

The Writer's Soundtrack in *Cien botellas en una pared*

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The metafictional games and abundance of intertextual references that embrace both “high” and popular culture in *Cien botellas en una pared* (2002; 2010) characterize the writing of Cuban author Ena Lucía Portela. Her corpus, which includes four novels, collections of short stories and essays, and critical pieces, has been published in and outside of Cuba. Scholars commonly associate Portela (b. Havana 1972) with the generations of Cuban writers known as *novísimos* and *posnovísimos*. These authors write in the final decade of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Salvador Redonet (1996), Nanne Timmer (2006), and Iraida López (2010) observe that the *(pos)novísimos* authors share certain characteristics: thematically, they often display an irreverent attitude toward the Castro regime and question societal norms and boundaries; stylistically, *(pos)novísimos* writers tend to embrace fragmentation and playfulness, especially metafictional games.

In the sparse critical literature on *Cien botellas*, three main tendencies stand out: a reading of *Cien botellas* as a postmodern police novel—*el nuevo policial*,¹ an analysis of how Portela creates a critical portrait of Havana during the *Período especial* [the Special Period],² and a study of Portela’s self-reflexivity, including her references to an international publishing industry.³ The present essay enters into conversation primarily with the arguments of Jaqueline Loss, Nara Araújo, and Mariana Romo-Carmona. Loss argues that *Cien botellas* reflects on both writing and marketing processes, and she contends that Portela’s writing acknowledges the heterogeneity of Cuban and international audiences (Loss 254). She also asserts that *Cien botellas* erodes a clear distinction between “high” literature, popular best-sellers, and oral storytelling (263).

The earlier editions of *Cien botellas*, published by Debate (Madrid) in 2002 and Unión (Cuba) in 2003, only include Zeta's footnotes in which she explains and translates her lover's occasional use of Latin. The 2010 Stockcero edition is the first to include footnotes by the editor, Iraida López, and the author, Portela. They use the footnotes to comment on all the novel's cultural intertexts, including popular music. The present article uses the 2010 edition and includes an analysis of its footnotes. Araújo, who published her article prior to the 2010 Stockcero edition, connects the question of Portela's intended audience with the narrator Zeta's use of footnotes in the Debate and Unión editions of *Cien botellas*. She argues that Zeta's textual clarifications and translations of Latin phrases in the earlier editions of *Cien botellas* reveal Portela's desire to appeal to the average reader who does not possess knowledge of Latin or an extensive literary background (Araújo, "Mas allá" 115-116). Romo-Carmona, using the 2010 edition of *Cien botellas*, adds that the novel's footnotes by Zeta, the editor, and the author establish a dialogue with the reader (Romo-Carmona 145).

The present essay contributes to existing scholarship by connecting the novel's metafictional elements with its references to popular music, including those that appear in the footnotes. I argue that *Cien botellas's* discussion of what constitutes good quality music extends to the novel's metafictional concern for what it means to be a good Cuban novelist. The novel's humorous inclusion of popular music and its self-reflexive examination of the Cuban novelist challenge the literary theorist Pascale Casanova's concept of "world fiction," in part through the use of extensive footnotes that make the novel accessible to a broad readership without losing the specificities of the particular Cuban context.

Cien botellas's explicit discussion of publishing as a Cuban author enters into dialogue with the idea of "world fiction" that Casanova expounds in *The World Republic of Letters* (2004).⁴ Casanova fears that a new kind of "world fiction" is emerging in both central and peripheral places due to economic pressure from the international publishing industry:

The new organization of production and distribution, together with the emphasis at all levels upon immediate profitability, favors the transnational circulation of books

conceived for the mass market. Bestsellers, of course, have always sold across borders. What is new today is the manufacture and promotion of a certain type of novel aimed at an international market. Under the label “world fiction,” products based on tested aesthetic formulas and designed to appeal to the widest possible readership [. . .] are marketed alongside updated versions of mythological fables and ancient classics that place a recycled “wisdom” and morality within the reach of everyone and books that combine travel writing with aspects of the adventure novel. These productions have created a new composite measure of fictional modernity. (Casanova 171)

Casanova accuses world fiction authors of appealing to a mass readership by indiscriminately recycling familiar literary formulae; she cites the self-reflexive “novel within the novel” as one of the over-used formulae (Casanova 171).⁵ At first glance, *Cien botellas* could be labeled as just this kind of “world fiction:” it includes footnotes to reach a readership beyond Cuba and combines elements of the popular romance and of the crime novel, all within a metafictional framework comprised of two fictional authors and multiple novels within the novel.

