

Translating Cuba: Diasporic writing between moving cultures and moving media

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Abstract

This article discusses the interrelation between transculturality and transmediality with an emphasis on processes of translation. It focuses on two examples of transcultural and transmedial writing taken from contemporary Cuban literature in Paris: Miguel Sales's recontextualization of Cuban popular music in Paris and William Navarrete's ekphrastic reinscription of his island into the realm of French romantic painting. The case studies are significant in this context because they show how cultural borders are simultaneously set and transgressed at medial crossings—between music and poetry, text, and image. Thus, cultural translations go hand in hand with medial transpositions that include forms of rewriting, recomposition, and revisualization. The connection between *moving cultures* and *moving media* also points to the question of “travelling memory” in diaspora.



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Keywords: *transculturality and transmediality; Cuban literature in Paris; diasporic writing; cultural translation; moving cultures and moving media; transcultural memory*

Recent publications have put a theoretical focus on linking cultural and interart studies, thus opening up interart studies for inter- or transcultural approaches, as well as connecting transcultural studies with the concept of transmediality to analyze the interrelation between *moving cultures* and *moving media*.¹ This article intends to combine these conceptions of transmediality and transculturality by taking into account two quite heterogeneous examples from contemporary Cuban writers exiled in Paris. In the following analysis, the poem “La otra rumba de María Belén” (1996) by Miguel Sales serves as an example to demonstrate the medial crossing of music and word as a

phenomenon of audibility.² A contrasting illustration of visibility will be provided by a discussion of William Navarrete's literary essay “Hundimiento de la isla” (2007), which, as an ekphrasis³ of Théodore Géricault's *Le radeau de la Méduse* (1819),⁴ is located at the interface between visibility and textuality.⁵ With a focus on cultural and medial transformations and rearrangements, both texts allow me to consider forms of rewriting (*reescritura*), recomposing (*recomposición*), and revisualizing (*revisualización*) that are embedded in a transmedial and transcultural context. What happens when the famous Cuban song “María Belén Chacón” moves over to Paris, where it reappears

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as Sales's "song-poem" in 1996? And how can Cuba's contemporary history be reread on the canvas of Géricault's romantic painting?

These cases of cultural transfer will be analyzed with Alfonso de Toro's concept of *translatio*, which focuses on cultural aspects of translation as transformation. It takes into account recodings and reconfigurations through which an "original" text is transported into new cultural settings and systems. Rather than searching for relations of equivalence, the term *translatio* explicitly stresses performative reinventions that intend to change the function and meaning of the "original." Thus, the emphasis lies not only on linguistic but also on cultural, social, and historical translations of media that move from one place to another, from one time to another, from one context to another.⁶ Therefore, de Toro's term is comparable to Homi Bhabha's conception of cultural translation, which accentuates the performativity of cultural appropriations and positionings within the practice of translation. For Bhabha, translation "is language *in actu*." It enounces a "movement of meaning" and decenters the original by turning it into a wandering phenomenon.⁷ The aspect of movement is also stressed in Toro's term *translatio*, which emphasizes the Deleuzian concept of de- and reterritorialization, in order to describe not only the relational and nomadic dynamics but also the marking of cultural difference within translational practices.⁸

Ottmar Ette considers these nomadic dynamics in Cuban literary history and applies the term of de- and reterritorialization to describe the movements of people in the context of the Cuban diaspora. According to Ette, Cuban writing has been characterized by "displacement and exile," "diaspora and homelessness" from the very beginning.⁹ Thus, every insularly retreat of Cuban authors into the supposed "own" has always been interwoven with the "other."¹⁰ This observation is still valid for Cuban literature in the twenty-first century, as a great part of it is produced and published outside of Cuba, with probably up to a third of all Cuban intellectuals, among them a considerable number of writers and artists, living in diaspora.¹¹

In my analysis of Sales's poem and Navarrete's essay, the relational and translational dynamics, which mark the "own" inside the "other," will be considered in the specific context of diaspora and its emerging cultural contacts. Sales and Navarrete both live in Paris as exiled authors, so

that their practice of *translatio* is tightly linked to the question of memory in displacement. Thus, relating to forms and functions of remembering, Astrid Erll's concept of travelling memory also plays an important role for "translating Cuba." Erll proposes to explore the interrelation between *moving cultures* and *moving media* in the field of memory studies.¹² The idea of travelling memory highlights transcultural dimensions of mnemonic processes, which raises further questions with regard to Sales and Navarrete: How do they transmedialize their memory of Cuba? To what extent can their texts be considered examples of transcultural memory? And how is the deterritorialized memory of these exiled Cuban authors reterritorialized in Paris?

