the poems.
3. Students will identify the musical instruments of African origin, mentioned in the poems, and listen to songs based on the poems.
4. Students will analyze the poems using the poetic language of: *simbolismo*, *metáforas*, *s'miles*, *rima*, *ritmo*, *onomatopeya* , and *jitanjáforas*.
5. Students will discuss the themes or *temática* of African-Antillean poetry.
6. Students will write their own *metáforas*, *s'miles* , and *jitanjáforas* as well as original poems.
7. Students will view Cuban and Puerto Rican art from the same time period of Nicolás Guillén and Luis Palés Matos.
8. Students will make connections between the poetry of Nicolás Guillén, Luis Palés Matos, and Langston Hughes.

Teacher Outline

The African Presence in the Caribbean: An Analysis of African-Antillean poetry

I. The African presence in the history of Cuba and Puerto Rico: the people *el negro*, *la mulata*, *la mezcla* , *las razas* II. *Luis Palés Matos*: La poes'a antillana en Puerto Rico III. Nicolás Guillén: *La poes'a mulata en Cuba* IV. The *jitanjáfora* and onomatopoeia in African-Antillean poetry: *jitanjáfora*: *Filaflama alabe cundre/ala olalúnea alifera/alveolea jitanjáfora/ liris salumba salifera* (A *jitanjáfora* is defined as an invented word or nonsense word which is used for its musical effect.) onomatopoeia: *tuntún*, *tum-cutum*, *tum-cutum*, *ten con ten* . (Onomatopoeia is defined as the usage of words that imitate the sound of the word they describe). V. Glossaries and vocabulary in African-Antillean poetry : *el vocablo africano bemba*, *bembé*, *bomba*, *botucos* / *Fernando Poo*, *Sensemaya*, *Tombuctú*, *Yoruba* VI. Musical instruments and music in African-Antillean poetry: Drums: *tambores*, *congas*, *gongos*, *timbales*, *y junjunes* Music and dance: *el baile*, *la bomba*, *la danza negra*, *el guaguancó*, *el son*

Celia Cruz: Quimbara and Bemba Colorá Gloria Estefan: Mi Tierra

Tacuafán: Caribe Negro

I. *The African presence in the history of Cuba and Puerto Rico: the people* Due to the large influx of Puerto Ricans into New Haven and other areas of Connecticut, we have many Puerto Rican students in the New Haven School system. As a result, my students in my Spanish classes may include a small number of Puerto Rican students. These students are resources in the teaching of this unit. Their knowledge of the history of Puerto Rico and of the race issues in Puerto Rico could prove useful in classroom discussions. With that note, let me add that stereotypes abound as to the race or races of Puerto Ricans. The same may be said about the Cubans, since they are fewer in number in the New Haven area. One of the goals of this unit is to encourage frank and open discussions about racial issues, whether discussing Puerto Ricans, Cubans, or African-Americans from Jamaica, St. Croix, or other regions of this country.

Historically speaking, the Cuban and Puerto Rican people are a mixture or *mezcla* of three races: white (European), indigenous (Ta'no and Ciboney) and black. (African). The Spanish textbook *Pasaporte* includes a section of history entitled *Del pasado al presente* for both units of Cuba and Puerto Rico. These sections are a first step for acquiring information. *Pasaporte* also has an excellent first chapter which discusses the Hispanic as being of three races: *Las tres hispanidades*. The accompanying video is an appropriate way to introduce this theme in the classroom and to initiate discussion on what it means to be Hispanic or Latino. The Latinos are a combination of races. In the Caribbean, the Cubans and Puerto Ricans are Caucasian and African, with some Ta'no blood. A brief study of the history of these two islands shows that the indigenous population was wiped out by the cruel treatment of the Spanish as well as disease and forced labor or slavery by the Spanish. A Puerto Rican could be light-skinned with blue eyes or dark-skinned with dark eyes. The same holds true for Cubans. From the point of view of my students, they are sometimes surprised that a dark-skinned person is in fact Cuban (Nicolás Guillén) or Puerto Rican (Roberto Alomar) or Dominican (Michael Jordan look-alike, Felipe López.)

