

## Editor's Note

In August, before the start of the 2016 academic year, I traveled to the northern part of the Dominican Republic, to the city of Sosúa, to meet with writers, all members of the literary group *Jueves Literarios de Sosúa*. While I have traveled to this part of Hispaniola and have been aware of the Semitic history of Sosúa, the windsurfing reputation of Cabarete, and the welcoming environment of Cabrera, I was surprised to hear a member of our Editorial Board disclose information about an important group of young writers from that city. The northern coast is better known for its influx of international tourists looking to escape their cold winter environments and bask in the warm waters of the Caribbean. Generally speaking, tourists are not usually attracted to cultural activities. Rather, many of them prefer to spend time at the beach, go to bars, buy souvenirs, listen and dance to music, and unwind. So, how was it possible for a literary group to thrive under these circumstances? Some had been recipients of national literary awards. Feeling the urge to better understand their situation, I took the liberty of contacting the writer and a *Jueves Literarios* founding member Óscar Zazo.

Throughout my professional career, I have enjoyed a tangential connection with the Dominican Republic. Shortly after arriving at Vanderbilt University, I organized a Maymester course to study the Caribbean. The course included readings from writers living in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Miami, and I traveled with students to those geographic locations to meet and talk to authors. So, with nine intrepid students, we began the intensive course in Miami, our first Caribbean city. The nature of the course proved to be more demanding than what I had imagined. There was the usual laborious academic schedule, with readings, discussions, interviews with writers, and visits to cultural centers, but the contact hours also encompassed meals and recreational activities. I soon realized that the course became a twenty-four-hour commitment.

In the Dominican Republic, my then graduate student, who is now Dr. David García, awaited our arrival with anticipation. David, who was raised in the United States, became our guide and wanted us to explore with him a country he barely knew. Though my recollection has become sketchy of that unprecedented trip, I do recall some memorable extracurricular activities, like renting a minibus and driving students to different island locations, puncturing a tire on an unpaved dusty road and, to my amazement, watching all the students helping to change it, eating delicious *mofongo*, meeting David's extensive family, worshiping the sun, and going to the *Guácaro Taina*, a discotheque, located inside a deep cavern. I also learned about *mamajuana*, purchased a musician's quality *tambora*, shopped in the local markets, and listened to more merengue than I wish to remember.

That was the first but not the last of many trips to this part of the Caribbean. During my most recent trip in August, which has become the subject of the present Editor's Note, I also traveled to Puerto Plata and visited the Masonic Temple, *La Logia Masónica Restauración No. 11*. As a teenager, I heard a family story about

one of my uncles, from my grandfather's first marriage, who lived in the Dominican Republic. Trained in Agronomy, he had been invited by either Horacio Vásquez or the infamous Rafael Leonidas Trujillo to work in the nearby island of his native Cuba. He fell in love with the country and its people and decided to stay, marry, and have Dominican children. My mother had not seen her half-brother since she was a child, and she traveled to the Dominican Republic to meet his progeny. Some years later, while I was in college, she invited her niece, Raiza, to visit New York City. I was thrilled to meet a cousin I didn't know existed but was also saddened after hearing stories about her abusive husband. My mother, Petra, was a kind woman and offered to protect her niece, but Raiza felt the obligation to return to her country of origin. My mother, Petra, was grateful to a people who had opened their doors to a member of our family. She was generous, proud, and very Cuban. If you had asked, Petra would have given you the shirt off her back. On various occasions, she gathered donations from friends, packed them in suitcases, and transported them to the Dominican Republic, where some fifty godchildren awaited her arrival.

My grandfather lived to the ripe old age of 104. I never had the opportunity to meet him, since he died many years before my mother married. The few photographs I possess were taken shortly before his passing, and they show an elderly and gallant man surrounded by his children. There is another one taken shortly after the War of Independence with his fellow freedom fighters. The son of a slave and a landowner, Ventura Santos was a metalsmith, fought in Cuba's War of Independence, and was a well-known figure of his time. He was a captain in the Liberation Army, a founder of the Masonic Lodge San José in Caibarién, Cuba, and a Master Mason. Ventura married twice. His first wife followed him to war. The Spaniards were aware that he would visit her from time to time. One fatal evening they surrounded the house and waited for his arrival. Once inside, they called out for his surrender. Instead, he ran out the door and escaped. The enemy bullets missed him but killed his wife, the child she held in her arms, and the one she carried in her womb. The three that survived were raised by his second wife, my grandmother Evelia, whom he first saw when victoriously entering the town of Remedios on horseback. He spotted the young and beautiful Evelia and inquired about her at the local barbershop, he so desperately needed to shed his revolutionary appearance. As is often the case when things are meant to happen, the barber turned out to be Evelia's older brother, and he invited Ventura to their home for dinner. Evelia and Ventura had ten children of their own. My uncle, Venturita Santos, from my grandfather's first marriage, was also a Mason.

