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Prophetic Justice:
Gerardo Fulleda's Forward-Looking Historical Theatre

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> Siempre he escrito del presente,
> porque no voy a arreglar el siglo
> XIX. A mí me interesa arreglar este
> mundo. Uno no puede pasar por la
> vida sin siquiera intentarlo, sin
> pretender transformar algo.
> –Gerardo Fulleda León

Nicolás Guillén's 1964 poem "Tengo" celebrates the supposedly monumental gains toward racial equality made in the wake of the 1959 Cuban Revolution.[1] What the speaker of Guillen's poem purports to "have," per the anaphoric deployment of the title verb, amounts to the full exercise of his citizenship rights, including newly gained access to employment and education, the de-criminalization of his skin color, and a

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[1] The following fragment from Nicolás Guillén's "Tengo" illustrates the speaker's unqualified celebration of the leveling of racial inequalities, as he sees it, from the first years of the Revolution:

> Tengo, vamos a ver,
> tengo el gusto de andar por mi país,
> dueño de cuanto hay en él,
> mirando bien de cerca lo que antes
> no tuve ni podía tener (195).

democratic sense of national ownership over rural and urban spaces—in sum, the socio-political equality widely lacked by black Cubans before Castro-era reforms.[2] Decades later, an eponymous 1999 hip hop song by the group Hermanos de Causa satirically interpellates Guillén's "Tengo" in skewering the idea that racism is a problem of the past:

> Tengo una raza oscura y discriminada
> tengo una jornada que me exige y no da nada
> tengo tantas cosas que no puedo ni tocarlas
> tengo instalaciones que no puedo ni pisarlas
> tengo libertad entre un paréntesis de hierro
> tengo tantos derechos sin provechos, que me encierro
> tengo lo que tengo sin tener lo que he tenido
> tienes que reflexionar y asimilar el contenido[3]

Hermanos de Causa's recreation of Guillen's "Tengo" emphatically inverts the 1964 poem in decrying pervasive racial discrimination decades after Communist Party officials, incluing Fidel Castro, had proclaimed its "eradication" from Cuban life.[4] Through its parody of Guillén's poem, the Hermanos de Causa song presents the racial inequalities that exist at the close of the 1990s—exacerbated by the economic crisis of the Special Period—as a manifestation of pre-1959 social structures, suggesting the failure of the Revolution to implement lasting progress toward its egalitarian ideals.[5] Moreover, the 1999 adaptation of "Tengo" provokes its audience to reflect on the

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[2] Acknowledging the transformative accomplishments of the Revolution's 1959-61 efforts combatting racial discrimination and inequality—including the implementation of universal healthcare and education systems, land and housing reform, and the national literacy campaign—Devyn Spence Benson examines the ways insidious racism persisted after 1961, with lasting pernicious effects for black and *mulato* Cubans: "Revolutionary leaders literally opened doors for Cubans of African descent by integrating public spaces, opening private beaches, and providing more equitable access to education and employment. Despite these gains, the premature proclamation that the new government had eliminated racism … failed to dismantle racial prejudices" (247).

[3] Hermanos de Causa's "Tengo" used to play upon opening the homepage for the *Queloides* exibition (www.queloides-exhibit.com), a landmark project from collecting work by a dozen Cuban visual artists engaging issues of race and racism, launched in 1997 in Cuba with iterations running through 2012 in Cuba and the U.S.

[4] De la Fuente contextualizes each of the following party line assertions that the Revolution eliminated the problem of racial discrimination on the island: José Felipe Carneado's 1962 article in *Cuba Socialista*, Fidel Castro's interview with Lee Lockwood in 1965 and his statement to the Third Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1986, and Pedro Serviat's 1986 book *El problema negro en Cuba y su solución definitiva* (*Queloides* 12, *A Nation for All* 279).

[5] Following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union (and the disappearance of Soviet subsidies, food, and fuel, that had propped up the Cuban economy) were years of extreme economic hardship referred to by the Cuban regime as the Special Period in Times of Peace, or simply the Special Period. De la Fuente documents three examples of measurable racial discrimination in post-Soviet Cuba: a growing income gap between blacks and whites, police repression and racial profiling, and under-representation in the media of non-white Cubans ("New Afro-Cuban" 710-11).

immediacy of the historical past for present issues of race and racism, implicitly contrasting (for those familiar with Guillén's well-known poem) post-Special Period realities with the optimism of the early sixties, while summoning recollections of systemic discrimination before 1959 as well as the persisting legacy of colonial slavery.

The artistic strategy employed by Hermanos de Causa's "Tengo," the interpellation of elements from the past for speaking to present-day inequalities, abounds in Cuban cultural work produced since the 1970s, and this article examines its particular expression in three plays by Gerardo Fulleda León: *La pasión desobediente* (2014), *Plácido* (1982), and *Ruandi* (1977).[6] In fictionalizing the lives of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, in *La pasión desobediente*, and of Plácido (Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés), Fulleda's work exemplifies a tendency in Cuban theatre since the seventies: reincarnating nineteenth-century poets, which Luisa Campuzano attributes to "esa búsqueda de un sentido a la propia condición de escritores, que a consecuencia de todo el proceso de los setenta muchos…percibieron como minimizada, también como homenaje a los riesgos de diversa índole que ha implicado ser un escritor en Cuba" (20).[7] The phrase "process of the seventies" refers to the dark chapter in Cuban cultural politics emblematically represented by the 1971 arrest and coerced *mea culpa* of poet Heberto Padilla, targeted by officials for work deemed counterrevolutionary, an episode that evokes the brutal Stalinist purges of dissident writers in the 1930s. The Padilla Affair inaugurated a sharply repressive period for freedom of expression in Cuba, known as the "Quinquenio Gris" or the *Pavonato*, corresponding to Luis Pavón's tenure at the Consejo Nacional de Cultura from 1971-76, years marked by a dearth of substantive cultural production while reprisal threats loomed for departures, real or perceived, from ideological formulas prescribed by the regime.[8] The events of 1971

[6] Fulleda, active from the 1960s through the present and awarded the Premio Nacional de Teatro in 2014, is the author of some twenty-four plays and was general director of the Rita Montaner Theatre Company from 1988 until his retirement in 2014. Born in Santiago de Cuba in 1942, Fulleda has lived in Havana since 1956, where he came of age with the Revolution and received his theatrical formation in the three-year Primer Seminario de Dramaturgia taught by Argentine playwright Osvaldo Dragún from 1961 to 1963, which aimed to cultivate a generation of revolutionary playwrights (Interview with Narciso Hidalgo 154, Dragún 85-88).

