Identity in Cinco Canciones Negras (1945)
by Xavier Montsalvatge

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IDENTITY IN *CINCO CANCIONES NEGRAS* (1945) BY XAVIER MONTSAVATGE

By

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I dedicate this thesis to Jim, Jane, and Emily Henderson.
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ABSTRACT

After the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) left Spain in ruins, Catalan composer Xavier Montsalvatge (1912-1992) turned his attention towards the Caribbean for his first venture into vocal music. *Cinco canciones negras* (1945), commissioned by Catalan soprano Mercedes Plantada, consists of five poems by Rafael Alberti, Néstor Luján, Nicolás Guillén, and Ildefonso Pereda Valdés. This thesis examines how Xavier Montsalvatge interpreted suppressed voices of Spanish colonial minorities through his song cycle, *Cinco canciones negras*. Each song interprets the Afro-Cuban experience in its own way, but three elements create unity among the five songs. First, all five poems address themes of identity in terms of race and ethnicity, and gender. Second, resisting the Wagnerian preferences of his teachers, Montsalvatge created a musical style of *antillanismo*, combining Cuban dance rhythms, Spanish vocal styles, and indigenous Afro-Cuban musical forms. Third, the opening song recalls an old Spanish folk melody, setting up the rest of the cycle to be understood as quoted music. In this way, Montsalvatge creates a persona who becomes the narrator through the entire cycle. The persona, combined with Montsalvatge’s carefully researched and developed *antillanismo* style, give *Cinco canciones negras* a poetic unity that sends a powerful message about identity and oppression in Cuba.
CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SPAIN AND SPANISH AMERICA

Catalan composer Xavier Montsalvatge (1912-2002) did not venture into vocal writing until his 1945 song cycle *Cinco canciones negras*. Until then he had composed mainly piano music and ballet scores, and this transition in Montsalvatge’s compositional output reflects the composer’s response to political turmoil in Spain and its colonies. Montsalvatge admitted that his earliest compositions were so heavily derivative that they were almost plagiarized.¹ Two years later he wrote a work for violin and woodwind quartet titled *Petita suite burlesca*, which he omitted from his catalogue because it was “too blatently influenced by Stravinsky’s *Histoire du soldat*.”² Not only is *Cinco canciones negras* Montsalvatge’s first vocal work, but it is also one of the earliest compositions to employ the use of jazz chords, Cuban dance rhythms, and Caribbean percussive figures. These compositional attributes later defined Montsalvatge’s compositional aesthetic. The composer also integrated his love of the music of Les Six into a work centered around nationalistic colonial influence and the Catalan region of Spain. As shown in Table 1.1, the cycle consists of five songs based on poems by Spanish and Spanish American poets.

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Table 1.1—Poems, Poets, and their Nationalities in *Cinco canciones negras*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Cinco canciones negras (1945)</em></th>
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<td>2. “Punto de Habanera (Siglo XVIII)”</td>
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<td>(1922-1995)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. “Chévere”</td>
<td>Nicolás Guillén <em>(of Cuba)</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1902-1989)</td>
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<td>4. “Canción de Cuna Para Dormir a un Negrito”</td>
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All of the texts had been written within the decade preceding the publication of *Cinco canciones negras*, and they represent a substantial increase in the output of literature and music that took place as a result of the same crises that motivated Montsalvatge. Since the poems were so contemporary, they are a good representation of Afro-Cuban life. The goal of this thesis is to examine how Xavier Montsalvatge interpreted suppressed voices of Spanish colonial minorities through his 1945 song cycle *Cinco canciones negras*.

A defining example of legal racism and the enforced marginalization of colonial minorities (Blacks in particular) can be seen through an initiative known as “Limpieza de Sangre” or “Cleansing of Blood” implemented by the Spanish government in seventeenth-century Mexico City. On 2 May 1612 thirty-five Blacks and mulattoes were escorted by New Spain’s authorities through the streets and hanged in front of a large crowd across the street from the church and palace.\(^3\) Because racial purification could hardly be achieved by the execution of

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thirty-five randomly selected people, this example reflects the actions of a mismanaged and shortsighted New Spanish government that reacted to hatred and fear rather than reason. Religion provided a pretext for the Empire’s hatred of Blacks. Spaniards linked their enslavement to the Curse of Ham and thereby connected them with Jews and Muslims of the Iberian Peninsula. A caste system existed in Spanish America that revered pure “White blood” and automatically granted Whites full citizenship privileges. Next in the hierarchy were those of mixed blood, who could earn citizenship rights if they proved to have White blood even in a small percentage. Because many slaves in Spanish America had mixed blood and were obtaining freedom, colonial officials and slave-owners encouraged Black men to reproduce only with Black females, in order to justify keeping the Black population enslaved. In this way the institution of slavery in Spanish America required White men to take on paternal roles of their mixed-race children, thereby, as María Elena Martínez argues, emasculating the Black male. The Black woman became a sexualized figure, while the Black male became an emasculated nonentity. A stereotype developed in the 1600s that not only emasculates the Black male, but infantilizes him. The word “sambo” was originally used to describe a person of mixed African and Native American descent. As the term developed, however, Sambo became a stereotype that depicted the Black male as happy, naive, and child-like. In order for Whites to justify the institution of slavery, they depicted the character Sambo as a happy and grateful man who enjoys his work. While working,

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4 Martínez, 8. The Curse of Ham serves as a biblical explanation for black skin. While today it is heavily disputed by biblical scholars as being a valid explanation, it proved to be rather convenient rationale for Spanish monarchs to justify the enslavement of Blacks.

5 Martínez, 9.

6 Ibid.

Sambo enjoys singing and dancing, or “shuckin’ and jivin’.” The Sambo stereotype was used to promote Black men as a non-threat to Whites, while the Black woman was overly sexualized to make her not only the legal but the sexual property of White men. These gender conventions were developed during slavery in the seventeenth century and continued throughout Spanish-American history.

The political tension between Spain and Spanish America began in the early nineteenth century and culminated in the Spanish Civil War. Stability in the Spanish government and economy began to deteriorate in 1813 with the end of the Mexican War of Independence. Until then Spain had been one of the most powerful colonial empires in the world. Wealth and power in Spain at the beginning of the nineteenth century were controlled by the landed aristocracy. The monarchy in place, the House of Bourbon in Spain’s case, had supreme ownership of all the land held by citizens of Spain, as well as its colonial holdings across the ocean. The independence of Mexico severed a major crop importation relationship with Spain. Spain depended on its colonies to supply sugar, rubber, coffee, and minerals such as coal and tin in order to trade with other European countries. Due to Europe’s reliance on Spanish imports, the loss of its colonies also meant the loss of status for Spain within Europe. Mexico was one of Spain’s most profitable colonial holdings. Mexican Independence sparked the deterioration of the economic and political systems in Spain, as well as of its status as a major competitor in global trade.