El que no tiene dinga, tiene mandinga

What does this mean? It means that the Cuban and Puerto Rican cultures embrace different colors and different races. One of these races is black, or African. In Puerto Rico, a common expression is “*Si no tiene dinga, tiene mandinga.*” This means a person from Puerto Rico probably has African blood: mandingo. In Cuba, the same sentiment is expressed thus: “*Si no tiene negro, tiene carabal’.*” Translated, a person from Cuba either has black blood or carabali, which is black blood. In other words, the Cuban and the Puerto Rican identity is not a white one; it is a black one, or at times, a white and black one. It is a mulatto identity. As Luis Palés Matos wrote in his poems, the islands are mulatto: *Isla-mulata, mulata-antilla*. The African roots are acknowledged as being part of the Cuban and Puerto Rican identity. This is the reality and context within which the literature needs to be examined.

The literature reflects the ethnic reality and diversity of these islands. The poetry discussed in these units, black poetry of the 1920's and 1930's, was not the first time this black identity was articulated, but it certainly was the most dramatic and forceful. Since then, poets have been influenced by Guillén and Palés Matos and their contemporaries. In Puerto Rico, the author and poet Iván Silén was influenced by Luis Palés Matos; Julia de Burgos and Luis Lloréns Torres are some outstanding examples of Puerto Rican poets who were influenced by the the poetry of Guillén and Palés Matos. For a more extensive discussion of the black theme in the literature of Puerto Rico, Rafael Falcón's book, listed in the bibliography, is an excellent resource.

It is, therefore, not surprising that these islands developed a kind of poetry which celebrated the blackness within these islands. This poetry has alternately been called *poes'a negra, poes'a negroide, poes'a mulata,*

poes'a antillana, and *poes'a afroantillana*. What defines it is the African references, the African sound or music embedded in it, and the African themes of the anguish, strength and vitality of the black race. The two poets who are usually mentioned as the most outstanding examples of this poetry are Nicolás Guillén and Luis Palés Matos. (5) No discussion of *poes'a afroantillana* would be academically complete without these two giants. They developed this poetry as a reaction to prior poetry which was silent as to the contributions of the African race to the Cuban and Puerto Rican cultures.

II. *Luis Palés Matos: poes'a antillana en Puerto Rico* Luis Palés Matos was a Puerto Rican poet who wrote what he called *poes'a antillana* and what others refer to as *poes'a mulata* or *poes'a negra*. Angel Valbuena Prat, who edited one of Palés Matos' editions of *Tuntún de pasa y grifer'a*, describes the *temas negros* or *temas negroides* in Palés Matos poetry. He states that although Palés Matos was initially influenced by the *generación de 98* and the poetry of Antonio Machado, he developed his own style when he wrote black poetry: ". . . hasta encontrar en los motivos negroides su verdadero camino". (6) One critic describes the complex nature of Palés Matos' poems: Palés Matos at times celebrates the ancestral African heritage in its purest stage: the *danza*, the rites, the temperament. At other times, he extols the *mulato*, the mixture of African and European and part of the Puerto Rican identity. At other times, he defines the Puerto Rican identity as an Antillean identity, *una identidad antillana*. Critics have pointed out that Palés Matos is not the spokesperson or *portavoz* for a black identity; rather he views the black race as an element within the Antillean identity, as other than European or American:

Palés no es el portavoz del sector racial negro en la sociedad puertorriqueña; el poeta no habla del negro sino de lo negro como elemento clave en la identidad cultural antillana y diferenciador de las culturas dominantes europea y norteamericana. (7) In Palés Matos own words,

yo no he hablado de una poes'a negra ni blanca ni mulata; yo solo he hablado de una poes'a antillana que exprese nuestra realidad de pueblo en el sentido cultural de este vocablo. (8) Chronologically speaking, Palés Matos predates the French Caribbean authors of the *négritude* movement, and predates, with his earlier poems, the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. His poetry is consistent in its defiantly racial tone, with the spirit of *négritude*. *Négritude* was a phrase invented by a poet from Martinique, Aimé Césaire, and first used in a magazine, *L'étudiant Noir*, in 1934. It was a bold challenge to the dominant view that black was a negative or shameful quality. Rather than using euphemisms to describe a black person's coloring, Césaire insisted on the word *negre*. As critics have pointed out, to use the word *negre* or its Spanish equivalent, *negro*, was to challenge the racist ways, the euphemisms and of denials. *Negro*, when used by Spanish-speaking authors, was used as a *palabra-desafío*. (9) Although the first publication of *Tuntún de pasa y grifer'a* predated the *négritude* discussion, Palés Matos definitely falls within the same spirit as Césaire and his followers. The tone, the themes, and the title itself of this book are consistent with the literary ideology implicit in the *négritude* movement of later years.

Palés Matos' counterpart in Cuba was Nicolás Guillén in the sense that these two luminaries shaped and defined what we now know as African-Antillean poetry. What they had in common was the black theme or *la temática negra*. This encompassed the following: African references, African sounds and music, black themes of anguish, joy, suffering and endurance, beauty and strength. The *mulata* is the ultimate in African feminine beauty; the Caribbean islands are described with warmth and love and richness of details. Poetic devices they both used include certain rhyme schemes, repetitions and chants, onomatopoeia, and the ubiquitous *jitanjáforas*.

However, as to a direct connection between Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén, most critics deny a personal or

ideological connection between these two giants. Not only are they from two different countries, they write from different perspectives and developed different visions of the *negro* within the broad parameters of *poes'a negra* or *tema negra*.

III. Nicolás Guillén : La *poes'a mulata* en Cuba Nicolás Guillén was a Cuban poet who best exemplified *poes'a afroantillana*. His poetry is concerned with a realistic depiction of the black man, the black Cuban, and his day to day reality, as well as the suffering, beliefs, and dreams of the black man. He faithfully reproduced the speech patterns of the Cuban man of the street, referred to as the *habla popular*. In poems such as *Búcate Plata*, he successfully transcribed Spanish words as they are spoken in Cuba (and other parts of the Caribbean). Examples of these words are *búcate* instead of *búscate*, *má* instead of *más*, and *na má* instead of *nada más*. Also, Guillén's poetry is replete with African references: gods (Sensemayá), religion (Yoruba, mayombé), rituals (on killing a snake), chants, and African words. He uses repetition of words or phrases to create a sustained rhythm. (Mayombe-bombe-mayombé. . . Sensemayá). Other poets attempted some or all of these techniques; Guillén refined them and raised them to new heights. Thus, he became synonymous with the kind of poetry called *poes'a afroantillana* or *poes'a afroamericana* or *poes'a negrista*.

Nicolás Guillén: a brief biographical sketch

Nicolás Guillén was born in 1902 in Camagüey, Cuba, and is often referred to as *el poeta camagüeyano*. (10) His father is active politically and is the publisher for a local newspaper, *Las Dos Repúblicas*. Guillén shows literary promise at an early age, when he wrote his first poem at age 14. A year later, his father dies violently, murdered by government soldiers. This event is a harbinger for future events, since Guillén became in his adult years a political activist as well as a famous writer, and was an enthusiastic member of the Communist Party in Cuba, under the leadership of Fidel Castro. An excellent and precocious student, Guillén finishes his *bachillerato* in two years, at the age of 17. He studies law at *La Escuela de Derecho* in Havana, but abandons that career after one year of law school. In one of his poems, he refers to his unhappy law school days, by stating " *muero estudiando leyes para vivir la vida.*" He publishes poems and writes for literary magazines and newspapers, with a hiatus of writing poetry, which lasted from 1922 to 1927.