[7] Campuzano highlights plays based on the life and work of Juan Francisco Manzano, José Jacinto Milanés, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (Plácido), Juan Clemente Zenea, Julio Casal, and Juana Borrero. Abel González Melo has also explored theatrical resuscitations of nineteenth-century poets in Cuban theatre since the 1970s (32-33).

[8] Pavón actively repressed ideologically-suspect cultural work and through his program of "parametración" removed writers and artists whose work or identity did not conform to the regime's newly revised "parameters" of acceptability. Ambrosio Fornet, who coined the term "Quinquenio Gris" in 1987, reflected in 2007 on the lasting significance of 1971:

made visible the fissures between the community of Cuba's artists and intellectuals and the increasingly radicalized Revolutionary regime, which Jorge Fornet characterizes as two irreconcilible vanguards, one artistic and one political:

> Una de las persistentes paradojas a la que no pudo escapar esta revolución fue la dificultad—si no imposibilidad—de hacer coincidir de manera permanente a las vanguardias artística y política. De hecho, la aspiración a esa coincidencia había sido la columna vertebral del discurso de los intelectuales revolucionarios (y de izquierda en general) durante al menos una década. Sin embargo, según ha señalado Slavoj Žižek, a propósito de la experiencia ruso-soviética, "el encuentro entre la política leninista y el arte modernista (ejemplificado en la fantasía de Lenin de reunirse con los dadaístas en un café de Zurich) es algo que estructuralmente no puede ocurrir." Para el estudioso, la política y el arte revolucionarios se mueven en temporalidades diferentes; es decir, aunque están vinculados, son dos caras del mismo fenómeno que, por lo mismo, no pueden reunirse nunca (11).

While the landscape of cultural politics under the Revolution became relatively more permissive in the ensuing decades, after the crisis of the 1970s largely passed, colonial-era settings for literature and cultural work, I argue, have continued to provide Cuban authors with the critical distance needed to negotiate politically treacherous issues, such as the persistence of discrimination based on race and sex.

Two foundational examples of this cultural phenomenon are the 1972 film *Una pelea cubana contra los demonios* by director Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Titón) and the 1973 play *La dolorosa historia del amor secreto de don José Jacinto Milanés* by playwright Abelardo Estorino. *Una pelea cubana* presents tensions in a coastal village near the end of the seventeenth century between the "heretical" inhabitants (the most prominent of whom trade in contraband with the French) and their fervent priest, Father Manuel (who wishes to move the town inland for his flock's moral preservation). In his fervor to clean the town of its spiritual and commercial demons, Father Manuel becomes guilty of the very evils he condemns. On a material level, he insists on leading the town to infertil land far from the coast, where its economic prospects will be imperiled by reduced sugar prices due to inferior quality and diminished access to markets—an

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> Si tuviera que resumir en dos palabras lo ocurrido, diría que en el 71 se quebró, en detrimento nuestro, el relativo equilibrio que nos había favorecido hasta entonces y, con él, el consenso en que se había basado la política cultural. Era una clara situación de *antes* y *después*: a una etapa en la que todo se consultaba y discutía—aunque no siempre se llegara a acuerdos entre las partes—, siguió la de los ucases: una política cultural imponiéndose por decreto y otra complementaria, de exclusiones y marginaciones, convirtiendo el campo intelectual en un páramo (por lo menos para los portadores del virus del diversionismo ideológico y para los jóvenes proclives a la extravagancia, es decir, aficionados a las melenas, los Beatles y los pantalones ajustados, así como a los Evangelios y los escapularios) (12).

obvious reference to the sugar cane harvest of 1970, the so-called *zafra de los 10 millones*. Morally, Father Manuel's religious paranoia leads him to use the whip in his exorcisms to the point of killing one of the faithful he purports to save. The film thus constitutes a precaution against fanaticism that can be read as a denunciation of the dogmatism manifested in the *zafra de los 10 millones* and the Padilla affair.

With delirious theatricality not dissimilar from the cinematic chaos of *Una pelea cubana*, Estorino's *La dolorosa historia* explores the non-place of the nineteenth-century poet Milanés amidst strong repressions on freedom of expression instituted by Cuba's colonial governor Miguel Tacón. Defying the Tacón regime, Estorino's Milanés declaims one of his abolitionist poems in a conversation with prominent cultural figures Domingo del Monte, Ramón de Palma, and Cirilo Villaverde:

> MILANÉS. Campiñas, ¡ay!, do la feroz conquista
> cual antes en el indio, hoy vil se ensaña
> en el negro infeliz; donde la vista
> al par que mira la opulenta caña
> mira, ¡qué horror!, la sangre que la baña.
>
> DEL MONTE. Estas cosas deben ser conocidas. El mundo tiene que enterarse de lo que sucede en la Isla.
>
> PALMA. El lápiz rojo impedirá que se publique una palabra.
>
> DEL MONTE. Encontraremos la forma de divulgarlo. Siga escribiendo así. Siempre hay un juego, una argucia, un traspié para burlar la censura. (38)

By turning toward the past in its condemnation of censorship, the abuse of authoritarian power, and political hypocrisy, *La dolorosa historia* dislocates its critique of 1970s cultural politics to a colonial setting a century and a half earlier. The urgency to make known to the world what is happening in Cuba, emphasized by Del Monte above, applies explicitly to the injustice of slavery in the nineteenth century, but the denunciation of oppression and censorship in the 1830s easily extends to the repression exercised in the 1970s. Further, in presenting Del Monte's insistence that there is always a way around (Spanish colonial) censorship through literary invention, Estorino's play baldly highlights its own exact undertaking in the face of *Pavonato*-era repressions.