Once Mexico became a newly independent nation, additional colonial revolutions in Spanish America erupted in rapid succession. Table 1.2 displays the date each colony achieved

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8 Ibid., xx.
independence from Spain and, in some cases, the re-allocation of those colonies to countries with more stable economies.\textsuperscript{10}

Table 1.2—Spanish American Colonies and Their Dates of Independence.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Spanish American Colony</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>May 1813 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>May 1814 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>1818 (from Argentina)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>February 1818 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>July 1821 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Central America</strong></td>
<td>September 1821 (All of Central America except for Panama was re-allocated from Spain to Mexico. Panama was re-allocated to Colombia.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>1822 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>1822 (from Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>May 1822 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>1823 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>1828 (from Spain via Argentina)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>1838 (from Mexico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>October 1838 (from Mexico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>October 1838 (from Mexico via Honduras)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>November 1841 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>February 1844 (from Haiti)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>December 1868 (from Mexico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>1871 (from Mexico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1898 (from Spain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>1898 (from Spain but still a U.S. territory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>March 1981 (from Britain)</td>
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By the 1880s the only colonies still under Spanish rule were Guam, the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The loss of the colonies in such rapid succession had a profound impact on the economy in Spain. Colonial revolutions were not the only problem affecting the Spanish government, however. The Industrial Revolution had already taken hold in most other parts of Europe and came to Spain at the same time as the colonial wars of independence. The Spanish labor force shifted from farm labor in the country to urban factories in larger cities such as Madrid and Barcelona. Urbanization undermined the land-based governmental monarchy and divided the country into two sides, the Conservatives, who supported agrarianism, and the Progressives, who supported urbanization. Citizens in the more industrialized parts of Spain vilified the monarchy and accused it of being corrupt and outdated. A series of urban riots in the late 1860s and 70s attempted to overthrow the House of Bourbon, but since no new governmental leader was proposed, Alfonso XII of the Bourbons resumed power in Spain in 1874.

By the 1870s and 80s Cuba and Puerto Rico were the leading producers of sugar and rubber worldwide. Because Spain drained its Caribbean colonies as a source of income, Puerto Rico and Cuba were producing wealth but unable to benefit from it. The Caribbean colonies grew angry at their indispensability to a country that was unable to sustain them. Their desire for justice was propelled by all the surrounding countries that had managed to attain independence. Fed up with the crumbling Spanish monarchy, Cuban national hero José Martí (1853-1895) set up rebel headquarters in south Florida in 1896 to meet with the United States and conspire against Spain. While Cuba and Puerto Rico relied on the help given to them by the United States, however, they failed to recognize fully the political and economic interest the U.S. had in them.
Cuba and Puerto Rico wanted to be independent from Spain to become successful individual nations. For the United States their independence was a political opportunity to gain control of Cuba and Puerto Rico for their crop exports and to establish a firmer naval presence in the Caribbean.

The Spanish-American War lasted only four months during the summer of 1898. While the armed hostilities were primarily between the United States and Spain, they resulted in Cuba’s independence. After experiencing defeat on the island, Spain pulled out of Cuba and declared peace. Simultaneously, the United States temporarily withdrew its forces due to an outbreak of yellow fever. Once free of military occupation, Cuba was able to sign the Treaty of Paris, drafted by Spain, to become an independent nation, while Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines were re-allocated to the United States.

Having lost its remaining colonies, Spain experienced an economic collapse. In 1909 industrial workers and portions of the military attacked the monarchy in Madrid. The attack sparked riots throughout the city, and chaos ensued in the following days. This event has come to be known as Tragic Week. In 1931 Alfonso XIII—the last monarch of the House of Bourbon—gave in to the riots and abdicated the throne.

The defeat of the monarchy was followed by a five-year period of peace, during which politicians and public figures attempted to restructure the governmental system. This move was known as the Second Republic. One major issue that needed to be solved was how to reform the Spanish economy. The divide over agrarianism and urbanization that had developed in the nineteenth century was the major issue the Republic attempted to solve. Progressives believed that the land-based governmental system that Spain had in place was obsolete. Some extremists
even proposed adopting an entirely Communist system and establishing a strong industrialized nation with an economy centered around manufacture. The land-owners, known as *latifundia*, who had acquired great wealth when the monarchy was in place, formed the core of the faction that opposed industry and saw Communism as a threat to their livelihood. In 1931 Spain ratified a constitution, and the division during the Spanish Republic developed into two opposing political parties. The Republican party represented the middle class, who pushed for stronger urban centers and a Communist economy, which would favor the labor force. The Nationalist party, led by Francisco Franco, strongly opposed Communism and raised a rebellion against the Second Republic. Both parties believed the previous land-based plutocracy in place prior to 1931 was obsolete; it was the issue of Communism that spurred vehement conflict and the eventual Spanish Civil War (1936-39).

Niceto Alcalá-Zamora (1877-1949) became the first prime minister of the Spanish Republic in 1931. Initially he was supported by all segments of society, but his popularity dwindled with the onset of the Great Depression later that year. Farm and factory workers alike were forced to work twelve-hour days in order to maintain their current salaries. The events that followed from November 1933 to November 1935, known as the *black two years*, made a civil war more likely.\(^\text{11}\) Under the umbrella of Fascism, Alejandro Lerroux, a delegate from the Republican Party, made many changes to Alcalá-Zamora’s regime in 1933. Due to Lerroux’s persuasion, the average work day was reduced to only eight hours, which forced Spanish laborers to go into debt or rely on (almost non-existent) governmental welfare in order to maintain their

Spain was so economically crippled that it was unable to provide its local citizens basic necessities. Nationalists were outraged at the changes being made and inflicted open violence against the Republic throughout 1934. Because they had a stronger hold in the government, Republicans fired prominent Nationalist figures in order to promote their policies effectively. Franco, who was the director of the military academy, was among those who were ousted. His termination, along with the court-ordered execution of revered general José Castillo (1901-1936), angered him so much that he and a group of conspirators instigated a military coup d’état on 17 July 1936. Franco was well connected and well respected in the military community, which allowed him to recruit strong military support for the Nationalist party and became very threatening to the Republicans in power.

Within days of Franco and the Nationalists’ invasion of Spanish camps in Madrid and Morocco, the country divided into two sections: those who remained loyal to the floundering Spanish Republic (the Republicans or “Loyalists”) and those who sided with the insurgents led by Franco and strong military officials (the Nationalists or “rebels”). Figure 1.1 shows how the country was divided and which major cities fell under which party alliance. The areas that were once the strongest agricultural centers (Eastern Spain) aligned more with the Republicans, while the more urban and popular tourist centers like Cadiz and Seville sided with Franco and the Nationalist party. Part of what made the Spanish Civil War so intensely personal to its citizens was the equal division of the two opposing parties. The Spanish Civil War split the country in half, and no citizen could escape its turmoil.

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12 Ibid., 64.
13 Image is in the public domain.
Figure 1.1—Division of Spain in 1936. Lighter area under Republican control; darker area under Nationalist control.

After three years of bloodshed the Nationalists finally invaded the Catalan region of Spain, which included Girona and Barcelona. Figure 1.2 reflects Nationalist occupation in 1939, as well as the military strength and resources from which the Nationalist party benefited.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\) Image is in the public domain.
By 1939 only Madrid remained aligned with the Republican party. On 31 March 1939 Franco and his unstoppable military contingent invaded the capital and set fire to the government buildings. This was the final push towards a Nationalist victory. Franco proclaimed victory on 1 April in a national radio broadcast. For the next four decades Franco led an aggressive dictatorship over his people. Over 500,000 Republicans fled their country for France (Xavier Montsalvatge included), leaving Spain wounded from the war and unsure of the success of its future.

