

the Communist Party would hardly emerge as flawless, but neither would it take shape as the mechanistic and self-serving organization that appears in so many conventional discussions of the writer and the Left.

I am not suggesting that Dos Passos is an unsung revolutionary. Even at his most radical he stubbornly retained a number of pronounced bourgeois tendencies. But it was not *fated* that this personal intransigence would prevail. As *U.S.A.* demonstrates, Dos Passos's best work was energized by the notion of class struggle, which enabled him to transform the narrative inertness of the early aesthete novels and the kaleidoscopic diffusion of *Manhattan Transfer* into a powerful portrait of a nation locked in internal combat. What is needed now is a study of Dos Passos that offers a sophisticated analysis of the historical process, both personal and political, that led to—and away from—this dynamic vision. Ludington's study provides the necessary data for such an undertaking, and it offers a highly sympathetic appreciation of Dos Passos's own angle of vision. Dos Passos scholarship now awaits a "U.S.A." about Dos Passos himself, which locates the novelist's subjective experience in that larger objective process with which Dos Passos grappled so consistently and passionately in all his major writings.

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Ideology and Caribbean Literature

Most persons committed to the study of the Caribbean and its literature will no doubt agree that conditions in that part of America cry out for major structural changes in the social, economic, and political spheres, and that authentic literary production from the region will naturally reflect the concrete problematics of life confronted by its writers. At the same time, it seems clear that no particular formula for structural transformation is obviously preferable to all others, and that no particular type of relationship between Caribbean literary expression and Caribbean social reality is in any sense binding upon writers, critics, or the reading public—whether such interested parties are native or non-native to the region. Beyond this, it seems to me that the ends of politics and ideology are better served by journalism and essayistic prose than by imaginative literature, since the former are primarily referential, while the imaginative work is first of all an aesthetic construct, a unique selection, arrangement and interpretation of experiences which calls attention to itself as such a construct, as well as to its medium, language.¹

¹Certainly, art has an ideological content, but only in the proportion that ideology loses its substantiveness by being integrated into the new reality of the work of art. That is, the ideological problems that the artist chooses to deal with have to be solved *artistically*. Art can have a cognitive function also, that of reflecting the essence of the real; but this function can only be fulfilled by *creating a new reality*, not by copying or imitating existing reality. In other words, the cognitive problems that the artist chooses to deal with have to be solved *artistically*. To forget this—that is, to reduce art to ideology or to a mere form of knowledge—is to forget that the work of art is, above all, creation, a manifestation of the creative powers of man." Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), pp. 40-41. Spanish original published in 1965, here translated by Marco Riofrancos.

A major consequence of this state of affairs is that attempts to judge literature according to extraliterary (typically political) standards tend to be narrowly reductionist and thus notably inadequate—though not entirely so, because the semiautonomous literary system from which a work issues is itself a product of a larger social context, and because every poem or play or novel arises from not only aesthetic, but also extra-aesthetic life. The fatal error, it seems to me, is to insist upon a connection too direct, too literal, between literary statement and social reality—a mistake *not* evident, for example, in Marx's celebrated admiration for Balzac, who was not only a rightist, but a decidedly unscientific commentator on such reality.²

We can now proceed to some remarks on Selwyn R. Cudjoe's recent book, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980). Sad as it is to say so—for I share at least the general sentiments of the author, if not his specific loyalties and views—this work constitutes not an advance but a setback in a field of scholarship which at this juncture direly needs an incisive study, from a comparatist point of view, of contemporary fiction in French, Spanish, English, and some of the regional Creole languages. Cudjoe moves in this direction, but his execution is defective at virtually every level of composition.

To begin with, the book is mainly about resistance, only derivatively about literature. Its first three chapters are entirely non-literary, and this pattern predominates, with a few exceptions, till the end. Just one crucial question is meaningfully posed, that of form and content—in the form of a quotation (p. 65) to the effect that the two are "indissoluble." But, sound as it is, this position is quickly abandoned, in favor of the hackneyed notion (implicit throughout the book) that form is nothing more than a paraphrasable manner, clearly subordinate to the abstract relationships of "content." To get to the bottom of this problem, it is necessary to explore extreme positions, for example: "There is no such thing as content; every aesthetic use of language is relational, formal, even the choice of theme, which is less referential than preferential."