In 1930 he publishes his first book of poems, *Motivos de Son* . The following year, he publishes *Sóngoro Cosongo: Poemas mulatos*, and four years later, *West Indies, Ltd*. In 1937 he travels to Mexico, Canada, and Spain. He arrives in Spain in the midst of the Spanish Civil War and joins the Communist Party. From 1945 to 1948 he travels extensively throughout Latin America: Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. In the next couple of years he travels to the United States, France, and the Soviet Union, in various capacities, such as a delegate for peace or a delegate for a cultural organization. From 1953 to 1958 he is a veritable exile from his homeland, participating in cultural and literary activities in such countries as Chile, Chekoslovakia, Finland, Hungary, and India. In 1958 he published another book of poems: *La paloma de vuelo popular* . The Cuban Revolution brings him back to Cuba in 1959, to participate in the new direction of his country.

He holds various high positions in the Cuban government and represents his country at international events. In 1971 he publishes *La rueda dentada*, *El Diario* , and *Obra poética*, which is a compilation of all his works. From 1961 until 1989, Guillén is president of the Writers' and Artists' Union in Havana

Nicolás Guillén: his works

Guillén's poetry went through several stages. His earlier poems were described as modernist. Modernism in Latin America was a literary movement, chiefly characterized by the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Dar'o. More importantly, through Modernism, Latin American writers identified themselves as Latin Americans, as a unified

voice. Modernism ended with the Mexican Revolution and World War I. Guillén soon abandoned his early Modernist poetry for an African-American sound, which used African words and speech patterns, and which borrowed from the Cuban musical form, the *son*. Examples of this are *Negro Bembón*, from *Motivos de Son*, and *Canto Negro*, from *Sóngoro Cosongo*. His last stage of poems was more overtly political within the context of Cuba's Marxist regime.

IV. *The jitanjáfora and onomatopeya in African-Antillean poetry* The poetry of Luis Palés Matos and Nicolás Guillén is characterized by two poetic devices: the *jitanjáfora* and the *onomatopeya*. Students are probably familiar with onomatopoeias but are less familiar with *jitanjáforas*. Onomatopoeia is the imitation of the sound of an object by sounds in the poem itself. For example, *tun-tun* echoes the sound of drums. In fact, the drum sounds are a common device found in this kind of poetry. See the following lines by Luis Palés Matos:

Los negros bailan, bailan,

ante la fogata encendida.

Tum-cutum, tum-cutum,

ante la fogata encendida. And also:

Al ritmo de los tambores

*tu lindo **ten con ten** bailas,*

una mitad espa-ola

y otra mitad africana. Even the title of his book, *Tuntún de pasa y grifer'a*, includes an example of the drum sound: *tuntún*. That richly ambiguous word has several meanings in Spanish: *tuntún* is also the sound of a knock on a door, a beat of a drum, the bootshine or *betún* on a shoe, and continuity in the sense of blah-blah or etcetera: all of which are hinted at in the title of his book. When I read this title aloud I accompany the reading with the beat of drums, for a dramatic effect and to show the inherent musicality of these lines. Drums are highly recommended for any reading of these poems.

Guillén also provides many examples of the drum sound:

sóngoro, cosongo, songo be; and

Tamba,tamba,tamba,tamba,

*tamba del negro **que tumba;***

tumba del negro, **caramba,**

caramba, que el negro **tumba;**

yamba, yambó, yambanbé! and

¡Tun, tun!

¿Quién es?

Una rosa y un clavel! Students should listen to many examples within a poem, then identify them as examples of onomatopoeia, and finally, be able to write original examples within their own poems. Students should also be aware that some of the above examples are more than mere onomatopoeias; some of the words are in fact invented words. Which brings us to *jitanjáforas* : invented words used for their musical or rhythmic effect. The title of one of Guillén's books is *Sóngoro Cosongo*, two words with no meaning in any language, but invented by the author for a desired sound, evocative of Africa and its drums.