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CHAPTER 2

XAVIER MONTSAVATGE AND CINCO CANCIONES NEGRAS

Xavier Montsalvatge i Bassols (1912-2002) grew up in the midst of ongoing political turmoil. Born in Girona, a small riverside town in the northeastern corner of Spain, Montsalvatge was raised during a time of both political upheaval and a flowering of Catalonian literature and culture. In an effort to produce a more unified Spain, the monarchy in the 1830s had suppressed all instances of Catalonian cultural distinction.\textsuperscript{16} A later movement starting in 1900s, known as \textit{modernisme}, produced a revival of the Catalan language and embraced music and literature that glorified the region. Though Montsalvatge came from a family of bankers, his father, Francesc, surrounded himself with emerging \textit{modernista} poets and contributors to the Catalonian cultural landscape:

As for my father, who inherited the bank when it had already begun to disintegrate, I have the impression that he was interested in intellectual matters above all. He painted, made beautiful wooden objects, and above all he wrote; and he maintained a close relationship with all the artists, writers or painters, who were connected with Girona in one way or another.\textsuperscript{17}

Among these academics were Manolo Hugué (1872-1945), a family friend, poet, and artist, whose work was exhibited in the historic Armory Show of 1913 in New York, and the young Tomás Garcès (1901-1993), a poet considered to be the Catalan equivalent of Federico García Lorca.\textsuperscript{18} Set up as an academic circle, these men would exchange their work among the group

\textsuperscript{16} Evans, 5.

\textsuperscript{17} Xavier Montsalvatge, \textit{Papeles autobiographicos al alcance de recuerdo} (Madrid: Fundación Banco Exterior, 1988), 23. En cuanto a mi padre, que heredó el banco cuando ya había comenzado a desintegrarse, tengo la impresión de que él estaba interesado en asuntos intelectuales por encima de todo. Él pintó, hizo hermosos objetos de madera, y por encima de todo lo que escribió, y que mantuvo una estrecha relación con todos los artistas, escritores o pintores, que estaban conectados con el Girona, en una forma u otra.

\textsuperscript{18}Evans, 5.
and offer critique. García thought very favorably of Francesc’s poetry and complimented his taste in literature.¹⁹

Francesc Montsalvatge died in 1921, when Xavier was eight years old. Francesc’s death had a devastating effect on the entire Montsalvatge family. Xavier’s widowed mother could no longer support Xavier and his other siblings, so the young boy was sent to Barcelona to live with his maternal grandmother and three maiden aunts. The Bassols lived in a duplex apartment in a very fashionable quarter of Barcelona, which, partly due to the modernista movement, had become quite a sophisticated European city. It was in this apartment that Montsalvatge’s musical life began. His aunts doted on him and supervised his education very intensely: “The three self-sacrificing aunts cared for me like a hothouse flower.”²⁰ They gave Xavier a half-sized violin for dia del reis (Epiphany) and arranged lessons for him with eminent Catalan violinist Eduardo Toldrà (1895-1962). Having had a successful solo career throughout Europe, Toldrà became a local celebrity and a symbol of Catalan regional pride.²¹ Only a wealthy, well-connected family like the Bassols could procure private lessons with a prestigious violinist for such a young student. While his schooling was divided evenly between the local Montessori school and the Escuela Municipal de Música, his family had high hopes for his career as a concert violinist. Upon recollection, Montsalvatge claims in Papeles that “my family, not I, pushed towards music.”²² When preparing for university studies, Montsalvatge considered abandoning music

¹⁹ Ibid., 6.


²² Montsalvatge, Papeles, 13.

“La meva família, no pas jo, em va impulsar cap a la música,” translated by Roger Evans.
altogether and pursuing a degree in architecture. It was Toldrà who advised Montsalvatge to attend the conservatory and take up composition in addition to his performance studies on the violin.

Montsalvatge studied at the Escuela Municipal for a total of fourteen years. Once he became a full-time student at the university level, he took additional violin lessons with Francesc Costa (1891-1959), while Toldrà toured around Europe. Both teachers acknowledged that his skill level was high enough to justify a career as a violinist, but they also claimed that he lacked the drive of a soloist in his practice and was temperamentally unsuited to the life of a professional performer. Indeed, Xavier Montsalvatge was outspoken about the deficiencies of his teachers during his time at the conservatory, as well, in his autobiography and later interviews.

Montsalvatge studied harmony, counterpoint, and fugue with Enric Morera (1865-1936), an established figure at the Escuela Municipal, passionate Wagnerite, and Schoenberg scholar. He believed that in order for Catalonia to gain a prominent status in the musical world, its composers must emulate the music of the New German School:

Morera was a great harmonist and an even better contrapuntist; but, like nearly all the Catalan musicians of his generation, he composed all his works . . . literally submerged in the Wagnerian aesthetic. At every moment he proposed for us as an example—as if it was to be treated as the composer’s gospel—the overture to Die Meistersinger, and it goes without saying that, for him, the music of Debussy was a symbol of decadent and bloodless art, that Falla wrote music for refined gypsies, and that some works of his [Morera’s] pupils surpassed those of these composers.

23 Evans, 22.

24 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 25; quoted and translated by Roger Evans in his biography of the composer, page 26. Morera fue un óptimo armonista y mejor contrapuntista, pero como casi todos los músicos catalanes de su generación compuso toda su obra . . . literalmente sumergido en la estética wagneriana. Nos ponía como ejemplo a cada instante como si se tratara del evangelio para el compositor, la obertura de Los Maestros Cantores y no se callaba que para él, la música de Debussy era simbolo del arte decadente y exangüe, que Falla escribía música para gitanos de postín y que varias obras de algunos alumnos suyos superaban las de los autores aludidos.
Though not as inspired by German late Romantics and Austrian atonalists as his teacher, Montsalvatge felt deeply indebted to Morera’s teachings. Montsalvatge spent the majority of his time at the Escuela Municipal honing his compositional skills and absorbing music outside the confines of violin repertoire. Morera guided Montsalvatge’s thinking and fostered his passion for establishing his own compositional aesthetic. Morera’s goals aligned with those of larger universities, in that they wished their students to make contributions to Western musical life under the label of “Catalan.”

Jaume Pahissa (1880-1969) was Montsalvatge’s primary composition teacher at the conservatory and was himself a student of Morera. Montsalvatge studied with Morera and Pahissa concurrently. Pahissa subscribed to Morera’s opinions about the supremacy of German and Austrian post-tonal works. He believed serialism and atonality to be the next step in musical progression, and he wished to be on the cutting edge of that development.²⁵ Pahissa was more interested in incorporating these new techniques into his own music, however, than imposing them on his students. Even though Pahissa was open to his students’ own compositional endeavors, Montsalvatge had little to say about his major professor: “... he [Pahissa] was much more flexible and open ... although in reality I admit that he taught me nothing about composition ...”²⁶ Pahissa’s own compositional output changed drastically about a decade after Montsalvatge graduated. Numerous musicologists observe that Pahissa suddenly began to incorporate Catalonian folksongs and stylized Spanish dances into his music. Though Cinco canciones negras was published in 1945, right around the time Pahissa’s shift is said to have occurred, it is unclear whether Montsalvatge was a direct reason for this shift. Another reason for

²⁶ Evans, 24; quoted and translated from Montsalvatge, Papeles, 26.
the change in Pahissa’s style could have been that Franco’s conservative and “nationalistic”
government made the environment less receptive to avant-garde styles.