Furthermore, Cudjoe shows no interest in language. Beyond the obvious fact that literature is made of words, not ideas (Mallarmé), there is the marvelous linguistic reality of the Caribbean: the European and Asian languages and their local varieties, Amerindian and African survivals, the syncretic magic of the Creoles, the ever-shifting post-Creole continuum, and the prevalence of diglossic speakers—including, no doubt, Mr. Cudjoe himself. Why should he ignore all this? Could it be that he is one of those speakers, long ago described by Charles Ferguson, who deny doing, or even knowing, what is obviously their birthright?³

This apparent lack of interest is reflected in Mr. Cudjoe's use of language, for it is quite clear that standard, international English is not his native medium. My feelings are very warm toward the vernaculars of the Caribbean, several of which (e.g., Sranan, Papiamentu) have already attained literary status, but scholarly books, alas, must still be written in the languages of the colonizers. In Mr. Cudjoe's book we find every conceivable offense against the structure of English: *a* in place of *the* and vice versa, articles omitted where they are needed and used where they are not; chaotic misuse of prepositions and conjunctions; plurals for singulars and singulars

²On Balzac, we are now blessed to have at hand the long out-of-print classic by the quasi-legendary Ramon Fernandez, *Balzac ou l'envers de la création romanesque* (1943; rpt. Paris: Grasset, 1980).

³See Charles Ferguson, "Diglossia" (1959), reprinted in P. P. Giglioli, ed., *Language and Social Context* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). An idea of the large amount of work that has been done in this field can be had from the monumental compilation by John E. Reinecke and his collaborators, *A Bibliography of Pidgin and Creole Languages* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1975), lxxii plus 804 pp.

for plurals; confusion of pasts and presents, both simple and compound; omitted antecedents; misapplied intensifiers such as "so" and "very"; bizarrely connected phrases and clauses; flagrantly inconsequent uses of forms like "thus," "indeed," "hence," and "therefore"; abstract terms employed with varying degrees of imprecision and obscurity; pleonasm, tautologies, non sequiturs; and so on. Thus it will come as no surprise that the book is devilishly difficult to read.

Equally scandalous is the fact that we are faced with an editorial failure of cosmic proportions. Cudjoe, his typist, and his publisher have somehow conspired to subject us to every kind of error, every kind of erratum imaginable in the process of book-manufacture. There are dozens of misspellings, especially of proper names and foreign words—though a good many simple English words are victimized as well. Punctuation, capitalization, and italicization are capricious and confusing. There are inaccurate quotations, inexact references, wrong dates, incomplete and erroneous bibliographical entries, inconsistencies of scholarly style, and large and small errors of omission (on p. 283, n. 78, we are told to see Appendix III, but there are no appendices; on p. 232 we find a quotation from Mario Benedetti, which is not connected by number to its corresponding note on p. 296, and this note leaves us high and dry, since there is nothing by Benedetti listed in the bibliography). An especially grave oversight is the omission of the names of the translators of most of the non-English creative works cited, and of any comment on how dependable their translations may be.

Cudjoe's arguments are anchored principally in the works of fifteen different Soviet critics and theorists, none of them well-known in the West, as far as I can determine. On the other hand, there is no mention whatever of Adorno, Baxandall, Benjamin, Bloch, Caudwell, Goldmann, Jameson, Jeanson, Lefebvre, Lukács, Marcuse, Raymond Williams, or any other prominent Western Marxist thinker—with the single exception of Jean-Paul Sartre. Cudjoe's knowledge of the English-speaking Caribbean, and of scholarship dealing with it, is much more extensive than that pertaining to the Romance-speaking areas. Though he cites a number of critics, historians, and ideologues from the "Third World," his favorites are clearly Fidel Castro and Frantz Fanon.