Cien botellas in fact features three writers: the real author of the novel, Ena Lucía Portela, and two fictional authors: Zeta, the first person narrator and supposed fictional author of the novel to which readers have access, and Linda, a professional writer of crime novels whose third novel is also titled *Cien botellas en una pared*. *Cien botellas* depicts the *mezcolanza* [hodgepodge] of music genres and people who compete to be heard in Havana during the 1990s, a time in Cuba known as the Special Period, a severe socioeconomic crisis that followed the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the subsequent end to Soviet trade with Cuba as Portela explains in one of her footnotes (Portela, *Cien* 126, note 15). Just as Portela eliminates a zero degree for what comprises good music, she challenges a singular definition of the Cuban novelist. Despite the humorous contrast between Zeta and Linda, Portela complicates a simplistic dichotomy between the local, Cuban writer—Zeta—and the cosmopolitan writer—Linda. I invoke Pascale Casanova’s distinction between literary peripheries and centers to discuss how Portela challenges it by involving both writers in a self-reflexive discussion of what makes up a Cuban novel.

MUSIC VERSUS NOISE

Zeta lives in a tiny apartment in a building that was formerly a mansion in Havana's once opulent *Vedado* neighborhood. She sardonically calls the building *la Esquina del Martillo Alegre* [the Corner of the Happy Hammer] because of the incessant construction and general cacophony that accompany the recent influx of immigrants from Eastern Cuba. Zeta—in her late twenties, pregnant and unemployed while she narrates—establishes an antithetical relationship between Virginia Woolf's idea of “a room of one's own” and *La Esquina*, the noisiest place in the entire Milky Way galaxy. She paraphrases Woolf's arguments in her 1929 essay, *A Room of One's Own*—a classic (Western) feminist text. To be a successful female writer (even an *amateur* writer, Zeta adds), the room needs to serve as a refuge protected from worldly noises. The principal characteristic of Woolf's room is tranquility, precisely what *La Esquina del Martillo Alegre* lacks. In a footnote, Portela adds that Woolf's stipulations do not account for conditions affecting the intensified marginality experienced by women in peripheral places, like Zeta, Linda, and Portela herself (Portela, *Cien* 43, note 69).

To further underscore the breach between Woolf's ideal writing conditions and the acoustic chaos that invades Zeta's room of her own, Zeta proceeds to list each of the sounds that accost her and disrupt her writing, principally animal noises and a barrage of popular music groups:

Podrá parecer un deseo mezquino, surgido de la frustración y el resentimiento y hasta de la envidia, pero no digo yo si no me encantaría ver a Mrs. Woolf escribiendo *Mrs. Dalloway* entre el cacareo de las gallinas, los atronadores ladridos del megaterio [. . .] las fichas del dominó contra alguna mesa [. . .] los gruñidos del cerdo [. . .] la guerra de los decibeles entre Compay Segundo, el Médico de la Salsa, NG La Banda, la Orquesta Revé, Paulo F.G. y su Élite, Adalberto y su Son, no sé quién y su Trabuco y la Charanga Habanera [footnote 75] en un todos contra todos a ver quién es el más bárbaro, el más vociferante [. . .] Y todo este barullo no es nada comparado con lo que fue en tiempos de Poliéster . . . (Portela, *Cien* 43-45)

This passage captures the sounds that reverberate in the foreground of Zeta's version of Havana. Onomatopoeic animal noises constitute a kind of refrain that punctuates the acoustic landscape. In the midst of animal sounds, the clanking of dominos gives way to outbursts of braggadocio between the players, what one would informally call "trash talk" in English.