Without his teachers’ knowledge, Montsalvatge entered the Pedrell Prize competition of
the Patchot Foundation in 1933 and won for his composition *Tres Impromptus* for piano. The
prize consisted of 500 pesetas and one week in Paris. Montsalvatge had always been attracted to
French music, in contrast to the preferences of his teachers. *Tres Impromptus* was composed in
the Impressionist style and was not endorsed by either Pahissa or Morera. Even though
Montsalvatge later omitted *Tres Impromptus* from his catalog, the composition afforded him the
opportunity to hear and collect the music of Les Six, who eventually shaped his aesthetic and
career. While in Paris, Montsalvatge visited the Conservatoire de Paris and the École Normale,
bought musical souvenirs including Ravel’s Sonata for Violin and Piano, Satie’s *Gymnopédies*
and *Gnossiennes*, Poulenc’s *Mouvements perpétuels*, and Milhaud’s *Saudades do Brazil* at the
Durand publishing house, and heard a live concert at the Théâtre du Châtelet with Feodor
Chaliapin singing the title role of Borodin’s *Prince Igor*. This experience would forever
influence Montsalvatge’s musical style. One important result of this trip was the young violinist’s
growing interest in piano music, and another was his exposure to the French music that had been
dismissed by his composition teachers in Barcelona. Montsalvatge studied the scores he bought
in Paris and began to incorporate their style into his compositions.

For the next few years Montsalvatge continued to win awards for his compositions based
on his new aesthetic and became a point of pride for the Catalan region. This area of Spain
had continued to thrive, producing distinct music and culture. As a result of the *modernista*

27 Dalton, 5.
28 Evans, 29.
movement, Barcelona hosted the 1936 International Society for Contemporary Music (I.S.C.M.), an annual international festival culminating in a live concert conducted by a major contemporary musical figure. This event was also the occasion for the premiere of Alban Berg’s Violin Concerto. Due to his overwhelming prominence in contemporary music, the I.S.C.M. booked Igor Stravinsky for the festival. By the time Stavinsky came to Barcelona for the Lenten concerts at the Liceu (Barcelona’s new auditorium) on March 15, 1936, Spanish troops had infiltrated the city, creating a grim and ominous atmosphere:

The environment of Barcelona for those entertainments was distressing and oppressive, and it was loaded with dark omens that caused one to fear the worst, as unfortunately very soon came to pass. Many assault troops were seen in the street with their blue uniforms and, from time to time, the pedestrians halted to let some parade of armed workers and active syndicalists pass.29

The Spanish Civil War (1936-39) disrupted Montsalvatge’s compositional development. The composer was in the middle of writing a ballet score, *El àngel de la guarda* (The guardian angel), commissioned by the Liceu later that year, when he was forced to stop suddenly. A conflict that was not expected to last more than a few weeks resulted in a three-year and intensely personal Civil War, in which no citizen of Spain was left unaffected:

For more than three years of nightmare, of infinite suffering, of despair there was a dark tunnel, an endless interval during which music ceased to exist for me, collapsed like so many things by the drama that fell down on us from above.30

It was a time so dark for me that I have tried neither to think nor speak of it. And, since I don’t think, I don’t remember. I decided to delete the recollection of the war from my life, and since

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El entorno de Barcelona para los espectáculos era angustioso y opresivo, y que estaba cargada de presagios oscuros que causó una a temer lo peor, ya que por desgracita, muy pronto se hizo realidad. Muchas tropas de asalto fueron vistos en la calle con sus uniformes azules y, de vez en cuanto, los peatones se detuvieron para dejar un poco de desfile de los trabajadores armados y activa pase sindicalistas.

Fueron más de tres años de pesadilla, de sufrimientos sin fin, de desaliento, túnel oscuro, intervalo inacabable durante el cual para mí la música dejó de existir, colapsada como tantas cosas por el drama que se abatía sobre todos.
then I live with a certain void, but happier. The picture that endures is the one everybody has: lack of food, complexities, sorrows, misfortunes—all very nebulous.31

After graduating from Barcelona’s Conservatori Municipal, (formerly the Escuela Municipal, the school changed its name during Montsalvatge’s attendance) at 24, Montsalvatge had achieved enough success to make him a threat to Franco and the new regime. Like his father’s, Montsalvatge’s success also fostered development and cultural distinctiveness in Catalonia. The region was becoming so autonomous from Spain with its own music, language, and culture that it had the makings of an independent nation, something Franco desperately wanted to avoid. As Evans states in his biography, “Francisco Franco had raised a rebellion against the five-year-old Second Republic, and both history and his own ambitions caused him to regard the Catalans, especially those of Barcelona, with hostility.”32 Even though Montsalvatge wanted no part in this conflict, as an important figure in Catalanian culture he was in immediate danger. With the help of his friends and family, Montsalvatge gathered money and supplies and headed for the French border, “literally running for his life.”33 The quoted statements above are the only two instances in which Montsalvatge mentions the war in his autobiography. The Catalonian region that Montsalvatge’s father worked so hard to define and to which Montsalvatge himself contributed great cultural identity was completely eradicated twenty-five years later. Heartbroken and without a home, the composer was forced to rebuild the region through his own success and compositional development.

31 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 56.
Fue un tiempo muy oscuro para mí que he intentado no pensar o hablar de ello. Y, ya que no creo, no me acuerdo. Decidí borrar el recuerdo de la guerra de mi vida, y desde entonces vivo con un cierto vacío, pero más feliz. La imagen que perdura es la que todo el mundo tiene: la falta de alimentos, las complejidades, penas, desgracias—todo muy nebuloso.

32 Evans, 34.

33 Codina, 49.
After the war ended in 1939, Montsalvatge inconspicuously returned to Spain from France and settled in Burgos, a small town in northern Spain. Aware that he could never return to Barcelona while Franco was in power, Montsalvatge resumed composing and became a regular contributor of political articles to underground insurrectionist magazines such as Destino and El Matí. While in Burgos, Monsalvatge started soaking up the local music and dance. One dance in particular, the Aragonese jota, became a major influence for the composer. In 1941 he wrote a piano composition called Tres divertimentos sobre temas de autores olvidados (Three divertimentos on themes of forgotten authors.) The piano work became a sort of ethnographic transcription of Spanish influences, as each of the three divertimentos characterized a stylized dance—the schottische, the Aragonese jota, and an havanera combining Catalan and Cuban elements. Montsalvatge infused the music with compositional techniques from Milhaud and other French composers, whom he greatly admired and often referenced.

*Tres divertimentos* was one of the first compositions to represent Montsalvatge’s distinctive sound. In the next twenty years Montsalvatge would continue to incorporate his fascination with Caribbean styles into his music. Cuba, which had most recently achieved independence, had exported goods as well as its culture into Spain for nearly 100 years. Cuban culture brought with it the forms and gestures of African slave descendants. Incorporating influences from the Caribbean allowed Montsalvatge to add new style to his compositions while still maintaining ties with Catalonia.