In the vein of Titón's *Una pelea cubana* and Estorino's *La dolorosa historia*, Gerardo Fulleda's works of historical theatre, spanning four decades, recast Cuba's colonial era to explore the present-day implications of past oppression in issues of race and sex. Fulleda's theatre upholds human dignity as paramount, setting his characters' drive for liberation against hegemonic forces that constrict possibilities for members of

marginalized groups.[9] His plays *Ruandi* (1977), *Azogue* (1979), *Plácido* (1982) and *Chago de Guisa* (1989) reclaim the humanity of black and *mulato* protagonists in slaveholding Cuba, who journey—literally and metaphorically—from the plantation to the *palenque* on quests to live freely in the recognition of their innate humanity.[10] These *cimarronaje* plays implicitly demand that audiences locate current racial inequalities in the historical context of slavery in the Americas.[11] Fulleda's most recent piece, *La pasión desobediente* (2014), is a monologue in the voice of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, staged to commemorate the bicentennial of the birth of this celebrated writer, whom many view as a champion for women's equality in her time. *La pasión desobediente* expands the vision of justice projected by Fulleda's theatre, bringing historically-contextualized calls for racial redress into concert with denunciations of inequalities based on sex and gender.

Turning first to *La pasión desobediente* in the section that follows, my analysis shows the ongoing effectiveness of the artistic strategy of using colonial-era settings to address politically sensitive social inequalities. Restrictions on freedom of expression persist in twenty-first-century Cuba, even if not as harshly as during the 1970s, and *La pasión desobediente* offers a model for the artistic critique of social inequalities under the revolutionary government. Moreover, by approaching *Plácido* and *Ruandi*—Fulleda's earlier plays on Afro-Cuban experiences during the slaveholding era—through the prism of the more broadly focused *La pasión desobediente*, we see the cohesive nature of the playwright's preoccupations with racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Taken together, then, Fulleda's colonial-era plays anticipate the future righting of structural injustices in a way that provokes audiences with the nagging realization that our own time continues to fall short of standards for human equality articulated in centuries past. His historical characters respond to lived oppression with hope for the future, theirs and Cuba's, in a way that indirectly acknowledges the gains of the twentieth century as incremental steps toward a far-from-achieved ideal.

In its forward-looking treatment of history, Fulleda's theatre is simultaneously idealistic and melancholy, activist and meditative, imaginative and realist, ethereal and corporeal. Poetic rhythms and intercalated song add oral and mystical dimensions that

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[9] The attention to marginalized subjectivities is true not only for the colonial-era plays that are the focus of this article but also works with contemporary settings such as *Remendios* (1993), *Betún* (1995), and *Remolino en las aguas* (1999), which tackle issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation in twentieth-century settings.

[10] "Palenque" refers to a community of runaway slaves in the Spanish Caribbean, typically in an isolated location deep in the forest or the mountains.

[11] The word *cimarronaje* relates to runaway slaves (*cimarrones* in Spanish).

bring into relief the crude realities lived by his characters. These texts fight for the common good while upholding the value of individuality, which I see as a vision of liberty that is both egalitarian and personal throughout Fulleda's oeuvre. Specifically, Fulleda's historical plays enact a struggle for justice through prophetic/poetic language that imagines a future where egalitarian aims fall within reach. In Fulleda's theatre, in which the celebration of the humanity of his protagonists is always also a celebration of their Cubanness, historical inequities inform present-day concerns, with an idealistic eye toward what might one day be.

Retro-Futurism in La pasión desobediente

The notion of liberty is fundamental to *La pasión desobediente*, where an impassioned Avellaneda desires freedom from patriarchal control over her sexual desire, freedom from restrictive gender roles, and freedom to travel abroad or to remain in Cuba. Anchored in the western province of Pinar del Río in 1863 by the bed of her ailing husband Domingo Verdugo, Avellaneda's memories follow a trajectory that takes us east to Havana, to Santiago de Cuba, over Yemayá's waters to Madrid and Paris, and back to her native island, presented here as her beloved and true home. Frequent flashbacks mark the structure of the monologue in which Tula (as Avellaneda is affectionately known) explores her most intimate memories, returning rhythmically to the present moment in which Verdugo's health cyclically improves and worsens, seemingly in synchronization with the intermittent tropical rains. The parallel between the natural environment and the characters' emotional and corporeal states invokes the Romantic spirit exemplified in the poetry, prose, and theatre of Avellaneda herself, a writer emblematic of nineteenth-century Cuban Romanticism, together with José María Heredia and Plácido.

The sexual liberation yearned for by Fulleda's Avellaneda lies at the heart of *La pasión desobediente* and comes to represent the desire for justice in issues of discrimination on the basis of gender, racial identity, social class, sexual orientation, and migratory or national status. Deleuze's concept of "becoming" sheds light on the way Fulleda's Avellaneda transforms her world by transforming her own thinking, during a theatrical time rooted in difference and in awareness. The becoming described by Deleuze occurs in a generative present where being is constituted by converging forces in continuous change, yet without ceasing to recognize past formations and future possibilities: "Becoming isn't part of history; history amounts only to the set of preconditions, however recent, that one leaves behind in order to 'become,' that is, to

create something new" (171). It is in this Deleuzian spirit that Avellaneda enters the stage in Fulleda's play singing "Sempre libera" from Guiseppe Verdi's opera *La traviata*, which premiered in Venice in 1853 and in Madrid two years later in 1855, the same year Avellaneda married Domingo Verdugo while living in the Spanish capital. *La pasión desobediente* locates Avellaneda at Verdugo's side, awaiting the arrival of Dr. Sánchez, whose delay is surely due to the rain and mud impeding travel on the dirt roads of nineteenth-century Pinar del Río. A state of expectation permeates the work. To wait for the doctor is to wait for the world to change, to become a more welcoming place for those individuals who, like Avellaneda, resist being restricted to traditional social roles.