In addition to animal noises and shouting, constant music is an inescapable part of the reality in which Zeta (and Portela) write. The neighbors use their stereos to engage in a "guerra de los decibeles" to determine who is the most obnoxious (Portela, *Cien* 44). Zeta's mention of this all-out musical "war" depicts music as a form of aggression, akin to the literal fights [*brincas*] that she hears in her *solar*. Furthermore, Zeta associates music with noise by listing the names of the popular Cuban music groups that her neighbors blast along with the other noises (animals, dominos, yelling). It might sound as though Zeta were implicitly criticizing the kind of music that her neighbors listen to in addition to the aggressive manner in which they project their music. Portela adds in her footnotes that her own neighbors play the same bands:

Timberos y salseros.⁶ Algunos son buenísimos, otros no tanto. En general se trata de músicaailable, para, como quien dice, menear el esqueleto alegremente en un concierto o en una fiesta. No es cuestión de ponerlos a todo meter a las doce del día, como les encanta hacer a mis maravillosos vecinos, quienes ahora, para mi desgracia, han cogido tremendo fanatismo con una cosa estridente, monocorde y terrible llamada "reguetón."⁷ *ELP* (Portela, *Cien* 44, note 75)

Though Portela criticizes the recent musical genre *reguetón*, she does not condemn outright her neighbors' taste in music. In addition to *reguetón*, Portela's neighbors play some *salsa* groups that are great. Portela's footnote suggests that the disruptive context in which the music is played determines its classification as noise. The music that inconsiderate neighbors blare at all hours of the day becomes noise to listeners like Zeta and Portela. Portela's sarcastic tone, evident when she calls her noisy neighbors *maravillosos*, nevertheless creates a divide between the author and her neighbors just as Zeta differentiates

herself from the raucous tenants in *La Esquina*. The way that Zeta and Portela's music preferences conflict with their neighbors' listening habits points to what Josh Kun defines as an "audiotopia," a space created by music in which differences are made visible and allowed to coexist.⁸ In *La Esquina*, differences in music-listening separate the neighbors from Zeta, a writer who sometimes needs a peaceful environment in which to reflect.

Poliéster is the writer's comic nemesis in *La Esquina*. He rivals all of the other cacophonous neighbors together with his strident interpretations of classic Cuban songs. Zeta's description of Poliéster's lack of musical talent showcases her irony and sarcasm and also highlights the porous boundary between music and noise: "De orejas cuadradas, de voz débil, medio tiple y con tendencia al aullido, cuando no se consagraba al bel canto, su instrumento predilecto era la corneta, sin desdeñar la tumbadora, el bongó, los tambores batá, las maracas y el güiro, lo mismo a las doce meridiano que a las tres de la madrugada" (Portela, *Cien* 46). Poliéster is a parody of an Afro-Cuban musician. The percussion instruments that he plays [the *tumbadora*, the *bongó*, the *batá* drums, the *maracas*, and the *güiro*] are products of the syncretism between African, indigenous, and European music.⁹ Yet Zeta affirms how he is completely devoid of talent as a singer or a musician; even his mother laments his lack of rhythm. Poliéster particularly cultivates popular Cuban *sones*, an authentically Cuban music genre that combines African and European influences.¹⁰ Poliéster plays and sings *sones* with such little skill, however, that even the most popular ones such as "El manisero" cause his unfortunate listeners to recoil. In the footnotes, López and Portela identify "El manisero" as one of the most popular Cuban *sones*, and Portela names several of its best interpreters (Portela, *Cien* 95, note 33).

Ironically, the authentic *cubanidad* [Cubanness] of the songs that Poliéster attempts to play contrasts with the foreignness, monstrosity, and inauthenticity that the character's name implies. Poliéster is not entirely Cuban: his father came from the Soviet Union, as Zeta indicates (Portela, *Cien* 45). In fact, his birth name is Dniéster, a Ukrainian river. Zeta explains that the neighbors in *La Esquina* were incapable of pronouncing "Dniéster," so the boy simply became Poliéster. The unpronounceable and incomprehensible nature of Poliéster's name reveals his difference. In addition to the possible association with Polyphemus, Homer's monster, the

word polyester connotes low quality and artificiality, a possible jab at the Sovietizing of Cuba.