TRANSLATIO AND MUSIC: "MARÍA BELÉN CHACÓN"

When we think about Cuba, it is, above all, the music of this Caribbean island that comes to our minds. According to Antonio Benítez-Rojo, "the cultural expression that best defines what is Cuban to a foreigner is Cuban popular music."¹³ The musical style of the *son* is regarded as the foundation of Cuba's *música popular*. It started to proliferate in the late 1920s, and even today the *son* enjoys great popularity inside and outside of Cuba.

The song "María Belén Chacón," performed by the band Lecuona Cuban Boys, allows us to travel back in time: composed by Rodrigo Prats, this *son* was first staged as *zarzuela*—a dance-theater performance that originated in Spain—in 1932. Prats's composition is a musical adaptation of a poem by Emilio Ballagas, "Elegía de María Belén Chacón," which appeared in his anthology *Cuaderno de poesía negra* from 1934. The poem was first published in 1930 in the influential cultural journal *Revista de Avance*.¹⁴

Over 70 years later María Belén Chacón reappears as part of the anthology *Ínsulas al paio: Poesía cubana contemporánea en París*, edited by William Navarrete, which compiles the poems of 12 Cuban authors living in Paris. The collection contains Miguel Sales's poem "La otra rumba de María Belén," explicitly dedicated to Emilio Ballagas. Written in Paris in the year 1996, Sales's poem can be considered a reminiscence of the poetic-musical tradition of the *son*-poetry in Cuba,¹⁵

the poet's native country, which he left as a political exile in 1978.

The poetic cannot be detached from the musical. Poetry depends on music and sound, and this holds especially true for the hybrid genre of the *son*-poetry, which is mainly identified in Cuba with the Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén.¹⁶ In the late 1920s, *negrismo* flourished in Europe and the North American continent and became a movement of fashion in Cuba.¹⁷ With an orientation toward African heritage, the culture and living conditions of the Afro-Cuban population were brought into focus. The *poesía negra* thus corresponds to the category of social poetry in which the poet absorbs “características ancestrales, culturales, idiomáticas [...] de un sector de la comunidad de que forma parte.” [ancestral, cultural and idiomatic characteristics of his own community.]¹⁸ Contrary to this definition, Emilio Ballagas created *negrista* poetry from an outside perspective, as he himself—in opposition to Guillén—belonged to the white, bourgeois Cuban upper class.¹⁹ Genuinely oriented toward a transcendental *poesía pura* (pure poetry), Ballagas searched for the specific sensuality of Afro-Cuban popular culture with its languages, rhythms, and dances.²⁰ Similar to Guillén, Ballagas' *poesía negra* shows the close intermingling of music and poetry. The musical styles of *son* and *rumba* appear together with a specific regional vocabulary and Afro-Cuban expressions that are integrated into the rhythm of the verses. In his “Elegía de María Belén Chacón,”²¹ Ballagas takes up the tragic fate of an Afro-Cuban singer and dancer, a so-called *rumbera*, who earns her living as a laundress. One morning at daybreak, the steam of a pressing iron scalds her lungs. Thereafter she can no longer sing:

Elegía de María Belén Chacón

01 María Belén, María Belén, María Belén
 02 María Belén Chacón, María Belén Chacón,
 María Belén Chacón
 03 Con tus nalgas de vaivén de Camagüey a
 Santiago, de Santiago a Camagüey.
 04 En el cielo de la rumba,
 05 ya nunca habrá de alumbrar
 06 tu constelación de curvas.
 07 ¿Qué ladrido te mordió el vértice del
 pulmón?
 08 María Belén Chacón, María Belén
 Chacón ...
 09 ¿Qué ladrido te mordió el vértice del
 pulmón?

10 Ni fue ladrido ni uña
 11 Ni fue uña ni fue *daño*.
 12 La plancha, de madrugada, fue quien te
 quemó el pulmón!

13 María Belén Chacón, María Belén
 Chacón ...

[María Belén Chacón's Elegy

01 María Belén, María Belén, María Belén
 02 María Belén Chacón, María Belén
 Chacón, María Belén Chacón
 03 With your backside swinging from Cama-
 güey to Santiago, from Santiago to Camagüey.