Jitanjáforas were invented by a Cuban poet not within the movement of *poes'a antillana*: Mariano Brull. He playfully wrote these lines and used the term *jitanjáfora* for the first time: (11)

Filaflama alba cundra

ala olalúnea alifera
alveolea **jitanjáfora**

liris salumba salifera. *Jitanjáforas* have been defined as words that have no meaning but nevertheless contribute a certain African flavor. They have also been defined as: " *vocables que no tienen sentido por sí mismos pero que son usados para dar musicalidad a un poema,* " (12) or, as words that have no meaning by themselves but are used to give a musical sound to a poem.

After students have studied several poems and identified examples of onomatopoeia and *jitanjáforas* , they are ready to write their own examples. First, they should start with phrases, such as the sound of a drum or the sound of a maraca. Then, they should write a short poem. For *jitanjáforas* , they should start with a word that exists, that has meaning, and then make it into a nonsense word. For example, they can research African names and places or take African words from the poems they have studied, and then convert these words into words that do not impart meaning, but have a musical sound to them. The final step is to incorporate both of these poetic devices into an original poem, and read them to the class, accompanied by a musical instrument.

V. Glossaries and vocabulary in African-Antillean poetry As stated in the introductory part of this unit, the poetry of Luis Palés Matos is usually accompanied by glossaries to explain the African words and references. The same is true of the poetry of Nicolás Guillén. If no glossary accompanies the poems, the footnotes explain the meaning of the African words. Sometimes the words are of African cultural groups, such as *Yoruba* , from Nigeria; or of African deities, such as *Sensemayá*, an African goddess often represented by a serpent ; or of African queens, such as *Tembandumba* . Sometimes the words are of African places, whether real or legendary or imaginary, such as *Quimbamba* (an imaginary place in Africa), *Tanga-ica* (an African region), or *Kalahari* (an African desert). The African words for chief are used: *Alimam'*, *Botuco*, *Cocoroco*, *Mongo* , and

Mungo. What the teacher needs to tell the students is that, even though these words may have a specific meaning, the poets often use them for a different purpose: to create an African sound:

Por la encendida calle antillana

Va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba

-Rumba, macamba, candombe, bámbula.- The words in bold print are African or of African origin: *rumba* is a dance in the Caribbean of African origin, *macumba* is an African religion, *candombe* is an African dance or party, and *bámbula* is an African dance. However, Luis Palés Matos does not use these words for their literal meaning. Rather, he strings them together for their African sound, for their beat and cadence. These words are repeated several times in the poem, to describe *Tembandumba*, a beautiful African woman.

Also, they are used for their musicality. (*jitanjáforas*). Nicolás Guillén writes:

Mayombe-bombe-Mayombé!

Mayombe-bombe-Mayombé!

Mayombe-bombe-Mayombé! Although *Mayombe* is a Yoruba religious sect, *Mayombe* (or *Mayombé*) is used by the poet for its musical effect. The same device is used by Luis Palés Matos in the following lines:

Calabó y bambú,

Bambú y calabó.

El gran Cocoroco dice : tu-cu-tú,

La gran Cocoroca dice: to-co-tó. *Calabó* is an African wood, as explained in the glossary. *Bambú* is Spanish for bamboo, a plant that we are familiar with, which was often used by the Africans for building. The poem, however, has nothing to do with the wood or plant; these words are not used to convey their usual meaning. They are used for their sound, to create a beat, an African beat.

Students need to identify the words in the poems they study that are African, or African-sounding. They should try and figure out their meanings and then check their results with a glossary. Finally, they should include African words, whether to convey a meaning or to convey a sound, in the original poems that they write.