Maria Canals (1913-2010), a leading Spanish pianist of the day, premiered Montsalvatge’s latest composition, Ritmos, on November 10, 1942. Canals had commissioned the piece for herself after the success of *Tres divertimentos* which helped to establish
Montsalvatge as a composer of excellent piano repertoire.\textsuperscript{34} *Ritmos* was composed with the same Caribbean elements as the *havanera* movement of *Tres divertimentos* and subsequently solidified the Cuban sound as a compositional trend that the composer would later refer to as *antillanismo*:

\[
\ldots\text{antillanismo es un gusto personal que nunca he sabido cómo definir y no sé de dónde puede venir. Creo que procede de mi afecto por habaneras más acentuada en Cataluña.} \text{\textsuperscript{35}}
\]

Deborah Ann Dalton defines *antillanismo* in her dissertation as “a type of music which reflects a West Indian influence.”\textsuperscript{36} It is important to clarify that while Dalton believes this style to be reflective of the entire West Indian region, it is clear in this thesis that Montsalvatge’s aim was to create a style representative of Cuba, specifically Afro-Cuban influences. Though this trend has been referred to by his biographers as a “period,” the Caribbean rhythms combined with the French neoclassicist bitonality to create a style that remained consistent throughout Montsalvatge’s entire compositional output.

The success of Montsalvatge’s piano works confirmed the composer’s reputation and legitimized his music. Since Montsalvatge now felt like an established composer, he also felt that he had the freedom to be creative and try new things.\textsuperscript{37} One of these experiments was a venture into vocal music. Spanish soprano Mercédes Plantada (1911-1993) was planning a recital with pianist Pere Villrìbera at the Plau de la Música Catalada and asked Montsalvatge to provide a piece for the program. Having recently become interested in Latin American poetry, Montsalvatge took advantage of this opportunity to experiment with setting his music to words.

\textsuperscript{34} Evans, *Xavier Montsalvatge*, 45.

\textsuperscript{35} Codina 24; translated in Dalton, 17.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{37} Franco, 40.
The poems that would make up *Cinco canciones negras* reflected the voices of disenfranchised or oppressed minorities. He first set Ildefonso Pereda Valdés’s lullaby “Canción de cuna para dormer a un negrito,” intending that song to stand as a single unit. He then chose two poems by Nicolás Guillén, “Chévere” and “Canto negro,” to frame the lullaby. At the same time, a very close friend, the poet Néstor Luján, presented the composer with some of his recently written poems. Montsalvatge chose Luján’s “Punto de Habanera” because “it excited me.” Finally, another Spanish poet and good friend, Rafael Alberti, approached Montsalvatge with a single poem, “Cuba dentro de un piano.” Montsalvatge thought that Alberti’s text made a good opening song, followed it with Luján’s poem, and concluded with the three already conceived songs. By assembling these texts together, Montsalvatge uses *Cinco canciones negras* to make a deliberate statement about how he wished to represent Spain, Spanish America, and questions of identity that had been further emphasized by the Civil War.

Mercédes Plantada was born in Barcelona in 1911. Her family maintained a close relationship with the Montsalvatges; essentially Xavier and Mercédes grew up together. Plantada began taking lessons at the conservatory at the age of twelve and enrolled as a full-time student at the age of fifteen. While attending the conservatory, Plantada developed a love for contemporary Spanish art song. She received a teaching position at the conservatory in 1935 while also maintaining an active performance career. She imparted her love of Spanish art song to her student Victoria de los Ángeles and others, many of whom went on to have successful careers of their own. Plantada approached Montsalvatge and asked for a new song to perform on her upcoming recital in Barcelona’s Ateneu. It was the local custom for recitals to be divided into

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38 Ibid., 60.
three parts. The first section was made up of classic Italian arias, the second featured songs by modern Catalan composers, and the third consisted of old popular Castilian and Catalan songs. Plantada planned for Montsalvatge’s composition to close her second group.

Montsalvatge composed “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito” within one week, and Plantada premiered it in mid-May 1945 to overwhelming acclaim. The composer and performer were “surprised by the sincere emotion in the auditorium.” The positive reception of the song stimulated Montsalvatge to consider how he could extend such a success. Montsalvatge was not the only person spurred by the success of “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito.” Plantada recognized Montsalvatge’s skill at song composition and encouraged the expansion of the song into a collection. Montsalvatge worked quickly on all five songs, and Plantada performed the entire cycle on June 14, 1945, within one week after it was completed. Cinco canciones negras proved to be an important composition for the careers of both Montsalvatge and Plantada. The cycle was premiered by Barcelona’s Orquestra Municipal and conducted by Montsalvatge’s former teacher Eduard Toldrà. The work was an instant success, and one year later she premiered the orchestrated version in Barcelona to an audience of over 6,000 people.

The collection of songs was a milestone in Montsalvatge’s career in several important ways. It propelled Montsalvatge’s fame to an international level. Cinco canciones negras also represents the peak of Montsalvatge’s antillanismo trend, because it is not only a culmination but a true fusion of Catalonian and Caribbean influences. The orchestrated version of Cinco

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39 Evans, 52.
40 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 72.
41 Evans, 54.
42 Dalton, 31.
43 Ibid, 27.
canciones negras premiered just a few months before Manuel de Falla’s death. The timing of

Cinco canciones negras thus represented a figurative passing of the nationalistic torch from Falla to Montsalvatge.
CHAPTER 3

I. “CUBA DENTRO DE UN PIANO” (CUBA IN A PIANO)

“Cuba dentro de un piano,” with text by Rafael Alberti (1902-1999), was the final poem selected for the overall conception of Cinco canciones negras. By 1945 Alberti was a well-known figure in Spain for both his poetry and his extremist politics. Franco publicly exiled Alberti from Spain in 1939 because of his Marxist beliefs. Montsalvatge selected the untitled text from Alberti’s collection Poesía, which was published in Cuba in 1940. (Literature written by or about Blacks and/or Native American slaves was purged or forbidden publication by the Spanish government.) Montsalvatge’s selection of Alberti’s underground poem for his song cycle shows that he not only uncovered literature from censored national poets who were writing about colonial minorities, but he also musically interpreted the suppressed voices of colonial minorities represented in the poems themselves. Although Montsalvatge outwardly maintained a neutral stance regarding the Spanish Civil War, Cinco canciones negras gave him a way of fighting against Franco’s dictatorial regime. Alberti’s text served as a good opening for the cycle because it exposed the listener to poetry that would otherwise not have been read and because of the poem’s strong language and subject matter.

“Cuba dentro de un piano” is dedicated to Catalan soprano Concepción (Conchita) Badía de Agustí (1897-1975.) Having premiered the works of Granados, Mompou, de Falla, and Ginastera, Agustí was known as one of the greatest interpreters of twentieth-century Catalan,