04 The heaven of rumba
 05 will never again be illuminated
 06 by the constellation of your curves.

07 What dog's bark has bitten the angle of
 your lung?

08 María Belén Chacón, María Belén
 Chacón ...

09 What dog's bark has bitten the angle of
 your lung?

10 It was neither a dog's bark nor a fingernail
 11 It was neither a fingernail nor a *damage*.
 12 It was the iron, by dawn, which burned
 your lung!

13 María Belén Chacón, María Belén
 Chacón ...]

Turning to Miguel Sales's version of Ballagas's poem, the title, “La otra rumba de María Belén” already reveals the direct reference to Ballagas and his song-poetry. Thus, Sales's poem can be described as a variation of a theme, which becomes immediately clear to the adept reader. The contextualization is provided by the paratexts, specifically the title and the dedication, “en homenaje a Emilio Ballagas.” Moreover, yet another paratext indicates the temporal and spatial recontextualization of the poem by mentioning place and time—“París, verano de 1996” [“Paris, summer of 1996”].

On a formal, stylistic, and thematic level Sales refers to his precursor Ballagas's elegy. First, he adopts the rhythmic structure of the refrain. Furthermore, he produces an effect of orality by applying a high number of regionalisms, which even culminate in the use of an expression borrowed from the West African language of Yoruba: the word “subuso” (line 11) can be translated into Spanish as *calladamente* or *en voz baja*, “silently” or “in a low voice.” This linguistic hybridity is a specific characteristic of the Afro-Cuban poetry of Guillén and Ballagas.²² A further look at Sales's

variation reveals various aspects of the thematic rewriting of María Belén:

La otra rumba de María Belén

01 Voz de plata macaquina,
02 cutis de canela fina
03 María Belén Chacón.

04 Un negro de Camagüey
05 Matrero y baracutey
06 Te ha robado el corazón.

07 María Belén
08 María Belén
09 María Belén Chacón.

10 Y a la noche, en el batey
11 Se oye *subuso* este son:
12 “Tu boquita de mamey
13 ha sido tu perdición”.

14 María Belén
15 María Belén
16 María Belén Chacón.

[María Belén’s other rumba

01 Silver coined voice,
02 smooth cinnamon skin
03 María Belén Chacón.

04 A negro from Camagüey
05 crooked and a maverick
06 has stolen your heart.

07 María Belén
08 María Belén
09 María Belén Chacón.

10 And at nightfall, in the dwellings
11 this *son* is heard in silence:
12 “Your mouth of mamey
13 has been your ruin.”

14 María Belén
15 María Belén
16 María Belén Chacón.]

In contrast to Ballagas’s poem one notes the shortness of Sales’s verses, composed of seven or eight syllables, and the application of a regular rhyme scheme (aab/ccb/ddb/cbcb/ddb). The first stanza addresses the beauty of the singer. In place of the “nalgas” (line 3) and the “constelación de curvas,” with which Ballagas celebrates the grace of her body’s dancing movements, Sales accentuates María’s fine, cinnamon-colored skin and her voice, metaphorizing it as silver coinage, “macaquina” (line 1). The second stanza entails a semantic change in the comparison of both poems. Although the local reference to Cuba’s

Oriente province prevails through Camagüey, in which Afro-Caribbean culture is most dominant, Sales adds an unfortunate love story to his verses, which does not appear in those of Ballagas. An Afro-Cuban from Camagüey, characterized as “crooked and a maverick” through the regional expressions “matrero” and “baracutey” (line 5), steals the heart of María Belén (line 6). This semantic change indicates that the musical adaptation resonates in Sales’s rewriting. Rodrigo Prats’s lyrics transform Ballagas’s social critique into a story of love betrayed. The following extract of the song’s lyrics illustrates the typical motifs of a desperate and disappointed love: betrayal, sorrow, rejection, tears, and a bleeding heart, whose sad fate of being left behind is emphasized by the particles of negation “ya jamás” and “nunca más.”