Poliéster's incessant practicing fuels a musical battle that exacerbates the cultural differences between the writer figures in the novel and *La Esquina's* other tenants. This battle also highlights the neighbors' lack of consensus over what is music and what is noise. Upon Linda's recommendation, Zeta blares Mozart over her speakers to combat Poliéster's harsh trumpet playing, raucous drumming, and unharmonious singing. Though they are tolerant of Poliéster's musical aspirations, the neighbors protest loudly against Zeta's classical music, which infuriates Linda when she visits *La Esquina*: "Ella [Linda] no podía permitir que unos inmigrantes advenedizos orientales de baja estofa me metieran el pie [. . .] Conque los inmigrantes no se tragaban el *Don Giovanni*, ¿eh? [. . .] Había que educarlos. Mozart, después de todo, era suave, fácil, popular" (Portela, *Cien* 47). In place of Mozart, Linda blasts Schönberg, known for composing atonal music as López indicates in a footnote (Portela, *Cien* 47, note 84). The musical war culminates in an alarmingly violent confrontation that Linda diffuses by brandishing a pistol.¹¹

TWO VERSIONS OF A PERIPHERAL WRITER

In *Cien botellas*, the subjective distinction between music and noise, dependent in part upon the listener, corresponds with the novel's ambiguous response to its own implicit question, "Who is a Cuban novelist?" Zeta and Linda's different degrees of tolerance for the raucous music in *La Esquina* encapsulate the overarching contrast between the two fictional authors in the novel. Zeta is about to surrender to her neighbors' demand that she stop torturing them with *Don Giovanni* when Linda, much less tolerant of Zeta's lower class neighbors, insists on intensifying the musical battle by playing Schönberg. Zeta never directly criticizes her neighbors for their different social class or educational background; she simply desires a quiet place where she can live and write peacefully. In contrast, Linda displays an elitist attitude and denigrates Zeta's neighbors for having migrated from the eastern part of the island, a demographic shift caused by economic difficulty during the Special Period. Though Linda's family has left the island for Israel, Linda still lives in a privileged situation: she inhabits a penthouse apartment in Havana with a truly peaceful room of her own, complete with a balcony that offers an idyllic

view of the city. Most importantly, Linda's apartment is quiet. Zeta occasionally visits Linda to escape from her chaotic surroundings: "Vengo porque hay silencio" (Portela, *Cien* 98).¹² The cacophonous soundtrack for Zeta's writing—a *mezcolanza* of animal sounds, dance music, and Poliéster's practicing—exposes the problem with Woolf's feminist concept of a room of one's own: women writing from the periphery—as Casanova calls places outside of literary centers like Paris, New York, and London¹³—face challenges unknown to women from central places. The contrast between noise levels in Zeta and Linda's respective rooms of their own reveals how writing conditions differ even within peripheral places.

With her first-person style of narrating that imitates orality, Zeta stands in stark contrast against Linda,¹⁴ a *professional* writer: "Ella [Linda] es una escritora profesional, una escritora *de verdad*, viajera, ambiciosa y enérgica, a sus horas feminista y con pensamientos de gran envergadura" (italics in original) (Portela, *Cien* 12). Always self-deprecating, Zeta describes herself as an amateur writer who writes on low-grade paper.¹⁵ Zeta briefly considers immigrating to a quieter, more prosperous place with an abundance of food, progress, and, especially, quiet, but she cannot imagine the cold (Portela, *Cien* 122-123). Though Zeta expresses her frustrations with writing conditions in Cuba, she remains on the island. The fact that she is the fictional author and narrator of a text filled with references to Cuban society, history, and culture—particularly Cuban music—suggests that Zeta's writing is nourished by the very writing circumstances that the novel's caricatured Woolf would consider less than ideal.

While Zeta writes her oral-sounding piece that she insists is *not* a novel, Linda has already published two successful crime novels at the time of the narration, and her literary agent is negotiating translations and a possible film version (Portela, *Cien* 16). Zeta predicts that Linda's crime novels, "[e]n algún futuro no muy dilatado, llegarían a ser clásicos del thriller, de la Serie Negra" (Portela, *Cien* 16). Linda seduces her readers by skewing their sense of the true and real. Her first two novels, both bloody and truculent, disguise as fiction terrible crimes that actually occurred in Havana. Though Zeta expresses admiration for Linda's eloquence and persuasive abilities, Zeta also describes her friend as a lying illusionist who invents with the mastery of a Hollywood screenwriter. Zeta compares Linda to a snake charmer capable of casting a spell over readers with her false stories.¹⁶