46 Evans, 45.
Spanish, and Latin American art song. She taught voice at the Municipal Conservatory of Barcelona in her later years, where Montserrat Caballé (b. 1933) was one of her students. During this time Agustí encouraged her students to sing contemporary works by Spanish composers. As a lifelong promoter of contemporary Spanish song, she made an obvious dedicatee for the opening song of *Cinco canciones negras*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cuba dentro de un piano</th>
<th>Cuba inside a piano</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuando mi madre llevaba un sorbete de fresa por sombrero</td>
<td>When my mother wore strawberry ice for a hat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y el humo de los barco aún era humo de habanero.</td>
<td>and the smoke from the boats was still Havana smoke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulata vuelta bajera...</td>
<td><em>Mulata fallen low...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cádiz se adormecía entre fandangos y habaneras</td>
<td>Cadiz was falling asleep to fandango and habanera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y un lorito al piano quería hacer de tenor.</td>
<td>and a little parrot at the piano tried to sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...dime dónde está la flor que el hombre tanto venera.</td>
<td>...<em>tell me, where is the flower that a man can really respect.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi tío Antonio volvía con aire de insurrecto.</td>
<td>My uncle Anthony would come home in his rebellious way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Cañaña y el Príncipe sonaban por los patios de El Puerto.</td>
<td>The Cañaña and El Príncipe resounded in the patios of the port.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ya no brilla la Perla azul del mar de las Antillas.</td>
<td>(But the blue pearl of the Caribbean shines no more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya se apagó, se nos ha muerto.)</td>
<td><em>I met beautiful Trinidad...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Me encontré con la bella Trinidad...</em></td>
<td>Cuba was lost, this time it was true.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba se había perdido y ahora era de verdad.</td>
<td>True and not a lie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Era verdad, no era mentira.</td>
<td>A gunner on the run arrived, sang Cuban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un cañonero huido llegó cantándolo en guajira.</td>
<td>songs about it all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La Habana ya se perdió.</em></td>
<td><em>Havana was lost</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Tuvo la culpa el dinero...</em></td>
<td><em>and money was to blame...</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calló, cayó el cañonero.</td>
<td>The gunner went silent, fell,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pero después, pero ¡ah! después fué cuando al SÍ lo hicieron</td>
<td>But later, ah, later they changed SÍ to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES.</td>
<td>YES.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The poem is written in free verse (*verso libre*), with no set number of syllables per line and no conventional form. While the rhyme scheme is somewhat fragmented, the final

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consonants and vowel clusters are assonant. In the original text, for which the typography is reproduced above, specific lines of text are italicized, breaking up the poem into stanzas. As the following discussion will show, Monsalvatge clearly intended the italicized lines to function as a separate stanza based on his musical interpretation.48

The poem as a whole refers to the changes that the Spanish-American War wrought in Cuba. Over the course of the poem Alberti shifts attention from picturesque descriptions of ladies in pretty hats and boats floating lazily on the water to instances of violence and harsh lamentations of economic oppression and Cuban cultural disintegration. The Spanish-American War marks the change between Cuban life in the past and Cuban life in the present. Alberti reflects that impact by alternating between two narrative discourses. While both discourses have a sense of past and present, they interrupt each other’s flow and direction. The un-italicized lines, which make up the bulk of the text, recount how the Spanish-American War deteriorated Cuban culture. It begins by recalling bright colors that are typically associated with Afro-Cuban culture, “When my mother wore strawberry ice for a hat,” and continues with comparisons between romanticized pre-War Havana and defeated post-War Havana.49 A painting by Cuban artist J. Pons (dates not found) portrays an Afro-Cuban woman wearing the same colored head-covering as the woman described in the poem (see Figure 3.1). Though the painting is dated around

48 Suzanne Draayer, *Art Song Composers of Spain*, 381. In her dissertation Deborah Ann Dalton compiles the italicized lines into a synthetic stanza in order convey more clearly the meaning of the otherwise quite fractured poem.

twenty years earlier (1919), this image corresponds well to the song, since the speaker is recalling her mother who may have dressed that way twenty years ago.  

Figure 3.1—Negrita (1919) by J. Pons, oil on canvas, Cernuda Arte in Coral Gables, FL. Used with permission.

This narrative memory, referred to in this chapter as personal narrative, represents the independent thoughts of the speaker who tells a story that is actively recalled. The speaker’s narrative is interrupted, however, by snippets of text that seem to be recollected in fragments. Montsalvatge interprets these fragments as lyrics to an old Cuban song. This second level of discourse, designated by italicized lines, represents thoughts recalled gradually from the speaker’s memory that culminate in a quoted song. Both narratives represent parallel streams of thought, the former making direct observations and the latter recalling a Cuban song. Moreover, Alberti reflects the disintegration of the Spanish language by creating shorter and shorter lines as the text trickles towards the end and finally gives way to English. In his musical interpretation Montsalvatge mimics Alberti’s shifts between personal narrative and quoted song by interjecting

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50 J. Pons, Negrita, 1919, Cernuda Arte, Coral Gables, FL. Used with permission.
a recurring musical refrain in A♭ major with an *habanera* ostinato that coincides with the italicized portions of the poem.

The alternation of both continuing discourses shows that there is not one interjecting force but rather that the functions are interrupting each other. In his musical interpretation Montsalvatge also represents each part almost equally. The italicized lines, which when compiled only make up six lines, consist of thirty-seven measures, while the personal discourse comprises forty.

“Cuba dentro de un piano” begins with octave Cs serving as a dominant pedal that continues until m. 5. The right hand begins in m. 3 on an *habanera* rhythm of a triplet followed by two eighth notes, but the first note of the triplet is omitted in the right hand, so that the listener does not hear the triplet as a continuous rhythm. The *habanera* rhythm is only recognized if the listener is studying the score while listening. Otherwise, Montsalvatge creates a sense of the accompaniment trickling in without a steady meter. Measure 5 is the first time the listener hears a steady pulse. The *habanera* pattern actually introduced in m. 3 becomes clear aurally in m. 5 on a very prominent chromatic descending ninth progression (Example 3.1).

![Example 3.1—Chromatic descending ninth progression (mm. 5-7).](image)

This passage reflects some of Montsalvatge’s recent influences. Its main purpose is to highlight the entrance of an *habanera* rhythm, which helps to emphasize the old Cuba and its musical tradition. Debussy and the music of Impressionism were one of Montsalvatge’s primary influences, and the chromatic descending ninth passage evokes the Impressionist sound. The
ninth chords are also reminiscent of jazz progressions, an influence that had recently captured Montsalvatge’s attention.

The melody enters in m. 9 with a descending sixth followed by repeated Cs. This introduces the Spanish *cante jondo* vocal style. *Cante jondo*, literally translated as “deep song,” is a vocal style in which the melody typically dips a large interval (typically a fifth or larger) and the lower note of the interval is repeated through a whole measure on the text. It is a style trait that became a common marker for Spanish nationalism due to its association with flamenco music. Because of flamenco's roots in the music of the Roma people (also known by the originally derogatory name “Gypsy”), it is possible that here the device also signifies ostracized and oppressed communities more generally and thereby reinforces the racial denigration expressed as Afro-Cuban experience in the songs. On the other hand, Montsalvatge left no external evidence of such an intention, so this is merely an observation for speculation. The opening line, “When my mother wore strawberry ice for a hat and the smoke from the boats was still Havana smoke,” introduces several important characteristics present in each of the *Cinco canciones negras*. First, it initiates a woman as the focus of song. The reference to the “strawberry ice” color of her hat alludes to the color of clothing typically worn by Black women as shown in the Pons painting. As the line continues, “and the smoke from the boats was still Havana smoke,” the listener is oriented in Havana, Cuba. Although Caribbean elements have already been stated by the opening *habanera* rhythms, the opening sixteen measures situate the song, and all of *Cinco canciones negras*, in time, place, and subject.