A characteristic example of how our author approaches literary texts is provided by his comments on Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (México: Siglo XXI, 1968), which Cudjoe has read in a translation entitled, erroneously, *The Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*. He takes this at face value and treats Esteban Montejo, the protagonist, as if he were the author, while the truth is that Barnet has put together a fairly short (205 pp.), forceful, well-structured book from an apparently vast amount of disorganized testimony, some of it tape-recorded, some preserved in the form of notes (Introducción, pp. 7-12). Thus even the narrator, the *yo* of the text, is not directly Montejo but a literary persona set in motion by Barnet, who makes it clear that his interest is primarily ethnographic. Yet there is no basis whatever for Cudjoe's claim that he has depoliticized Montejo, as any reader can tell from the final paragraphs of the "Introducción" (p. 12).

Another of Cudjoe's procedures is to discuss part of an author's production and ignore the rest, as he does, for instance, in the cases of Aimé Césaire, Edouard Glissant, and Alejo Carpentier. We are told nothing about Césaire's plays, his poems after the *Cahier*, his many essays before and after the *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950), including the famous *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (1956) and *Toussaint Louverture* (1960). Likewise, we learn nothing of Glissant's poems and essays, his play *Monsieur Toussaint* (1961), and two of his three important novels, *Le Quatrième Siècle* (1964) and *Malemort* (1975). As for Carpentier, we note the conspicuous absence of any reference to such explicitly political later fictions as *El derecho de asilo*

(1972), *El recurso del método* (1974),⁴ and *La consagración de la primavera* (1978). (It is misleading, by the way, to say that *El siglo de las luces* [1962] was written during the Cuban Revolution. Carpentier has told us that he began it in Venezuela in 1956 and finished it in Barbados in 1958. Publication was deferred because he wanted to touch it up and was delayed by his commitment to the Revolution.⁵)

It may be further noted that all three of these writers are notorious verbal magicians for whom language is much more than a transparent vehicle for thought, whether political or otherwise. It simply will not do to read them only in translation, nor to denigrate their formal procedures as falling short of the alleged virtues of something called "critical realism"—presumably the preferred approach in Stalinoid circles in the "Third World" (which is coming to look more and more like the Second). Césaire, Glissant and Carpentier are certainly *critical*, but each in his own undogmatic, uniquely revealing way.

Cudjoe's book is basically a polemic, an instance of quasi-scholarly pamphleteering. It is hard to imagine any worthwhile literary or pedagogical purpose it might serve, since much of the information it provides is unreliable, and what is said about the works it discusses is of very limited interest—when not merely trivial or downright mistaken. What is required in the Caribbean, he says, is "therapeutic violence" to overthrow all colonial and post-colonial oppressors, and presumably cleanse the souls of the oppressed. Caribbean literature should be a weapon in this struggle. That violent means have a way of evolving into violent institutions does not seem to bother him, though this is clearly the process which produced the system he opposes—to say nothing of the Gulag and assorted other political atrocities we have come to know in the 20th century. Furthermore, it seems of no concern to Cudjoe that there are many ways to formulate a problem or approach a goal, many functions to be served by literature, many views among writers as to how their writing should relate to extra-literary realities. Granted, the elimination of hunger, disease, and oppression comes first, but, however this is to be achieved, it seems to me that there can be no illuminating social role for literature except in terms of pluralism, dialogue, and the cross-fertilization of ideas. What the writer in particular must resist is not only oppression from without, but a fatal infirmity of the mind, its susceptibility to *la tentation totalitaire*.

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⁴On this book see J. David Danielson, "Alejo Carpentier and the United States: Notes on the *Recurso del método*," *IFR*, 4(1977), 137-45.

⁵See Klaus Müller-Bergh, *Alejo Carpentier: estudio biográfico-crítico* (New York: Las Américas, 1972), p. 33, and Roberto González Echevarría, *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 215.