Though Linda eventually achieves literary success with her bloody, truculent novels, at the start of her career she experiences the challenges that the editorial world poses to a Cuban (woman) writer. She realizes that her first contract took advantage of her for being young and Cuban. Zeta summarizes Linda's ironic estimation of why her first literary contract was so terrible: "Una escritora joven, quizá demasiado joven, casi desconocida y procedente de un país *periférico*, sí, *periférico*, *subdesarrollado*, *primitivo*, *silvestre*, porque ella era cubana aunque su pasaporte dijera otra cosa . . . no podía aspirar a más en su primer contrato" (italics added) (Portela, *Cien* 166-167). The series of adjectives that the foreign editor attaches to Cuba (according to Linda) reveals the difficulty of publishing off of the island. In addition to her poor contract, Linda must also accept that one of her enemies write a prologue to the novel even though she considers him a terrible novelist (Portela, *Cien* 168). Linda's poor estimation of the prologue author shows how commercial success and literary quality do not necessarily align. Despite its challenges, publishing outside of Cuba permits an author to circulate more widely, increasing her economic gain and the likelihood of future editorial contracts.

Portela shares Zeta and Linda's distinct challenges as Cuban women writers. At the same time that Portela commiserates with Zeta's frustration over her noisy neighbors and remembers writing her first stories on the same paper that Zeta uses,¹⁷ Portela also faces the publishing difficulties that Linda experiences.¹⁸ When Zeta exclaims how difficult it must be to be a *real* writer (like Linda), Portela aligns herself in the footnotes with Linda (Portela, *Cien* 169, note 5). Portela goes on to describe her own editorial challenges, both in and outside of Cuba (Portela, *Cien* 169, note 5). She attributes some of the challenges to the fact that Cuba is marginalized within the Spanish-speaking publishing industry.

Like Linda, Portela overcomes the difficulties of being a female author from a peripheral place, and she enjoys local and international acclaim. Portela's literary prizes include the Cuban "Cirilo Villaverde" prize (1997) for her first novel, *El pájaro: pincel y tinta china*, and the French "Juan Rulfo" prize (1999) for the collection of short stories *El viejo, el asesino y yo* (Loss 252). *Cien botellas en una pared* was awarded the Spanish "Premio Literario Jaén" in 2002 and the French "Dos Océanos" prize in 2003 (Loss 253). Though Casanova calls literary prizes "the least literary form of literary consecration" (Casanova

146),¹⁹ international literary prizes nonetheless help authors' works circulate beyond their home countries, and local prizes attract a larger local readership. Portela maintains that the highest ambition of every writer is to affect as many people as possible.²⁰ Indeed, she makes an effort to transcend the immediate context for *Cien botellas* in order to reach a diverse, international readership. Portela's inclusion of detailed footnotes in the 2010 edition constitutes one of the ways that she seeks to attract a broad readership on and off of the island.

A MEZCOLANZA OF INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCES: FOOTNOTES FOR THE CUBAN AND NON-CUBAN READER

The footnotes educate the reader about Cuban social, historical, and cultural references. Throughout the footnotes, Portela alternates between speaking to Cuban readers, Spanish speaking readers, and unspecified, perhaps international readers. When she describes a Cuban duo that interprets *boleros* as one of the best examples of "*nuestra música popular*" (italics added) (Portela, *Cien* 34, note 48),²¹ Portela addresses a specifically Cuban audience. The novel's abundance of musical references assumes that some readers will share Portela's pride in popular Cuban music. In reference to the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca, Portela contends that the octosyllabic verse is "(el ritmo más profundo de *nuestra lengua*. ELP)" (italics added) (Portela, *Cien* 46, note 79), and she repeats *nuestra lengua* in her praise of the Golden Age poet Francisco de Quevedo (Portela, *Cien* 81, note 13). Her use of *nuestra lengua* [our language] indicates that she writes for a Spanish-speaking readership that is not necessarily Cuban. *Nuestro/a* can also refer to a broad reading public united by its shared humanity: "(Tal como van las cosas hoy día en *nuestro planeta* . . . ELP)" (italics added) (Portela, *Cien* 104, note 17).