09 María Belén Chacón
10 después de la traición
11 y este no se da
12 nunca más a tu corazón

13 María Belén Chacón
14 supiste del dolor
15 inmenso del saber
16 que no fue tuyo su querer.

17 María Belén Chacón
18 tu pobre corazón
19 nacido para amar
20 hoy tendrá que llorar

21 María Belén Chacón
22 no podrás ya jamás cantar
23 tu corazón sangró
24 María Belén Chacón.²³

[09 María Belén Chacón
10 After the betrayal
11 he won’t give himself
12 never again to your heart

13 María Belén Chacón
14 you experienced the immense pain
15 of knowing
16 that his love wasn’t yours.

17 María Belén Chacón
18 your poor heart
19 born to love
20 will plead today

21 María Belén Chacón
22 you won’t ever be able to sing again
23 your heart bled
24 María Belén Chacón.]

In the third stanza of this *son*-poem, Sales’s performative rewriting not only of Ballagas’s elegy

but also of its musical adaptation becomes evident. Through the use of a *mise en abyme* the earlier song resonates inside the later song. At nightfall, in the dwellings of the rural population (“batey,” line 10) a *son* is sung, whose lyrics are set off by quotation marks: “tu boquita de mamey/ha sido tu perdición” (lines 12–13). Chacón’s fruitful tempting mouth, metonymic for her singing, has caused her desperate silence.

In the context of its translational movement from Cuba to Paris, the story of María Belén Chacón reappears as travelling memory.²⁴ In relation to the song of the Lecuona Cuban Boys, Sales’s variation appears like a nostalgic echo that evokes the remote fashion of *son*-poetry in the 1930s. Through his linguistic, stylistic, and transmedial reminiscence, Sales reminds us of the musical and poetic vitality of this genre. Taking into account that it was created in Paris, an overcoding of Cubanness characterizes Sales’s rewriting, explicitly addressed to adept readers who have no problem decoding the density of Cuban regional Spanish. In comparison to Ballagas’s aestheticized verses, those of Sales appear in a mode of reduced complexity, which is oriented toward song lyrics rather than to a literary poem. Its local coloring and sound point out the specific “regional” positioning of the deterritorialized poet. This shows how much Afro-Cuban popular culture has become an integral part of Cuban identity across social and spatial boundaries.²⁵

Hence, out of the Cuban diaspora María Belén Chacón sounds forth. By evoking this tragic figure of the beautiful Afro-Cuban singer who, of all things, loses her voice, Sales further re-presents the reality of his exile, which has dispossessed him of his voice through his exclusion from Cuba.²⁶ Who would be more apt to symbolize this experience of loss than the famous figure of María Belén Chacón, who deeply inhabits Cubans’ cultural memory? The *translatio* of María Belén’s voicelessness into the context of exile illustrates the fate of the excluded expatriates whose voices are cut off. Separated from his home country, the exiled writer in Paris addresses Cuba without being heard there.

TRANSLATIO AND PAINTING: THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA

The focus of the following analysis moves from musical poetry to the pictorial text by examining William Navarrete’s literary essay “Hundimiento

de la isla,” which was published in *La canopea del Louvre*, a collection of texts on various paintings exhibited in the Louvre museum. As a form of ekphrasis, the essays range between fiction and art criticism. “Hundimiento de la isla” is dedicated to Théodore Géricault’s painting *Le radeau de la Méduse*, which represents the sinking of the frigate *Medusa* in the year 1816. In the course of the Napoleonic wars, it was sent out to protect the colony of Senegal, which had recently been regained from England, and was shipwrecked off the coast of Mauritania.²⁷ The survivors saved themselves on a raft.

This debacle was considered a great scandal in French history and so was the exposition of Géricault’s painting in the Salon de Paris in the autumn of 1819. In his ekphrasis of the painting in *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (The Aesthetics of Resistance), the German-Swedish writer Peter Weiss considers *The Raft of the Medusa* as a dangerous affront against established society. Its impressive size of five by seven meters increased the effect of the attack.²⁸

Navarrete’s contemplation of Géricault’s painting sets free a process of remembering, in which the image perceived is linked to the unfortunate *balseros* [boat people] of Cuba. Within the dialogue between the medium’s image and text, the painting is not *described* but *rescribed* by the author²⁹: Navarrete translates the shipwreck of the *Medusa*, a trauma that has occupied the collective memory of France, into the traumatic present context of his island. Since the beginning of the 1990s, when the collapse of the Eastern Bloc was followed by the *período especial* [special period] in Cuba, thousands of Cubans have tried to leave the island on makeshift boats while risking their lives on the open sea.³⁰