Measure 17 marks the first change from the realm of personal narrative to quoted song. The melody abandons the *cante jondo* style in favor of a pre-existing lyrical melody compiled by
Montsalvatge in the 1930s. During his time in Burgos, Montsalvatge had started collecting *habaneras* and compiling them into an album. In her dissertation, Deborah Dalton provides one of the melodies he collected, “El abanico” (The fan), and shows how well the melody set the italicized lines of Alberti’s poem (Examples 3.2 and 3.3.)\(^1\)

\[\text{Example 3.2—Folk melody, “El abanico,” from Montsalvatge’s *Habaneras de la Costa Brava.*}^{52}\]

\begin{align*}
\text{“El abanico”} & \quad \text{“The fan”} \\
\text{Que un abanico sirve} & \quad \text{The fan has its use,} \\
\text{¿sabéis para qué?} & \quad \text{do you know what it is?} \\
\text{Para ocultar el rostro} & \quad \text{To hide the face} \\
\text{de una mujer.} & \quad \text{of a woman.}
\end{align*}

\[\text{Example 3.3—“Mulata vuelta bajera” (mm. 17-21) of “Cuba dentro de un piano.”}\]

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\(^{51}\) Dalton, 71.

Another clear way that mm. 17-21 delineates the narrative from the song is through the use of a second habanera pattern. The second and most recognizable habanera rhythm appears as an ostinato in the bass of the accompaniment under the words “Mulata vuelta bajera,” the first italicized line in Alberti’s poem. It supports the lyrical “El abanico” folk melody and represents the abrupt shift between the two discourses. The habanera ostinato keeps the section in A♭ major, continues to the end of the italicized line, and then disappears. At this point, the text has also dissipated. The disintegration of “Mulata vuelta bajera” to “mmm” is important to notice. In the “El abanico” melody shown in Example 3.2, the text is set syllabically. The text in mm. 17-21 begins on the same melody, is set syllabically, and then tapers off. Because the melody stems from a pre-existing folk tune, the switch from personal recollection to pre-existing song represents a switch in the speaker’s memory. The song sections, which correspond to the italicized lines in Alberti’s poem, illustrate the speaker recalling an old Cuban folksong. As the interruptions continue throughout the song, they each become longer, indicating that more of the tune is recalled and the text is gradually remembered. One of the ways Montsalvatge makes the alternation abrupt is by switching key areas without any modulation. Measures 17-21 appear in a new key signature without any modulation from F major to A♭ major. There is also no indication of modulation back to the tonic key of F.

After the first interruption by the quoted song, the narrative on the text “Cadiz was falling asleep to fandangos and habaneras,” resumes in m. 22. In contrast to the more lyrical “El abanico” folk-melody, the melodic lines in mm. 22-30 act as quasi-recitative fragments. They are supported by minimal accompaniment and do not have a clear lyrical direction. As the melody
ends on a half cadence in F major in mm. 29-30, it concludes with vocal flourishes used to characterize Spanish vocal styles.

The second interruption of the personal narrative happens at measure 31. The previously quoted “El abanico” melody occurs in the piano for four measures before the voice enters in m. 35. Unlike the first quoted-song passage in m. 17, here the “El abanico” melody occurs in the piano, and the voice adds decoration. In m. 35 the singer begins a phrase the listener has not heard before, and the melody in the piano supports it. While the Spanish folk song pulsates in the accompaniment, the singer sings fragmented phrases. Montsalvatge uses this effect to create a sense of recall. In mm. 35-39 it seems as if the singer is trying to remember the rest of the “El abanico” melody. In the original passage (mm. 17-21) the piano and voice sang the melody together, suggesting that the words “mulata vuelta bajera” could be the actual words to the song. As the melody reappears, however, the listener hears the strong previously stated melody without the words. The appearances of the recalled song passages in “Cuba dentro de un piano” increase in length, demonstrating that every time the “El abanico” melody occurs, the singer remembers more of the original song. The folksong continues without her until m. 42.

Another switch to narrative happens in m. 43. While the second, dotted-rhythm, habanera pattern is a clear indication of a quoted-song passage, the initial habanera pattern (a triplet followed by two eighth notes) is clearly associated with the quoted recall passages. Montsalvatge muddles a steady pulse in this recitative-like section (mm. 43-56) by offsetting the first habanera rhythm between the voice and piano. The melody is set syllabically on two eighth notes followed by a triplet in each bar. Simultaneously, the piano articulates the same habanera rhythm but reversed—a triplet followed by two eighth notes. Montsalvatge uses this technique to disrupt the
steady pulse that is so clearly present in the folksong sections. This portion is one of the longest passages of personal narrative in the song. It begins on the text “My uncle Anthony would come home in his rebellious way” and then begins to retell what Caribbean life was like prior to American intervention. The speaker bemoans how a once vibrant Cuban culture has been extinguished. In spite of the text’s lamenting quality, it is set syllabically and moves very fast. It is difficult for the listener to catch all the speaker’s grievances. Measure 55 is a significant moment in the song, however. The music ends on a half cadence in A♭ major. This is the first instance of modulatory material that sets up the next occurrence of the quoted song in a way that it has not been set up before. This moment in the song represents a convergence between the two discourses.

A brief interruption in the personal narrative occurs in mm. 56-59. The piano plays the latter half of the “El abanico” melody, while the singer sings along at the ends of phrases. Every time the singer sings, the piano accompanies her melody. This is additional confirmation that the singer is indeed trying to remember bits and pieces of the old Cuban song.

The triplet/duplet habanera rhythm occurs in piano accompaniment in m. 60, indicating that the song has moved back into narrative discourse. The text at this point becomes more sinister, “Cuba was lost, this time it was true,” and the music shifts from F major to F minor and A♭ major. Once again the voice and piano articulate the habanera rhythmic pattern in opposition, and the music cadences on another dominant seventh chord in the key of A♭ in mm. 69-70. This recurring pattern has become an aural cue to the listener that signals a shift back into the ongoing narrative. In spite of the increasingly bitter text, its syllabic setting combined with the tonicization of a major key communicates not sorrow, but confusion. It is not until the return
of the “El abanico” folksong in m. 71 that the singer has a chance to reflect on what has happened to the dissolving Cuban culture.

The longest “El abanico” passage begins in m. 71 and lasts until m. 85. The folksong above the habanera ostinato starts right away and repeats in full two times, while the singer begins to the sing the latter halves of phrases. As before, when the singer comes in, the accompaniment plays along with the singer. The piano ends on a fully diminished F♯♯42 chord before moving into a new rubato section.

Measure 86, while still in narrative discourse, represents a new point in the song. The diminished seventh chord signals a seven-bar section that intensifies as the singer laments Cuba’s future. Measures 86-93 also demonstrate Montsalvatge’s interpretation of Cuban cultural disintegration. As the language falls apart in the final lines of Alberti’s poem “But later, but later, they changed ‘SI’ to ‘YES!’” Montsalvatge reduces the melody to short, repeating fragments. At this point the singer is so bitter that the melody dissolves into shorter and shorter motives supported by sparse accompaniment.

The final word of the poem, “YES!,” sparks a recurrence of the opening descending ninth progression. This time, however, the lazy-sounding triplet is replaced with a sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth pattern that makes the progression sound harsher. Montsalvatge also heavily accents each articulation of the passage and marks that it should be played fortissimo rather than piano. This is the most bitter and resentful part of “Cuba dentro de un piano.”