Whether addressing Cubans, Latin Americans, or all of humanity, Portela uses the footnotes to clarify intertextual references to films, books, philosophers, and music. López and Portela meticulously explain every cultural reference, without distinguishing between cultural products that are traditionally classified as "low" or "high." The editor and author explain the British punk movement and its Cuban followers with the same details and seriousness with which they comment upon Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (Portela, *Cien* 108, note 30); (Portela, *Cien* 250, note 34).²² In this manner, the editor and author

make the novel accessible to readers who possess diverse kinds of cultural knowledge.²³

Portela's footnotes explaining the novel's references to popular music exemplify how she makes the novel legible to a diverse readership. Portela's references to popular music—the continual soundtrack for Zeta's writing—also augment the novel's verisimilitude and contribute to its ironic humor. The footnotes often specify the definitions of musical genres and the multiple interpretations of one song. After López simply identifies a song title to which the text refers, "Conversación en tiempo de bolero," Portela goes on to describe one interpreter's magnificent voice and explains the song's genre: "(Este tema entró en el hall de la fama en la cálida, profunda y exquisita voz de la cantante cubana Elena Burke (1928-2002), alias "Señora Sentimiento." Pertenece al movimiento musical conocido como "filing" (del inglés feeling), que fusionaba el bolero tradicional con el jazz, y estuvo en boga durante las décadas del 40 y el 50. ELP)" (Portela, *Cien* 42, note 65). Interpreted as a whole, the musical footnotes expose the reader to the richness and variety of popular Cuban music, which includes traditional genres like the *bolero*, *guaracha*, *son*, *cha cha cha*, and *salsa* as well as more recent genres such as *filing*, *nueva trova*, *reguetón*, and Cuban rock.²⁴

In the body of the novel, weaving song lyrics into dialogues between characters often comprises a form of Cuban *choteo*—comic disrespectfulness that seeks to overthrow order and social hierarchies.²⁵ For example, the group of drunk men [*los curdelas*] who sing outside of the bar in *La Esquina's* basement use popular songs to antagonize neighbors and passersby. The songs they choose to sing comically criticize the victims of their jokes. When the entire neighborhood learns that the bar owner's wife controls him, the drunk men sing to him, "María Cristina me quiere gobernar . . . / y yo le sigo, le sigo la corriente . . . / porque no quiero que diga la gente . . ." (Portela, *Cien* 106). López's footnote provides the unfamiliar reader with the song's socio-cultural context. She explains that the song is a Cuban *guaracha*, popular in the 1940s, presumably a song that many Cuban readers would know. Portela comments that the lyrics reveal an aspect of Cuban sexism: as long as no one else finds out, the female partner in a relationship can be domineering.²⁶ Portela's footnote helps to show the reader how musical commentary sometimes intersects with social commentary in the world of the novel. Yet even without

the footnotes, the lyrics' content adds to the comedy of Pancholo's colloquial tirade against his wife.

Song lyrics are also a source of the novel's ironic humor. When Zeta learns that her lover Moisés inadvertently killed Poliéster when Moisés fell from their apartment window, she does not sing a celebratory song even though Poliéster's music-making tormented her: "No me alegré esta vez. No di brincos de júbilo ni palmadas de regocijo ni aullidos de felicidad, no canté aquello de "No, no hay que llorar . . . / que la vida es un carnaval . . ." [footnote 4], aunque Dios sabe que motivos no me faltaban" (Portela, *Cien* 265). López and Portela's footnotes add a layer of irony by specifying that the song lyrics come from an Argentinian *cumbia* that the Cuban singer Celia Cruz popularized; Cruz loved the *cumbia* so much that the Puerto Rican *salsero* Víctor Manuelle sang it at her funeral (Portela, *Cien* 265, note 4). Poliéster's complete lack of musical talent contrasts ironically with Celia Cruz's international fame, but the death of the innocent, if annoying Poliéster is no laughing matter.