Notably, the essay does not mainly focus on the *balseros* but the collapse of the island itself: “Nuestra isla se hunde. Los últimos sobrevivientes del cataclismo nos hemos puesto al salvo” [“Our island is sinking. We, the last survivors of this cataclysm, have saved ourselves”].³¹ In this passage, Navarrete refers to his personal condition of exile. The author himself belongs to the group of “survivors” who have escaped from the shipwreck of the Cuban revolution. Those left on the island are trapped, but so are those who were able to rescue themselves:

Como si la isla entera no fuera también un barco que naufraga, con hombres a bordo que se delatan, se humillan, se rehúyen, o



Théodore Géricault, *Le radeau de la Méduse* (1819).
(http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Théodore_Géricault,_Le_Radeau_de_la_Méduse.jpg)

intentan, como nosotros, ponerse a salvo sin importarles lo descabellado de la empresa.³²

[As if the whole island was a sinking boat with people on it who denounce, humiliate, avoid one another, or just try, like us, to save themselves without even caring about the absurdity of this endeavor.]

This passage from the beginning of the text indicates a pragmatic dimension of collectivity because the author consequently uses the first person plural “we.” Thus, he seizes the voices of all Cubans, of those, above all, who cannot be heard anymore because they drowned during their escape from Cuba and of those whose voices from exile are not listened to. In the second part of the essay, a first-person narrator rises to speak. It is the third figure from the right, the man in a rigid and pensive pose, who confronts those regarding the painting by fixing them with his glance. In his arms, the figure holds a dying body that he seeks to protect from being buried in the waves of the sea. The narrator steps out of the painting’s inner world because he directly relates himself to his observers by comparing himself with their position. In doing so, he addresses questions to the visitors of the museum:

“¿Quién estará ahora contemplando nuestro naufragio creyendo de seguras que somos personajes del pasado cuya historia no volverá a repetirse?” [“Who might be here now contemplating our shipwreck while surely believing that we are figures of the past whose history won’t ever be repeated?”].³³ The *translatio* from image to word brings the represented figures on the canvas to life. Hence, they overcome their condition of mere pictorial representations of the past and are instead revitalized through the interaction with their observers.³⁴ Through the constant shifting between the viewpoint of observer and the observed (“observador” and “observados”³⁵) the spatial limitation of the framed canvas is transgressed and transversal movements set the painting’s inner life in motion. The following passage illustrates this:

Si no tuviera tanto miedo a los tiburones [...] me tiraría al mar y daría tantas, tantas y tantas brazadas, que llegaría, mojado, harapiento, pero con los ojos radiantes de felicidad a esa galería del museo, donde tal vez, mirándome de frente, lograría saber si viviré.³⁶

[If I did not fear the sharks so much [...] I would throw myself into the sea and do so

many strokes till—soaking wet, ragged but my eyes filled with delight—I would arrive at the museum’s gallery where, facing myself, I would maybe be able to find out if I was going to live.]

Inside of the text the figure is caught in a condition of immobility and imagines breaking the borders of this imprisonment. Freedom can only be gained by crossing the sea. However, the sea constitutes a menacing and insurmountable barrier, which unsettles the narrator’s belief in survival. The imagined movements of the narrator, just swimming away and reaching the “other side,” finally lead back to the imprisonment of the painting’s figures that are unable to avoid the sinking of the raft.

This aspect also refers to the metaphorical dimension of the raft as a sinking island. “Huimos porque *hay* que huir” [“We escape because we *have* to escape”], the text states.³⁷ The device “salvase quien pueda” [“save yourself if you can”] reflects the Cuban condition since the beginning of the special period.³⁸ Furthermore, the island’s shipwreck has become a striking metaphor pervading contemporary Cuban literature and culture.³⁹ Thus, it is not surprising that the palimpsest-like superposition of two contexts, the Medusa’s shipwreck and the collapse of Cuba, seem self-evident to Navarrete, who argues in an interview that the motif of the *mar inferno*, the menacing sea, would immediately come to a Cuban’s mind when looking at *Le radeau de la Méduse*.⁴⁰ This shows us that Navarrete’s rescribing of Géricault’s painting is inscribed in his logic of experience. Furthermore, the ekphrastic transposition from image to word refers to the culturally specific subjectivity of perception: Who is actually seeing what?