This past August, I called the masonic lodge of Puerto Plata and spoke to one of its newer members, Félix Desangles, who was enthusiastic about sharing his vast knowledge about Freemasonry with me. We agreed to meet at the lodge, a beautiful and majestic nineteenth-century building made of brick and wood, with

the same architectural structure and measurements as Salomón's Temple. Founded by General Luperón, Pedro Dubocq, José Francisco Ginebra, José Vicente Garrido and others in 1867, President Luperón, a native son of Puerto Plata, declared the lodge a National Cultural Patrimony in 1879. Immediately visible was its neocolonial entrance, adorned on each side by a row of three columns. However, the edifice has been neglected, perhaps because its membership has diminished. On the agreed upon day, Félix received me in the vestibule, which ran across the length of the front of the building. It was lined with two rows of portraits of many Masons, some like Duarte and Luperón went back to the nineteenth century. He showed me two rooms on the main floor that gave me a glimpse into this historic secret society. One appeared to be a dining room with a large table and chairs, surrounded by frames outlining the thirty-three stages of the Masonic order, and directly in front of us hung a large painting of the Last Supper. The other was a meeting room, where members gathered, held secret ceremonies, and voted. The sides of the rectangular nave were covered with beautiful wood paneling and high back chairs. Seven steps elevated the front of the room, and its location reminded me of an altar. In the center of the room, four tall wooden candle holders defined an interior space, and in the middle, there was a stand with a copy of the Bible on top of a red pillow. The ceiling featured a painting of a blue sky with well-defined white clouds and the tile floor was arranged in a checked pattern.

I inquired about my uncle, and for this information Félix contacted the lodge's oldest member, the one who was most familiar with its history. When the elder arrived, I asked the same question, and he abruptly turned to me and said, "are you referring to Venturita Santos?" I nodded my head, and he proudly answered: "I am married to Venturita Santos' daughter." The gentlemen with whom I spoke, José Ramón Quiróz, was my cousin. He immediately called his wife, my cousin Niria, who was traveling and visiting her son in Spain, and gave her the unexpected news. We spoke, shared stories, and promised to stay in touch. José also told me that my uncle loved to dress elegantly and had the reputation of being a ladies' man. Perhaps for this reason, my uncle did not complete the many Masonic stages my grandfather had earned. José also recalled meeting my mother and thought very highly of her.

The evening of my first night in Sosúa, Óscar was attending a wedding at the same hotel where I was staying. We met in the lobby and walked to the Waterfront Restaurant where I met Gil Ramón, Omar Messón, and Deisy Toussaint, but not Moisés Muñiz, who was traveling at that time. Some of our conversations appear in my interview contained in the present issue. The customary introductory presentations were followed by selected reading from each of the four participants, as the ocean's smell and sound served as backdrop to their words. After a rich and illuminating experience, I asked for representative samples of their work to be included in a dossier on these Dominican writers. Óscar was kind to invite us to his house the following afternoon for a real and metaphorical "paella literaria," which

we enjoyed with wine and stimulating exchanges.

The cover of the *Afro-Hispanic Review* features a painting of Cervantes's famous protagonist of his masterpiece *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Published in two parts, the first in 1605 and the second in 1615, the present issue commemorates the five hundredth anniversary of the second part of *Don Quijote* and more precisely the death of its master writer, Miguel de Cervantes de Saavedra (1616). Though it is not our intention to reference Spanish Colonialism, Cervantes's language has left an indelible mark on all the cultures and writings of Spanish America. Cervantes's language spread rapidly throughout the Spanish-speaking world and each country adopted Castilian to meet its own cultural, historical, political, and literary flows and rhythms. These national or regional adaptations have enriched the language we call Spanish, with new words and concepts that provide insights into localisms and national identities.

So, I ask, what does it mean for Don Quijote to be represented in the Caribbean, the Dominican Republic or Sosúa (or even Santiago, the artist's city of residence)? In the cover, Don Quijote is depicted fighting windmills, the so-called giants he combats in Part 1, Chapter VIII. But this Don Quijote is not in La Mancha. He is in the Caribbean surrounded by palm trees, local vegetation, and seagulls, and they are nurtured by the sea, the clouds, and the trade winds. Consequently, does Don Quijote view the Caribbean the same way he sees La Mancha? Does magical realism or marvelous realism, as described by Alejo Carpentier in the prologue to *The Kingdom of This World* (1949), also affect his understanding of the Caribbean reality? Is the Caribbean the magical space he searches for back home? Should the residents of our nations read him through the eyes of his Peninsular counterparts? Is this Don Quijote a modern diasporic figure? If so, what were his reasons for leaving the homeland? What did he expect to find in the new land? In light of Fidel Castro's recent death in November, was the Cuban leader a modern Don Quixote? Is this the reason why Cervantes's masterpiece became the first massive editorial enterprise of the Cuban Revolution? Are the Cuban people Quixotic figures? What about the people of Hispaniola? These are just some questions that Pacheco's painting elicit from this reader.

I want to thank Óscar for welcoming me into his home, all the members of Jueves Literarios de Sosúa for making this dossier possible, and Claudio Pacheco for providing the *Afro-Hispanic Review* with the opportunity to share his talents with our readers.