If the students are interested in a research project, this unit lends itself to research on African countries, especially those which are mentioned frequently in Cuban and Puerto Rican poetry. Nicolás Guillén is very specific in the cultural groups that he mentions: the Yoruba, Congo, Mandingo, and Carabali. The students could study these groups and their presence in Cuba.

I have found my students were very interested in studying the Yoruba after reading the poem by Nicolás Guillén: *Son Número 6*, which begins with

Yoruba soy,

cantando voy,

llorando estoy. Translated:

I am Yoruba,

I am singing as I go,

I am crying as I go.

Yoruba research: field trips, drums, and Yoruba masks:

I have included in my classroom information about the Yoruba, which may be presented either before or after the poem: the Yoruba talking drums as a musical presentation, the Yoruba customs and religions, the Yoruba masks. My students enjoyed going to the Yale Art Gallery for a special tour by Mary Kordak on the exhibit of African masks. This presentation included several examples of the Yoruba masks. My students also enjoyed making their own Yoruba masks, using Yoruba stencils and symbols.

VI. Musical instruments and music in African-Antillean poetry Music is an important part of this unit because music was an important part of this kind of poetry. Both poets used a poetic rhythm which ends with an accented beat. In Spanish, this is called *acento agudo*. For example, if a word ends in a stressed or accented syllable, it is *aguda*. Some examples are: *tuntún, calabú, bambú, mayombé*. They used this rhythm because of its musical effect; it sounds like the second beat on a drum. It also sounds like the music that inspired Nicolás Guillén: the *son*. The *son* was a Cuban sound or music that was popular in the 1920's and which later evolved into a *salsa* sound. It was heard in dancehalls and in the street. It was associated with an African or black sound. It often included repetition, chants, and responses.

Gloria Estefan does a beautiful rendition of a Cuban *son montuno* in her album, *Mi Tierra*. Students should listen to her album to hear this sound. Celia Cruz also interprets the Cuban *son* in her album, *Bemba Colorá*. Gloria Estefan is a romantic and lively sound; Celia Cruz is earthier and livelier. Gloria Estefan's album comes with a useful bilingual script, which I have shared with my students. The music may be heard either before or after the poems; I prefer to start the unit with the music, then have the students read the poems, then listen to the music again.

If a teacher does not have these albums, a simple double drum or *tambores* will be very effective. The teacher could read the poem and play the drums as accompaniment. Or, a guest musician could play the drums. A very useful resource in the Puerto Rican New Haven community is Centro San José. The director, Peter Noble, is helpful and informative. Centro San José has samples of a tape of black Caribbean music by a group called *Tacuafán*. They play a beautiful rendition of Luis Palés Matos' poem, *Danza Negra*. This is an example of some

of the resources that exist in the New Haven area.

The following sections include sample lesson plans and a bibliography. The sample lesson plans are for Spanish classes but may be easily adapted for English and History classes, for team teaching and for interdisciplinary uses, with Music and Art classes. Parts of this unit have already been used in my Spanish 4 and Spanish 4 Honors classes at James Hillhouse High School and in my Spanish for Spanish Speakers classes at Polly T. McCabe Center. Also, I team-taught part of this unit with Peter Herndon, a History teacher from the Cooperative Arts Magnet School. We taught this unit in the Yale Summer Academy. The students were from a cross-section of high schools in the New Haven School System and included African-American, Mexican, and Puerto Rican students. We cut across the different disciplines : English Language Art, Spanish Foreign Language, History of the United States, World History, Music, and Art. We read poems in English and Spanish, went to several art galleries for authentic examples of African and Caribbean art, listened to Yoruba music, *salsa* , jazz, and the blues, and made Yoruba masks. Those teachers interested in more detail on the Summer Academy Program may contact the Institute, Peter Herndon or myself, Elsa Calderón. My point is that this unit lends itself to many uses and is easily adapted to interdisciplinary uses.