By means of ekphrasis, Navarrete practices *translatio* as transcultural memory. However, the translational movements that the observation of the painting sets free and that are enacted in the text point out the position of the writer himself, who is trapped on his raft—in exile, while witnessing the collapse of his island.

CONCLUSION

Miguel Sales’s and William Navarrete’s examples of *translatio* illustrate the interrelation between *moving media* and *moving cultures* at the interfaces

of music and word, image and text. Both medial transpositions, Sales’s *son-poetry* as well as Navarrete’s ekphrastic literary essay, show instances of medial interactions as well as the movements of transmedial crossings. The rewriting of María Belén Chacón and *The Raft of the Medusa* cannot be separated from the act of recomposition and revisualization. The processes of translation diffuse the distinctions between the medial “origin” and its “translation” by transmedializing the “original” and turning it into a wandering phenomenon.

This wandering quality is also related to the cultural displacement of the Cuban authors living in diaspora. Thus, in both texts the medial reconfigurations are accompanied by cultural resettings that are closely tied to the question of memory in exile. The comparison of both texts reveals a major difference in the directionality of travelling memory: Sales remembers an emblematic example of Cuban popular culture to reinscribe himself into his lost Cuba, whereas, with his essay, Navarrete turns back to Cuba by inscribing it into a renowned romantic painting of French culture. Both mnemonic processes reflect the border settings of exile. From his outside perspective, Sales resemanticizes María Belén to express the loss of his voice in exile, while Navarrete—excluded from Cuba and caught in a condition of immobility—witnesses the sinking of his island.

At the same time both texts show the diasporic dynamics of movements across media and cultures. Sales’s *translatio* reaffirms his cultural origin within a transversal context: With the poetic recomposition of María Belén, Cuban *son-poetry* moves to Paris. Navarrete practices *translatio* as transcultural reconfiguration. The Cuban writer relates the sinking of the Medusa to Cuban collective memory by translating the motif of the shipwreck into his own cultural context. Hence, the travelling processes of medial de- and recontextualization are connected to the Cuban writers’ cultural de- and reterritorialization.

Notes

1. See Alfonso de Toro, ed., *Translatio: Transmédialité et transculturalité en littérature, peinture, photographie et au cinéma* [Translatio: Transmediality and Transculturality in Literature, Painting, Photography and Film] (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013); Nadja Gernalzick and Gabriele Pizarz-Ramírez, ed., *Transmediality and Transculturality* (Heidelberg, Germany: Winter, 2013); and Lisa