Gender identity for Fulleda's Avellandeda is a performance in the sense theorized by Judith Butler in arguing that gender is always constructed within a cultural context, in and through language, and that conceiving of gender independently of biological sex frees the word "masculine" to describe Avellaneda's body as naturally as the body of any man. The Avellaneda of *La pasión desobediente* smokes a cigar, contemplating how such an act transgresses gender norms, and remembers the sensation of liberation she felt dressing as a man during Carnival in Santiago de Cuba, exclaiming, "¡Cha, Cha, Cha! ¡Cuánta libertad desatada en el cuerpo!" (136). If Avellaneda finds herself in the domestic sphere in *La pasión desobediente*, caring for her sick husband, it is because this has been her decision as a woman with independent will. For her, desiring a man does not mean depending on him for her self-concept; it means affirming her individual agency as a liberated woman. She announces her sexual desire without fear. She eroticizes a male body with broad shoulders and large hands and denounces the *señoras* who suffocate under repressed desires while denying their own sexuality. Embodying the tension between puritanical social conventions and the transgressive sexual act of openly desiring a man, Avellaneda proclaims, "Pero las urracas comienzan a abrir los abanicos con furia y cuchichean con los señores y me lanzan dardos de mohines y gestos. ¿Qué me censuran? ¿Qué quieren? ¿Que me cierre el escote como una monja? … ¡Hipócritas! Habría que palparles por debajo de las crinolinas para comprobar cómo se humedecen de lascivia y se ahogan de deseo" (134). By voicing her sexual urges and by challenging the normative construction of femininity as chaste, Fulleda's Avellaneda breaks down societally-imposed barriers to the free expression of sexual desire and gender identity.

While the nineteenth-century moment represented in *La pasión desobediente* is explicit, the work implicates the spectators' or readers' present in expectantly awaiting

the elimination of sexist double standards, racial discrimination, and other forms of socio-political inequality. The piece optimistically foretells that groups once considered minorities will one day displace white heterosexual male hegemony:

> Ya sé, sí, que las cosas son como ustedes ordenan y mandan. ¿Pero, hasta cuándo? ¡Bien! Consuélate y reanímate, buen hombre, mi Verduguillo querido, todavía llevarán los pantalones puestos un buen tiempo. ¿Pero quieres que te diga lo que veo en mi bola de cristal? ¿Sí? Quizás, quizás, quizás…mira…para el final del siglo XXI o el XXIII…De no haber antes una gran guerra o epidemia que aniquile a la humanidad. Para entonces: Dios será una mujer. Ríete, ríete mucho a ver si te desangras de una vez o cambias esa cara…Y las mujeres y los negros, los árabes, los chinos, los indios y los descalzos, los sin pan y sin tierra; las mujeres que aman a otras mujeres, los hombres que aman a otros hombres y todos los inconformes y maniatados…¡Los distintos! Sin olvidar a las flacas y a los gordos, los feos y los zambos; serán una aplastante mayoría y se manifestarán y…¡Impondremos nuestros estatutos…! Y ustedes, pobrecitos mandamases, serán una especie en extinción. Ejemplares únicos de un gremio anacrónico, expuestos en un museo de cera. Y yo, sobre mi tumba, bailaré una rumba y no flamenca, precisamente. (138-39)

La pasión desobediente thus forecasts, from its nineteenth-century setting, a prophesy whose fulfillment will almost surely be ever-elusive: the egalitarian leveling of conditions of oppression in all its forms—even as Fulleda's Avellaneda grapples in the play with her own racial privilege as white and upper-class.

Walter Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image illuminates the paradoxical character of the past-present relationship and its artistic representations: "It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill" (462). Expanding on this idea, Michael Jennings postulates that: "Only the bringing to consciousness of the relationship of the elements in each image reveals to the reader the fallen condition of his own time. And only this knowledge can precipitate revolution, the erasure of conditions of oppression" (37). I argue that this theoretical framework applies variously to the use of historical figures in Cuban culture as approximate stand-ins for present-day realities; in all of Fulleda's colonial-era plays, dialectical images raise audiences' consciousness of racial discrimination. *La pasión desobediente* goes further by expanding Fulleda's vision to the pantheon of groups historically repressed due to being perceived as "different," in Avellaneda's words above, and therefore lesser than the straight white male hegemonic standard.

The kind of revolution suggested here is the radical change in awareness and reasoning proscribed by Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire with his term *conscientização.*

The process of *conscientização* for the Avellaneda of *La pasión desobediente* includes confronting a racist evil that she herself committed as a member of the privileged class in slaveholding society. Relaying a memory, she whispers into the ear of the dying Verdugo, confessing the jealousy she felt toward a young slave girl whose lover Avellaneda desired for herself. The lover's name, Sab, is, of course, a reference to the title character of Avellaneda's 1841 antislavery novel, her best-known work. The jealousy felt by Fulleda's Avellaneda drove her to have the slave girl, her romantic rival, beaten under false pretexts; this act torments her still, decades later, as she confesses it to Verdugo and to us, the play's audience: "Lo que alienta mi mayor locura es la imagen de aquella bendita lacerada…¡Aullando en mis sentidos como una garza herida! ¿Cómo pude? (*Pausa larga*)" (151). The pause indicated by the stage directions invites the audience to reflect on their own place in relation to the situation presented. How is it possible that we could be guilty of suffering by the most vulnerable? How can we react when we are victims of abuse? What should we do when we witness such abuses? *La pasión desobediente* advances a vision of theatre as social engagement, postulating that theatre exists for people to confront their realities and to change their way of thinking. The play puts into Avellaneda's mouth words that apply reflexively to the whole of Fulleda's theatre: "[M]is comedias sirven para tocar el lado flaco de las gentes, donde más les duele y ponerlos así de frente a sus propios retratos. […] Entretenerlos siempre, sí, pero mostrándoles las entrañas del desorden también, para sacarles las gandingas y que dejen a un lado las musarañas" (140-41). Theatre is an art of praxis. To pursue José Martí's ideal of racial harmony, as Fulleda's plays imply we should, it is imperative that we continually face the wrongs and the injustices of our own pasts and our own presents.[12]

In *La pasión desobediente*, as in all of Fulleda's production, the seduction of the foreign is shown to be a false promise. The bright lights of Paris, Madrid, and New York are outshined by love for the island homeland. Though Avellaneda lived much of her life abroad, in *La pasión desobediente* she remains always the venerated daughter of Cuba. Her fantasmagoric appearance on the Cuban stage at the bicentennial of her birth consolidates not only Avellaneda's already foundational place in Cuban culture but also Fulleda's own legacy as a playwright whose works challenge audiences in their own time

[12] The idealistic racial rhetoric of José Martí's essays "Nuestra América" (1893) and "Mi raza" (1895)—both of which deny not only racial hatred, but racial categories themselves —served, one, to advance the Bolivarian political aim to unite Spanish America and, two, to recruit black and *mulato* Cubans in the struggle for national independence.

by promoting awareness of what has been and hope for what may still be. Further, *La pasión desobediente* synthesizes decades of Fulleda's earlier work representing contemporary inequalities through historical dramas that engage audiences in the task of retrospectively forecasting the righting of structural injustices. To understand and appreciate Fulleda's theatrical sensibility that finds its full expression in *La pasión desobediente*, we can trace the trajectory of its development through his earlier works *Plácido* and *Ruandi*, contextualizing our analysis in relation to socio-cultural shifts in Cuba from the 1970s through the 1990s.