Objectives:

Students will discuss the themes of African-Antillean poetry.

Students will compare and contrast two poems.

Students will write creatively.

Students will identify and define African words and references.

Resources: Three poems by Nicolás Guillén: *Son Número 6/ El Apellido/ Balada de dos Abuelos*

Activities for Son Número 6:

- A. Students will read *Son Número 6* silently, then aloud.
- B. Students will discuss what *son* means and discuss other forms of Cuban music: *rumba*, *guaguancó*, *salsa*, etc.
- C. Students will answer the following questions:
 1. Who is the poet referring to with the first line, *Yo soy Yoruba*?
 2. Who are the Yoruba, and what is their presence in Cuba?
 3. How does the poem describe the Yoruba? (*cantando*, *llorando* , etc.)
 4. Write an original poem in Spanish, beginning with *Yo soy _____*.

Read it to the class, critique it, and rewrite it. Choose a musical accompaniment, whether it be drums, maracas, sticks, hand-clapping, etc.

Activities for *El Apellido* and *Balada de Mis Dos Abuelos*:

- A. Students will listen as the teacher or guest speaker reads *El Apellido*.
- B. What are the different names in the poem that Nicolás Guillén gives to himself? Why does he do this? Students will make a list of the names.
- C. Ask the students to answer the following questions:
 1. Why is the poem called *Apellido* , or Last Name?
 2. Do you know your African *apellido* ? If yes, share it with the class. If no, how do you feel about this?
 3. Write in your journal, in Spanish, about your name and what it means. Make a family tree: *un árbol genealógico* .
- D. After reading and discussing *El Apellido* and writing about their family name, students should read and compare: *La Balada de los Dos Abuelos*.
- E. Students should discuss the following questions:
 1. Who are the two grandparents?
 2. Describe the two grandparents or *abuelos*.
 3. Describe your grandparents, in a one-page *composición*, in Spanish.

Enrichment: Research the Yoruba on the Internet; make Yoruba masks; make Yoruba drums; go to the Yale Art Gallery and view Yoruba masks and art.

Notes

1. For example, Nicolás Guillén wrote *búcate plata* rather than *buscaste plata* and *na* for *nada*. This was a faithful reproduction of the way the people on the street speak, *el habla popular* or *el habla vulgar* .
2. The African words are so prevalent in the poems of Luis Palés Matos that his book *Tuntún de pasa y grifer'a* includes an eight-page glossary to explain the African terms. The introductory quote for this unit includes these African terms: *Tembandumba*, *Quimbamba*, *macumba*, *candombe*, and *bámbula*.
3. Some of the poetic devices included onomatopoeia, repetitions, metaphors, and *jitanjáforas*. These devices are more fully explained in the text.

4. Césaire's poems are translated into English by Ellen Conroy Kennedy. *The Negritude Poets*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1975.
5. Also worthy of mention are Fortunato Vizcarrondo, from Puerto Rico, and Emilio Ballagas, from Cuba. See Rafael Falcón, *Lo Afronegroide En El Cuento Puertorrique-o* , p. 19-20.
6. Mercedes López-Baralt, in her 1994 edition of *Tuntún de pasa y grifer'a*, discusses Luis Palés Matos and negritud, p. 21-28.
7. Ibid., p. 15.
8. Ibid., p. 24.
9. Ibid., p. 27.
10. This biographical data is from Luis I-igo Madrigal's 1990 edition of *Summa poética* , p. 18-22.
11. Actually, Alfonso Reyes used the term to refer to something new, based on a poem by Mariano Brull. Alfonso Reyes used *jitanjáfora* to refer to the verbal game of words with no apparent meaning or with a nonsense meaning or independent of meaning to confer musicality or other elements. See Raquel Chang-Rodriguez and Malva E. Filer, *Voces de Hispanoamerica*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers, 1996, p. 313.
12. *Voces de Hispanoamerica*, p. 596.

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