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- Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
2. Miguel Sales, "La otra rumba de María Belén," in *Ínsulas al Pairo. Poesía cubana contemporánea en París* [Islands on Hold: Cuban Contemporary Poetry in Paris], ed. William Navarrete (Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2007), 89.
 3. The term "ekphrasis" goes back to antiquity. Applied to literature from the fifth century on, it denominates the verbal representation of works of art, specifically painting and sculpture. In the 1990s, within the framework of interart studies, the term flourishes again and gains new importance. See Irina Rajewsky, *Intermedialität* [Intermediality] (Stuttgart, Germany: UTB, 2002), 196.
 4. William Navarrete, "Hundimiento de la isla," in *La Canopea del Louvre* [The Louvre's Canopy], eds. Regina Ávila and William Navarrete (Valencia, Spain: Aduana Vieja, 2007), 213–219; and Théodore Géricault, *Le radeau de la Méduse* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1819).
 5. Further readings of these texts can be found in Andrea Gremels, *Kubanische Gegenwartsliteratur in Paris zwischen Exil und Transkulturalität* [Cuban Contemporary Literature in Paris Between Exile and Transculturality] (Tübingen, Germany: Narr, 2014), 147–152, 267–272.
 6. See Alfonso de Toro, "Translatio e historia," in *In Memoriam: Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. Rafael Olea Franco (México City: Centro de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios, El colegio de México, 2008), 191–236, 191, 199; and Alfonso de Toro, "En guise d'introduction. Transmédialité. Hybridité—Translatio—Transculturalité: Un modèle," in *Translatio*, 39–80, 64.
 7. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 325.
 8. Toro, "Translatio e historia," 192, 194.
 9. Ottmar Ette, *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben: Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz* [Writing-between-worlds: Literatures of No Fixed Abode] (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2005), 171.
 10. *Ibid.*, 164.
 11. According to Strausfeld, 15–20% of Cuba's total population lives outside of Cuba. See Michi Strausfeld, "Isla—Diáspora—Exilio: anotaciones acerca de la publicación y distribución de la narrativa cubana de los años noventa," ["Island-Diaspora-Exile: Notes on the Publication and Distribution of Cuban Fiction in the 1990s"] in *Todas las islas la isla: Nuevas y novísimas tendencias en la literatura y cultura de Cuba* [Island of Islands: New and Newest Tendencies in Cuban Literature and Culture], eds. Janett Reinstädler and Ottmar Ette (Frankfurt, Germany: Vervuert and Iberoamericana, 2000), 11–23, 17.
 12. See Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," *Parallax* 17 (2011): 4–18.
 13. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, "The Role of Music in the Emergence of Afro-Cuban Culture," in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, trans. James Maraniss, eds. Isidore Okpewho, Carole D. Boyce, and Ali Mazrui (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 197–203, 197.
 14. Ballagas's poem was published in the last issue of the *Revista de Avance* (49 August 15, 1930). See Rogelio de la Torre, *La obra poética de Emilio Ballagas* [Emilio Ballagas's Poetic Work] (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1977), 69.
 15. According to Jiménez, who uses the expression *poema-son* to characterize the innovative musical style of Nicolás Guillén's poetry. See José Olivio Jiménez, *Antología de la poesía hispanoamericana contemporánea 1914–1970* [Anthology of Contemporary Hispano-American Poetry, 1914–1970] (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981), 263. I will apply the term *son-poetry* here, taking advantage of the onomatopoeic interplay of the words *son* and *song* that the English language provides. The term is also used by Frank André Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and Afro-Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, NC: North Carolina University Press, 2010), 139.
 16. "[T]he *negrista*-poetry did not acquire real force until 1930, the year in which Nicolás Guillén published the eight poems of his *Motivos de son*," Benítez-Rojo, "Afro-Cuban Culture," 200.
 17. Torre, *Obra Ballagas*, 65.
 18. *Ibid.*, 60.
 19. Benítez-Rojo, "Afro-Cuban Culture," 200.
 20. According to Vitier, Ballagas's involvement with *poesía negra* does not demonstrate a deviation from his pure poetry. He calls it a continuation, describing it as a form of "poetic evasion" from the real, with which the poet searches for a "sensorial elementarity" and purity. Vitier states that this poetic evasion had already been a main characteristic of Ballagas's first anthology, *Júbilo y fuga* [Jubilance and Flight]. Cf. Cintio Vitier, "La poesía de Emilio Ballagas," in *Obra poética de Emilio Ballagas*, ed. Cintio Vitier (Posthumous edition with a preliminary essay by Cintio Vitier) (La Habana: Úcar García, 1955), V–XLI, XIII.
 21. Ballagas, *Obra poética*, 66–67.
 22. Cf. Nicolás Guillén's poem "Son Número 6," ["Son Number 6"] part of the anthology *Motivos de Son* ["Son's Motifs"] in Jiménez, *Antología*, 273. It starts with the verses: "Yoruba soy, lloro en Yoruba/lucumí." ["I am Yoruba, I cry in Yoruba/Lucumí"] Lucumí refers to a Yoruba dialect that is mainly used in Cuban Santería. The liturgy of Santería is taken up by Ballagas in his poem "Comparsa Habanera." ["Carnival Troupe in Havana"] The second stanza is exclusively written in Yoruba. Ballagas, *Obra poética*, 83–85.
 23. My own transcription of the lyrics based on the version found on the Lecuona Cuban Boys