Muscular Words in Plácido

The Cuban poet Plácido (1809-44) was executed as an alleged leader of the slave uprising known as the Conspiracy of La Escalera. For nearly two hundred years, Plácido, a free *mulato*, has held a unique position as an early Afro-Cuban writer whose artistic talent earned him praise and respect from the literary and intellectual community, at the same time that his non-white racial identification led to his social marginalization and, ultimately, his death. Plácido's poetry from the 1820s and 30s resists racial oppression from within the constraints of slaveholding society to forge new terrain for early Afro-Cuban literary expression. Fulleda's 1982 play, titled simply *Plácido*, takes up the figure of the *mulato* poet near the end of the twentieth century to implicitly propose an Afro-Cuban aesthetic for contemporary black Cuban writers and artists, using performed and performative language—in the sense of words staged for public reception and also of words constituting acts that effect real change—to advocate making public the culturally substantive, rather than nominally symbolic, role of African roots in Cuba's *mestizo* national identity.

The story goes that as he was being led from his cell to face the firing squad, Plácido declaimed his poem "Plegaria a Dios", composed in the days or hours before his execution (Cué Fernández 100-01). In Fulleda's play the protagonist voices these lines from the poem:

> Ser de inmensa bondad, ¡Dios poderoso!
> a vos acudo en mi dolor vehemente…
> ¡Extended vuestro brazo omnipotente,
> rasgad de la calumnia el velo odioso,
> y arrancad este sello ignominioso
> con que el hombre manchar quiera mi frente! (121-22)

The embodied performance of "Plegaria a Dios" in the play places Plácido on the side of divine righteousness. After the first round of shots left the other prisoners dead,

Plácido supposedly proclaimed, "Adiós, mundo. No hay piedad para mí. Fuego aquí…" (Cué Fernández 24). The Plácido of Fulleda's play utters these same lines but with the added exclamation "¡Adiós, Cuba!" (405), a phrase that creates an intimate connection between Plácido's death and the sense of Cuban national identity that was emergent in the 1840s. Fulleda's *Plácido* portrays the poet as the patriotic, innocent victim of a racist campaign by the Spanish colonial government to repress the nascent middle class of free black and *mulato* Cubans, a presentation consistent with historians' interpretations of Plácido's life story and the circumstances surrounding the 1844 La Escalera uprising (Cué Fernández 77-85). Without discarding the centrality of Plácido's execution in shaping Cubans' memory of the poet, Fulleda's play recasts Plácido as a living figure, revitalizing his memory to be more than simply a deceased victim of unjust colonial repression.

Plácido fictionalizes the poet's life and death through twelve episodic scenes that portray him in diverse social environments: performing at two parties (one exclusively for white guests and one attended by black and *mulato* Cubans); sharing an intimate sexual moment with a white middle-class woman; in conversations with, among others, his Spanish mother, José María Heredia, and the *mulato* musician-narrator Jesús; and, notably, at the scene of his public execution. Through literary and historical intertexts, Fulleda's *Plácido* comments broadly on the polemics of race and racism, economics and avarice, interracial sexual relationships, Cuba's ties to the U.S. and Europe, the politics of morality and religion, and the role of literature in struggles for human equality. The spoken word, often in the context of metatheatrical poetic verse, becomes deed in the play. What words *do*, more so than what messages they transmit, is the common thread running through this eclectic work. Charles Bernstein, for example, argues that poetry comes into full being only when it is performed vocally. J. L. Austin demonstrates that words can constitute speech acts with consequential impacts that exceed their communicative function. Paradigmatic examples include legal pronouncements of marriage and criminal conviction. Fulleda's play draws these concepts of performed and performative language intimately close to one another. Showcasing the power of voiced poetic language, *Plácido* exposes racial stereotyping as inherently discriminatory while demonstrating that racial identity and economic status can be mutually constitutive to the double disadvantage of Cubans of African descent, posing particular obstacles to black writers and artists.

Poems pack a punch in *Plácido*, which features improvisational-style poetry at a party attended exclusively by black and *mulato* guests. The conversation centers on the

subject of *adelantando la raza*—"advancing the race"—by ensuring that future generations have progressively lighter skin tone.[13] The *mulata* characters Mercedes and Caridad have been advocating the "negocio" of partnering their daughters with white men of means when the poet Arcino challenges Plácido to a *repentista* competition (349).[14] As Arcino extols the supremacy of classical Greek conceptions of beauty, Caridad suggests the same as the theme for the poetic dual. In Sergio Giral's 1986 film adaptation of Fulleda's play, also titled *Plácido*, Arcino looks upward in the scene, pointing his index finger toward the heavens as he praises the bright, clean beauty of the Roman god Jupiter, a distant gaze reflecting the absence of connection between his poetic message and the lived experiences of the party guests. A melodramatic tone of voice belies Arcino's insincerity. Plácido, in contrast, looks directly into the eyes of his audience and speaks in the kind of forthright tone honed by politicians to inspire confidence among constituents. Arcino strikes first, but the narrator character Jesús spurs Plácido, "Anda, Plácido, devuelve el golpe," and Plácido rejoins by satirically ridiculing the superiority of classical culture espoused by his adversary. Then, brushing aside Arcino's protests, Plácido takes aim at the hypocrisy of Arcino's Eurocentrism, when the physical features of his face and hair attest to his own African ancestry. The fictionalized Plácido of this scene shames Arcino two-fold: the audience judges Plácido to be the superior competitor both in terms of creative word play and in the strength of his rhetorical argument against the imitation of "white" standards of beauty.

Though both are *mulato* poets, Plácido and Arcino take mutually contradictory stances with regard to their African heritage. Arcino affirms his belief that denial of African cultural roots is necessary if black and *mulato* Cubans hope to gain social equality with whites. Furthermore, Arcino suggests that 'high culture,' including poetic production, belongs to the white cultural sphere and believes that skin color indicates an individual's intellectual and artistic capacities. Arcino thus responds to the social disadvantage of his *mulato* status by imitating what he perceives to be "white" culture.