CUBAN WRITERS AND WORLD FICTION

In *Cien botellas*, Poliéster proves that not all noise can become music, regardless of differences in taste. Similarly, not all writing is literature, as indicated by Linda's criticisms of the man who wrote the prologue to her first novel. Linda's literary triumphs imply that market success and international recognition, which go hand-in-hand, are indeed one measure of literary merit. Making concessions to foreign editors in order to publish, however, does not necessarily mean sacrificing one's authenticity as a writer. Portela states that an author should strive to find his or her *authentic* voice instead of obsessing over the writing's originality: "alcanzar la expresión propia sí es algo que uno puede proponerse, cómo no, aunque jamás lo consiga del todo. Quizá no llegue uno a ser demasiado original ni espectacular ni grandioso, pero al menos será *auténtico*" (italics added) (Portela, "Ena" 16). This principle of authenticity can also be applied to music: Poliéster imitates Cuban classics poorly, and his interpretations therefore do not add authenticity to the existing *sones*; a more talented musician would recreate the *sones* in his or her interpretations.

Portela's incorporation of numerous musical references, diligently footnoted, constitutes one of the ways that she expresses her authentic voice. *Cien botellas* includes heterogeneous kinds of Cuban music

that reflect Havana's social diversity. Furthermore, the musical battles within the novel evince the violent confrontations that Havana's social diversity can generate. Playing music in *La Esquina* results in the stereo wars rather than a harmonious blending of musical genres. Similarly, *Cien botellas* exposes the tensions surrounding the post-modern Cuban writer, the criteria for a good (Cuban) novel, and the readership for whom Cuban authors should write. Although *Cien botellas* constantly refers to Cuba—its recent history, societal challenges, and cultural products—the novel's metaliterary reflection and explanatory footnotes open the text to readers from different places with varying kinds of cultural education. Unlike the world fiction that Casanova criticizes for placing certain ideas within everyone's reach, *Cien botellas* does not sacrifice difficulty or cultural specificity for accessibility: this is the strategy behind Portela's uses of popular music.

Notes

1. Iraida López (2010), Ana María Amar Sánchez (2000), and Glen Close (2006) are critics who analyze *Cien botellas* as a crime novel.
2. Françoise Moulin Civil (2007), Odette Casamayor Cisneros (2004), Karen Christian (2013), and María del Mar López-Cabrales (2007) analyze different aspects of how *Cien botellas* portrays the Special Period.
3. Araújo (2001; 2009), Campuzano (2004), and Redonet (1996) comment upon the metafictional aspects of Portela's writing.
4. M.B. DeBevoise translated *The World Republic of Letters* (2004) from the French *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999).
5. "[B]etween the covers of the same volume one can find a cloak-and-dagger drama, a detective novel, an adventure story, a tale of economic and political suspense, a travel narrative, a love story, a mythological account, even a novel within the novel (the last a pretext for false self-referential erudition that makes the book its own subject--an effect of the perceived necessity of imitating "Borgesian" modernity)" (Casanova 171).
6. *Timberos* cultivate a dance genre known as *timba* that became popular in the late 1980s and early 90s: "*Timba* is highly eclectic, a blend of traditional *son* and New York salsa music with elements of funk and local Afro-Cuban folklore" (Moore 119).
7. *Reguetón* emerged as a Caribbean music genre in the 1990s. "Characterized by rapped lead vocals, a danceable beat, and background choruses or instrumental

figures reminiscent of U.S. soul, *reggaeton* might be thought of as a fusion of Spanish-language dancehall and Spanish-language rap” (Moore 138).

8. In *Audiotopia* (2005), Josh Kun argues that music creates spaces in which differences are confronted: “[T]he audiotopia is a musical space of difference, where contradictions and conflicts do not cancel each other out but coexist and live through each other” (Kun 23).

9. The *tumbadora*, the *bongó*, and the *batá* drums are African-derived instruments while the *maracas* and the *güiro* come from Caribbean indigenous groups (Moore 31).

10. The *son* is a syncretistic Afro-Cuban musical genre that originated at the end of the nineteenth century in Cuba. It is comprised of a section in verse called the *verso* or *canto* and a cyclic ending called the *montuno* that uses call and response lyrics (Moore 91).

11. The violence of the confrontation between Zeta and her neighbors (both magnified and mediated by Linda’s timely intervention) supports Kun’s understanding of audiotopias as “contact zones” in which the unforeseeable occurs: “Thus, in a sense, audiotopias can also be understood as identificatory “contact zones,” in that they are both sonic and social spaces where disparate identity-formations, cultures, and geographies historically kept and mapped separately are allowed to interact with each other as well as enter into relationships whose consequences for cultural identification are never predetermined” (Kun 23).