- album *Rumbantona (remastered)*, track 22 (Valuable Records, 2011).
24. Astrid Erll, "Travelling Memory," 4. In this case, Rajewsky's definition of "transmediality" can also be applied. She conceptualizes "transmediality" as a media unspecific, "wandering" phenomenon that does not depend on a specific "contact-providing" medium, such as a biblical motif or *sujet* that is able to transverse various mediums. See *Intermedialität*, 12. The transversal appearance of María Belén Chacón in poetry, song, and dance can be considered as such a transmedial phenomenon.
 25. Cf. Benítez-Rojo, "Afro-Cuban Culture," 201.
 26. According to the US-Russian writer Joseph Brodsky, "the condition we call exile is first of all a linguistic event." Joseph Brodsky, "The condition we call exile," *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 34 (1991): 1–8. The loss of voice and its poetic reappropriation determines writing in exile. The paradox of silence being expressed appears as a leitmotif in the poems of Miguel Sales, i.e. in "Testigo Mudo," [Silent Witness] in Navarrete, *Ínsulas*, 92.
 27. The Bourbon regime was held responsible for the shipwreck. It was reproached for having manned the Medusa based on loyalty rather than competence. After the incident, the minister in charge and 200 marine officers were suspended. See Hubertus Kohle, "Kunstkritik als Revolutionsverarbeitung: Das Beispiel Augustin Jal," [Art Criticism as a Reflection on the Revolution: The Example of Augustin Jal] in *Frankreich 1815–1830: Trauma oder Utopie?*, [France 1815–1830: Trauma or Utopia?] eds. Hubertus Kohle and Gudrun Gersmann (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner, 1993), 171–186.
 28. See Peter Weiss, *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* [The Aesthetics of Resistance] (Frankfurt, Germany: Suhrkamp, 2005), 425.
 29. See Anne-Kathrin Reulecke, *Geschriebene Bilder. Zum Kunst- und Mediendiskurs in der Gegenwartsliteratur* [Written Images. Art and Media Discourses in Contemporary Literature] (Munich, Germany: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), 9.
 30. The *período especial* was characterized by an economic state of emergency. The population suffered a deprivation of supplies, especially of food. Thus, the term appears to be euphemistic. Strausfeld talks of the "salvage and desperate emigration" of 35.000 *balseiros* who intended to escape the island on improvised boats, "sobre llantas de coche, en balsas fabricadas con mucha fantasía y poco material." [many *balseiros* left on car tires; they fabricated rafts with scarce material but a lot of phantasy] The crisis occurred in 1994. Strausfeld, "Díaspora," 15.
 31. Navarrete, "Hundimiento," 213.
 32. *Ibid.*, 214f.
 33. *Ibid.*, 217.
 34. This phenomenon of revitalization relates to John Dewey's conception of art as esthetic experience. Dewey differentiates between experience as such and "having an experience," which happens to occur if the artist's process of creation, "artistic experience," is reproduced in the reception of an art work, called "esthetic experience." Hence, the union between the artistic and the esthetic experience is achieved through dialogical interaction. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934), 47. Yet another reference can be made to Jorge Luis Borges's conception of art as experience. He states: "Every time I read a poem, the experience happens to occur. And that is poetry. [. . .] I shall say: Art happens every time we read a poem." Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse. The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1967–1968* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 6, emphasis Borges. In the context of this article, both theories imply that ekphrasis provides an experience consisting not only of a process of writing but also of reading.
 35. Roland Spiller, "'Nuestra isla se hunde': naufragio con espectadores o como d/escribir el fracaso del castrismo," ["'Our Island is Sinking': Shipwreck with Spectators or How to Describe the Disasters of Castroism"] in *Cuba: La Revolución revis(it)ada* [Cuba: Revis(it)ing the Revolution], eds. Andrea Gremels and Roland Spiller (Tübingen, Germany: Narr, 2010), 213–229, 221.
 36. Navarrete, "Hundimiento," 219.
 37. *Ibid.*, 214.
 38. Cf. Spiller, "Naufragio con espectadores," 221.
 39. Spiller analyzes the symbol of the shipwreck throughout literary history and emphasizes its importance for the contemporary Cuban context. He mentions the examples of Luis Marimón's anthology *Cronología del vértigo y del naufragio* [A Chronology of Vertigo and Shipwreck] (La Habana: Ediciones Unión, 2007); Jacobo Machover's compilation of testimonial texts in *Cuba: Mémoires d'un naufrage* [Cuba: Memories of a shipwreck] (Paris: Buchet/Castel, 2009); and Iván de la Nuez's theoretical essay on Cuba's culture, *La balsa perpetua: Soledad y conexiones de la cultura cubana* [The Enduring Raft: Solitude and Connections in Cuban Culture] (Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Casiopea, 1998). Spiller also includes transmedial examples: besides Navarrete's essay, he cites the daring, "counterrevolutionary" song "Mi balsa" ["My Raft"] by the punk band Porno para Ricardo. Spiller, "Naufragio con espectadores," 218–227.
 40. Cited from my unpublished interview with William Navarrete on February 27, 2009.