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[13] Regarding the theme of *adelantando la raza* in Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), Cuba's foundational nineteenth-century novel, Reynaldo González comments, "Parecerse a las blancas en la vestimenta y en la proyección social podía conseguirse con un poco de lustre, de 'roce', de imitación. La mulatización progresiva, generación tras generación, se convirtió en una aspiración recurrente. 'Se me caería la cara de vergüenza si me casara y tuviera un hijo *saltoatrás*, dice Cecilia" (172).

[14] *Repentismo* refers to a tradition of poetic improvisation, common throughout the Spanish-speaking world and particularly strong in the Spanish Caribbean, in which two poets compete for audience approval while maintaining careful attention to poetic form. The most common *repentista* structure is the *décima espinela*, characterized by ten eight-syllable lines and the consonant rhyme scheme abbaaccddc (Pasmanick 252).

In fact, Arcino claims that imitation of white cultural practices could help Cubans of African descent gain as much wealth as whites and "one day even to become more white than them!" (360). Homi Bhabha holds that such attempts by subordinated groups to mimic the behavior of dominant groups cannot end their subjugation. Regarding British colonies that fought for political independence, yet continued to imitate the colonizer's style of government and social values, Bhabha describes "a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized, is *emphatically* not to be English" (128). Bhabha affirms:

> [T]he discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. (126)

By ambivalently emphasizing difference, mimetic projects will always be "*almost the same but not quite*" (130). Furthermore, the author of the mimesis, through the representation of difference, implicitly racializes himself or herself and is condemned to be, again in Bhabha's words, "*almost the same but not white*" (130). Bhabha argues that these imitations of colonizing governments or of "white" culture reinforce the repressive effects of dominant paradigms. Arcino's efforts have the opposite effect he intends, an irony Fulleda's play makes clear.

The artistic representation of race and racial prejudice is inescapably political, and Fulleda's *Plácido* advocates direct linguistic methods for engaging controversial racial themes. The Plácido of Fulleda's play refuses to be constrained by the political limitations that accompany imitation, racial or artistic. For Plácido, language and resistance go hand in hand. During a conversation about the implications of "whitening" Cuba with an immigrant population and possible annexation to the U.S., the poet underscores the need for strong, transformative, authentic language: "¡Me opongo, señores! Al lenguaje también habrá que poseerlo para transformarlo todo. Bien tontos seríamos si para nosotros patria y razón siguen significando lo mismo que para el rey" (334). Plácido is responding to the passive acceptance by many black and *mulato* Cubans of imposed Spanish colonial concepts of "national" identity. In addition to his emphatic linguistic opposition, Plácido resists appropriating hegemonic, pro-white values through his marriage to Gila, a *morena* depicted in Giral's film with skin significantly darker than her husband's. The observing *mulatas* scorn Plácido's choice of Gila, saying that he should have chosen a lighter-skinned partner to "advance the race" for the good of future generations, an opinion that reveals their internalized racism.

Fulleda's *Plácido* holds up the nineteenth-century poet's racial pride as a model for contemporary Afro-Cuban artist-activists. When the Plácido of Fulleda's play performs his poetry, whether for white or black audiences, the poet's racial identity becomes one prism through which audience members visually filter his work. The same is often true of rap and hip hop artists, and I would argue that Plácido's nineteenth-century legacy and its reinterpretation by Fulleda anticipate the ways Afro-Cuban rappers enact racial pride through linguistic performance. Roberto Zurbano credits hip hop culture with helping to bring the topic of racial discrimination into the national debate in Cuba. In rap music artists identify and resist what Zurbano calls "the subtle discrimination founded on Euro-Cuban domination"—in other words, the privileging of whiteness in cultural expression (151-52). A century and a half earlier, in Plácido's poems "Que se lo cuente a su abuelo" and "Si a todos Arcino dices," the latter included in Fulleda's play, poetic voices reprimand interlocutors for distancing themselves from the physical traits of their African ancestry. The same occurs in Nicolás Guillén's poems "Mulata" and "Ayé me dijeron negro" from the 1930s. Fulleda's 1982 play thus forms an integral link in this trajectory of Afro-Cuban cultural production running from Plácido's nineteenth-century work, through Guillen's poetry of the early and mid-twentieth century, and on to the hip hop movement.

While Fulleda wrote most of the poetry in his play, the text incorporates a selection of poems by Plácido himself that unite art and activism, including "¡Habaneros, libertad!", "Plegaria a Dios", and "El juramento." The narrator character Jesús ironically suggests that "¡Habaneros, libertad!" could serve as the inspiration for a slave uprising (the very accusation for which Plácido was executed), and "El juramento" convinces Plácido's widow Gila not to abandon the island. Gila plans to leave Cuba, disillusioned after her husband's death. Jesús entreats her, "Se ha regado demasiada sangre en esta Isla para darle la espalda a su llamado" (408). Gila is packing to leave when Jesús finds the text of "El juramento" among Plácido's belongings, which he reads aloud. The poem, similar to "¡Habaneros, libertad!" and "Plegaria a Dios", implores God to punish the "tyrant" and "break the yoke" of the oppressed. The reading convinces Gila to stay. She unpacks as the curtain falls.

The theme of emigration would have resonated strongly in Cuba at the time of *Plácido's* production in 1982, two years after the Mariel boatlift, regarded as the most significant mass exodus of the post-Revolution era (Gott 266). From April through October of 1980, 125,000 Cubans fled the island from the port of Mariel. In contrast to the first waves of emigrants after 1959, who were mostly middle- or upper-class and

left Cuba for political reasons, the *marielitos* were "blacker and poorer than those who had come before" and, according to Mark Sawyer, emigrated with the hope of finding a better standard of living in the United States than in economically depressed Cuba (157). The Mariel exodus highlighted persisting economic disparities in Cuba—correlated to race—two decades after Castro's Revolution began its work to mitigate socioeconomic divisions and to eliminate racism. Raising the question of emigration at the conclusion of *Plácido* increases the play's immediate relevance to its audience and begs the viewer or reader to reconsider the work as a whole through a contemporary lens.