12. Loss contrasts Linda and Zeta’s respective rooms of their own and argues that “Zeta’s space of creation prevents her from being fully conscious of her role in that creation” (Loss 260). Loss does not acknowledge, however, that Zeta’s narration is highly self-conscious and metafictional.

13. “Writers in postcolonial nations on the *periphery* of international literary space therefore have to struggle not only against the predominance of national politics, as writers in the richest spaces do, but also against international political forces” (italics added) (Casanova 81).

14. Loss establishes a contrast between Zeta’s oral style of storytelling and that of Linda (Loss 255-256).

15. Nanne Timmer acknowledges that a lack of paper impacted literary production in Cuba during the *Período especial* (Timmer 190).

16. “Linda, por el contrario, suele resultar convincente. La sublime embustera fabrica ilusiones con la maestría del más pícaro guionista de Hollywood. A muchos lectores les encantan (en el sentido de lo que hace el encantador con la serpiente) sus infundios, incluso los más descabellados” (Portela, *Cien* 260-261).

17. After Zeta states that she writes on *papel gaceta*, López defines it as “[p]apel amarillento, barato, de mala calidad,” and Portela adds, “(Pues sí, era bastante maluco, pero lo recuerdo con ese afecto especial que nos suscitan

algunos objetos familiares por míseros que sean, ya que me sirvió para mis primeros cuentos, poemas, dibujos, acuarelas y origami. *ELP*)” (Portela, *Cien* 25, note 13).

18. Loss contends that “[t]he relationship between the *habanera* Zeta and the worldly Linda become emblematic of the differences between local and global literature” (Loss 258).

19. “As the most apparent of the mechanisms of consecration, they [literary prizes] represent a sort of confirmation for the benefit of the general public” (Casanova 146-147).

20. In her interview with Jorge Rufinelli, Portela states, “la universalidad no es algo que uno deba proponerse. Uno escribe sobre aquello que conoce (sí, ya sé que hay muchas maneras de “conocer”) y si luego resulta que es universal, o sea, que afecta a muchísimas personas en muchísimos lugares, pues magnífico. Tal vez sea ésa, en última instancia, la mayor ambición de cualquier escritor” (Portela, “Ena” 14).

21. The *bolero* is a ballad-style romantic song that originated in Cuba at the end of the 19th century (Moore 127). Its lyrics often express melancholy and lovesickness. The *bolero* reached the height of its popularity in the 1940s and 50s thanks to its diffusion through the radio and the jukebox (Moore 131).

22. In *Musicking* (1998), Christopher Small questions the cultural hierarchy that divides different kinds of music, namely Western classical concert music from more popular genres and styles: “meaning and beauty are created whenever any performer approaches it [the performance] with love and with all the skill and care that he or she can bring to it” (Small 7).

23. Portela explains that her ideal reader is simply curious; he or she does not need to carry specific cultural baggage: “El “lector natural” es aquel que buenamente sienta curiosidad y se disponga a serlo” (Portela, “Ena” 13).

24. *Nueva trova* refers to a genre cultivated by musicians who grew up in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution (Moore 164). Songs tended to be composed for a vocalist and acoustic guitar, though songs written after the 1980s include a variety of instruments and influences (Moore 165). *Nueva trova* songs are frequently a medium for socio-political critique.

25. In his *Indagación del choteo*, published in 1940 but initially delivered in 1928, Jorge Mañach seeks to define the Cuban cultural practice called *choteo*. He determines that *el choteo* consists of “un hábito de irrespetuosidad-motivado por un mismo hecho psicológico: una repugnancia de toda autoridad” (Mañach 19).

26. López and Portela add the following footnote to explain the song: “Guaracha del compositor cubano Níco Saquito (1901-1982), muy popular en la década del 40. (He ahí el lado jesuítico del sexismo cubiche: no importa que sea María Cristina quien gobierne . . . mientras lo haga en forma discreta, sin que nadie en el barrio se entere. *ELP*)” (Portela, *Cien* 106, note 22).

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