For historians, the poet Plácido forms part of a lively debate about how to interpret the events of 1844 when most agree that an objective record of the facts of La Escalera will forever be illusory. Fulleda's fictionalization casts the poet as a consummate artist-activist, expanding his legacy as a brave martyr for racial equality in his time. The play projects Plácido's story and poetry onto Cuba's present-day social landscape, calling out the ways racialist stereotyping has continued from the nineteenth century while also fighting to move beyond discriminatory paradigms through the efforts of Afro-Cuban cultural expression. Linda Howe notes that:

> Since slavery, Afro-Cuban writers and artists have had few ideological choices for their cultural production: (1) to succumb to and to perpetuate romantic and exotic notions of their submissive relationship to the dominant powers; (2) to express an aesthetic perspective slightly critical of the dominant culture that still reasserts dimensions of that culture; (3) to provoke change (75).

Plácido provoked change in his lifetime and with his death. His recasting in Fulleda's play does so again in our present.

From Plantation to Palenque in Ruandi

The vision of justice forecast in Fulleda's *La pasión desobediente* and the activist poetics of *Plácido* find their precursor in his earlier play *Ruandi* (1977), his only work of theatre for children and likely the best known of his two dozen plays.[15] Like the two historical plays already discussed, *Ruandi* take place during the era of slavery. Unlike *La pasión desobediente* and *Plácido*, *Ruandi*—along with *Azogue* (1979) and *Chago de Guisa* (1989)—features a protagonist who is an enslaved person, who embarks on a journey to realize the full potential of his innate humanity. *Ruandi*, *Azogue*, and *Chago de Guisa*

[15] *Ruandi* is Fulleda's most widely performed play, having been staged in Latin America, Europe, and the U. S. in Spanish, French, and German. It has not yet been performed in English translation. Fulleda describes *Ruandi* as his "caballo de batalla", the work the playwright feels has been his most impactful for audiences as well as for his own development as a writer (Interview with Narciso Hidalgo 161).

celebrate the human spirit, frequently through poetry and song imbued with mystical Afro-Cuban cultural elements, while concurrently confronting twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences with the specter of slavery's overtly racist system of oppression. Poetry and song that often seem lighthearted in *Ruandi* become vehicles for anti-discriminatory action. If the indirectness of historical settings has been an effective strategy from the 1970s forward—for sidestepping the implicitly imposed prohibition on contesting the Castro regime's claim to have "eradicated" racism during the 1960s—then the interpolation of often-playful poetry and song in *Ruandi*, Fulleda's first work completed following the crisis of 1971, further nuances the ability of Fulleda's theatre to negotiate treacherous terrain in Cuban cultural politics.

In twelve episodic scenes, *Ruandi* tells the story of an eleven-year-old boy who has grown up as a slave on a plantation, where his closest friends are the master's daughter Belina and the matriarchal figure Abuela Minga, who is not his biological grandmother. For his clumsiness with the oxen, the master has decided to give Ruandi to a relative in Havana (Belina tells her father it is absurd that a boy might be given as a gift, a stance he finds unamusing). Fearing for his life, and inspired by Abuela Minga's stories of the *palenque*, where escaped slaves live free, Ruandi flees the plantation into the forest. As he journeys alone toward the *palenque*, Ruandi encounters a series of fantastical obstacles and allies, including a troubadour guard dog, a menacing Ceiba tree, a lecturing owl, a deadly white scorpion, dive-bombing vultures, an encouraging *jicotea* turtle, and a beautiful but treacherous river spirit. This play for audiences of all ages constitutes two different types of narrative at once. On one level, *Ruandi* is a universal tale of overcoming daunting odds by finding inner strength with the help of friends. Simultaneously, *Ruandi* is very specifically the story of an enslaved child's confrontation with systematic racism, whose enduring evils did not disappear overnight in the early 1960s.

Throughout *Ruandi*, poems, often meant to be sung, encapsulate the complexities of the play's dual ethos. In the first of these, Ruandi listens as Abuela Minga sings on the plantation about her childhood home in Africa:

> Tú que vienes de la tierra
> donde los ojos abrí:
> dime si aún da sombra el árbol
> del que frutos recogí.
>
> Tú que vienes de la guerra
> donde mi hermano perdí:
> dime si aún da sombra el árbol

del que frutos recogí.

Tú que vienes de la sierra
donde entre nubes crecí:
dime si aún da sombra el árbol
del que frutos recogí. (23-24)

There is inherent pleasure in the song's rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. The lyrics, though, explicitly evoke a nostalgic sense of loss and the pain of separation from Minga's place of childhood. The play makes clear that Minga was born in Africa and is a slave in Cuba, so an informed audience will recognize her as a survivor of Middle Passage horrors. The title protagonist's personal connection to Africa is inscribed in his name, a derivative of Rwanda, where his parents were from, according to the text. Abuela Minga's song thus operates both as a pleasure-bearing trope of children's theatre and as an indirect medium for confronting audiences, at least those equipped to understand, with the legacy of slavery, a past much more recent than is frequently acknowledged.

That *Ruandi* speaks to those able to read between the lines is made clear by the conclusion of the scene cited above. After insisting that Ruandi cannot and should not attempt an escape to the *palenque*—which is, of course, exactly what he promptly does—Abuela Minga is preparing to tell Ruandi the secrets he must know to survive as a slave in Havana when the poet/narrator interrupts, speaking over her, directly to the audience, to effect a transition to the following scene:

MINGA. Cuando seas mayor y te reúnas con otros esclavos en la casona de La Habana, entonces será que te servirá esto que voy a relatarte. Cuando…

POETA. Y así la buena abuela Minga desgrana una vez más, uno a uno, sus secretos al inquieto Ruandi. ¿Qué sueños, qué anhelos despiertan en Ruandi los sabios consejos, las hermosas leyendas de lucha de sus antepasados? Aún no lo sabemos. Pero veamos qué ocurre un poco más tarde en un recodo de la gran casa, a la hora en que los señores cenan con gran ruido de platos y tenedores […]. (27)

The audience is not privy to the final portion of the conversation shared between enslaved characters, corresponding to what James C. Scott terms a "hidden transcript": "If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term *hidden transcript* to characterize discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders" (4). The "offstage" space of the hidden transcript is "where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power" to create "a sharply dissonant political culture" (18). This space must be out of hegemonic view

because the hidden transcript is by definition that which cannot be openly vocalized for fear of repression, and Scott offers conversations between slaves in their quarters as the archetypical example of a hidden transcript, that which dare not be voiced within earshot of a master or overseer. Similarly, Doris Sommer argues that readers of "minority writing" must attend as much to the significance of gaps and blanks in the text as to the words appearing on the page.[16] In announcing that we cannot know secrets shared in confidence between slave characters, *Ruandi* highlights experiences of oppression in the nineteenth-century and indirectly spurs audiences to reflect on how these racial power dynamics play out still.

In *Ruandi* and *Chago de Guisa*, protagonized by child and adolescent black male characters fleeing slavery in colonial Cuba, songs add a dimension of playful escape, of otherworldliness, as a counterpoint to the grim social realities in which the protagonists live. Through imaginative poetry and song, rooted in Afro-Cuban oral tradition, Fulleda's characters access alternative modes of being.[17] Similarly, poetry and song in *La pasión desobediente* take Avellaneda back to a childlike state. They bring out youthful dimensions of her adult self, connecting her to her memories as a child with her mother. Fulleda's songs thus create spiritual connectedness, often to the memories of loved ones departed. They acknowledge loss, death, and tragic separation in productive ways that help characters find the inner strength they are seeking to discover and to develop on their respective quests in these plays. When Ruandi is frightened by a Ceiba tree, which he sees as a hundred-armed monster trying to put out his fire and punish him for lighting it, Abuela Minga appears in spirit and prompts Ruandi to sing in order to overcome his fears. After singing a lullaby of sorts to himself, according to the stage directions, "La Ceiba monstruosa se convierte en lo que es, una simple ceiba. Desaparece abuela Minga" (51). His song, whose particular words are less important than the comforting effect they produce, strengthens the child protagonist, who is alone in the middle of a dark and threatening forest. The comfort of a lullaby here reaches a higher aim: empowering a boy, who has been told he is merely property to be gifted or sold, to find and trust his inner strength. The scene leaves us relieved that Ruandi has

[16] The point of departure for Sommer's *Proceed with Caution* is that texts written by and/or featuring members of oppressed groups, and that are particular to the experiences of oppression, frequently present obstacles to ready comprehension, especially for readers with different/dominant-group life experiences. Readers must therefore attend to the limits of their own understanding. Chapter 8 on Cirilo Villaverde's landmark novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) specifically addresses slavery in Cuban fiction.

[17] Inés María Martiatu discusses Afro-Cuban spirituality in Fulleda's theatre in greater depth, with attention to various plays, including those considered here.

overcome his fear but still saddened to know that his fictional journey stands in for still more tragic lived experiences.

Surviving a near-deadly scorpion sting and then almost drowning, Ruandi ultimately does make it across the river and safely to the *palenque*, leaving behind the sound of barking dogs in pursuit and walking toward welcoming drumbeats ahead. Like many of Fulleda's works, *Ruandi* celebrates the humanity of its marginalized but determined Afro-Cuban protagonist, portraying his self-realized liberation as both an individual achievement and as a synecdoche for the fulfillment of racial justice for Cubans of African descent. The play concludes by suggesting that Ruandi will return from the *palenque* to live among us once again in a utopian future defined by racial harmony. Following thirteen utterances in the future tense, the play's final lines ambiguously recalibrate its own future moment using the present perfect tense: "POETA. […] Y todos sabrán que no fue inútil su viaje. Pues Ruandi ha regresado, y entre nosotros… ¡vive libre!" (112) The most literal interpretation is also the politically-expedient one for the context of the play's original production in the late 1970s: that is, that the Revolution's gains toward social equality in the 1960s produced the utopian circumstances of Ruandi's return, which has indeed occurred. However, an alternative interpretation reads a parenthetically implied "Y entonces dirán" in place of "Pues", locating Ruandi's return in a yet-hoped-for future: "Y todos sabrán que no fue inútil su viaje. *Y entonces dirán*, 'Ruandi ha regresado, y entre nosotros… ¡vive libre!'" In fact, a 2007 production by New York's IATI group adapted the final lines to remain in the future tense: "POETA. […] Y todos sabrán que no fue en vana su partida porque Ruandi, Ruandi regresará, y entre nosotros… ¡vivirá libre!" In considering which interpretation is more appropriate, it is essential to remember that racial politics in 1970s Cuba were shaped by the harshest repressions on freedom of expression since the 1959 Revolution. During the so-called Quinquenio Gris, it would have been anathema to the Revolution to even appear to contradict the regime's claim that it "eradicated" racial discrimination from Cuban society during the 1960s. In this political context, *Ruandi*'s conclusion—like other works of historical fiction from the 1970s referenced in the opening section of this article—does not celebrate Revolutionary triumphs over racism but instead prompts audiences to measure persisting inequalities against the Revolution's own egalitarian standard.

Even after recasting *Ruandi*'s conclusion from the present perfect to the future tense, it remains an overwhelmingly optimistic one. The same is true for *Plácido*, which concludes by highlighting the resolve of the murdered poet-protagonist's widow to

remain engaged with the fight for the betterment of her homeland. And it is also valid for *La pasión desobediente*, whose Avellaneda continually looks beyond present-day discrimination toward a future in which systems of socio-political power have been leveled for all. Fulleda's theatre is eternally optimistic, but it is not naïve. It believes in the good in humanity and encourages us to persevere through hardship to find that good for ourselves. Fulleda's protagonists do realize their potential, though always in ways that surprise themselves and never via the route they set out to take. Fulleda's theatre is one of life as a journey with great promise, if we can get beyond our own ambitions and pursue the good of others—a good that is found in connection to loved ones, in personal sacrifice, and in living in the present moment with awareness of the past, with acceptance, understanding, and goodwill.

Fulleda's theatre is a product of its time and is a prophetic voice for all time. The historical settings of *La pasión desobediente*, *Plácido*, and *Ruandi* respond to the urgent need for artistic expression that aspires to the Revolution's egalitarian ideals, despite (indeed, because of) the Revolution's shortcomings, all while negotiating the Castro regime's limitations on freedom of expression. Fulleda's historical theatre, through its activist poetics, spurs audiences and readers to personally reflect on their own places in society, to mourn the tragedies of injustice, and to take responsibility for shaping a more perfect future.

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