The violent descending ninth progression does not close the song, however. In m. 97 the second half of the “El abanico” melody returns to signify that the singer will always remember the original Cuban song and try to retain as much of her heritage as she can.
One of the most significant things about the placement and function of “Cuba dentro de un piano” is that it sets up a situation in which the speaker quotes existing songs. This has an enormous effect on the rest of the cycle, because the rest of the songs might be understood as quoted songs, and the speaker in the first song becomes the speaker in the entire cycle. In this way, Montsalvatge creates a persona for *Cinco canciones negras* who has the agency and authority to speak about Cuban life. It is not Montsalvatge but the speaker who is drawing these interpretations. The fictive persona has the right to say things that composer himself would not.

As the introductory song to *Cinco canciones negras*, “Cuba dentro de un piano” serves two purposes. The first is that it gives the pieces a sense of time and place. From the title the listener knows that the song is set in Cuba, and by m. 16 she knows that the action takes place in Havana. The obsessive use of *habanera* rhythms also situates the song in the Caribbean. As the song continues, the reader discovers that the poem is set after the Spanish-American War. The fluctuation between story and narrative times demonstrate the shifts in memory of Cuba between the past and the present. Though subtle, the second thing that “Cuba dentro de un piano” introduces are themes of race and gender, which are not entirely separate. The “fallen mulatto woman” appears in the “quoted” song, indicating that she is part of the old Cuba. It also subtly implies that the mulatto woman is of a degraded, lower class than other European or American citizens. As *Cinco canciones negras* will show, the treatment of Black women reflects the treatment of all oppressed people.
II. “PUNTO DE HABANERA (SIGLO XVIII)” (HABANERA RHYTHM [18th CENTURY])

“Punto de habanera (Siglo XVIII)” (Habanera Rhythm [18th Century]) was the fourth song incorporated into Cinco canciones negras. Both from the Catalan region, Xavier Montsalvatge and Néstor Luján (1922-1995) were lifelong friends and collaborators. Both men lived in Burgos during the 1940s and were regular contributors to the underground magazine Destino. Montsalvatge was the primary editor of the magazine and wrote political articles, while Luján published entertaining travelogues and food reviews. Their contributions to Destino resulted in a close friendship and many subsequent collaborations. In addition to his work for the magazine, Luján wrote poetry, short stories, and specialized in translating French Baroque literature. Montsalvatge and Luján frequently shared their work with each other and offered critical feedback. Luján was very much aware of Montsalvatge’s recent venture into vocal writing and approached the composer with a few of his verses. The subject matter in “Punto de habanera (Siglo XVIII)” coincided with other themes of race and gender already present in the three poems and therefore was a logical choice for Montsalvatge to make. Prior to the conception of Cinco canciones negras, the pair was already collaborating on an opera called El gato con botas (Puss in Boots). Luján translated the libretto from the original 1697 Perrault fable. Similarly, for “Punto de habanera (Siglo XVIII)” Luján traced the text from an eighteenth-century manuscript. Using his skills in translation as well as his love for and access to Baroque

53 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 93.
54 Evans, 56.
55 Franco, 24.
literature, Luján modernized the text by arranging its syllables to be more assonant through chain rhyming. Luján’s poem is presented here with the English translation.⁵⁶

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Punto de habanera (Siglo XVIII)”</th>
<th>“Habanera rhythm (18th Century)”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La niña criolla pasa con su miriñaque blanco</td>
<td>The Creole girl goes by in her white crinoline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Qué blanco!</td>
<td>How white!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hola crespón de tu espuma;</td>
<td>The billowing spray of your crepe skirt!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡marineros contempladla!</td>
<td>Sailors, look at her!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Va mojadita de lunas que le hacen su piel mulata.</td>
<td>She passes gleaming in the moonlight which darkens her skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niña, no te quejes, tan solo por esta tarde. Quisiera mandar al agua que no se escape de pronto de la cárcel de tu falda, tu cuerpo encierra esta tarde rumor de abrirse de dalia.</td>
<td>Young girl, do not complain, only for tonight do I wish the water not to suddenly escape the prison of your skirt. In your body this evening dwells the sound of opening dahlias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niña, no te quejes, tu cuerpo de fruta está dormido en fresco brocado. Tu cintura vibra fina con la noblez de un látigo, toda tu piel huele a limonal y a naranjo.</td>
<td>Your ripe body sleeps in fresh brocade, your waist quivers as proud as a whip, every inch of your skin is gloriously fragrant with orange- and lemon trees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La niña criolla pasa con su miriñaque blanco. ¡Qué blanco!</td>
<td>The Creole girl goes by in her white crinoline. How white!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Montsalvatge dedicated “Punto de habanera (Siglo XVIII)” to Lola Rodríguez de Aragón, a noted Spanish soprano. Rodríguez was known for teaching nationalistic art song to her students, thus, hoping to foster the performance and future creation of Spanish art song.⁵⁷

Because she and Montsalvatge had a lifelong friendship, he would frequently give her his latest song compositions. One of her most famous students was Teresa Berganza (b. 1935), a frequent performer of Cinco canciones negras and Montsalvatge’s later songs.

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⁵⁶ Cockburn and Stokes, 224.
⁵⁷ Ibid., 74.
One technique Luján uses to manipulate the *verso libre* text is chain rhyme. Luján links the lines of the text through the use of assonance. An example of chain rhyme occurs in the first lines of the poem:\(^{58}\)

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La niña criolla pasa con su miriñaque blanco.
¡Que blanco!
Hola crespón de tu espuma;
¡marineros contempladla!
Va mojadita de lunas
```

The poem comprises mostly eight-syllable (*octosílabo*) lines, which Luján intends to flow into each other without a pause between the verses. In this way Luján evokes a sense of continuity. The text begins and ends with the Creole girl walking past a group of sailors in her white crinoline. The poem is constructed to depict the entire episode of the Creole girl passing by. The color white serves as a symbol of virginity or innocence, which is symbolic because the Creole girl in the poem is being objectified by the male speaker. Luján could also have intended for the color white to serve as a contrast to the color of the Creole girl’s skin.

*A punto* is an African-derived Cuban narrative folksong.\(^{59}\) Characteristically, it employs an ongoing duel between the poetry and the music, in which the poetry always wins. The texts of *puntos* are often improvised, the melody is typically simple and very familiar. Unlike in “Cuba dentro de un piano,” here Montsalvatge structures the *verso libre* into a strophic form. This gives the illusion of an improvised punto where the melody is familiar to the singer and the words are being sung spontaneously.

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\(^{58}\) Dalton, 68.

“Punto de habanera” begins with the marking *Tempo de Guajiras*, which coincides with the metrical structure characteristic of a *guajira*—alternating measures of 6/8 and 3/4, as shown in Example 4.1. The word *guajira* is associated with rural texts, rhythms, instrumentation, and style. *Guajira* is synonymous with both the *criolla*, known as Creole music, and the *punto* which coincides with the song’s title. The use of the *guajira* tempo at the opening of the song immediately establishes the characters in the text as lower-class country-folk.

Example 4.1—Alternation of 6/8 and 3/4 *guajira* metrical structure (m. 1-4)

When the text enters in m. 5, a young Creole girl is addressed directly in the poem, and the meter changes to a slow duple, possibly evoking a guitar serenade. The melody is set syllabically and moves in a stepwise, playful motion. At measure 9 the *guajira* rhythm and vocal melody are abandoned in order to create a musical spotlight on the beautiful Creole girl. The minor sixth interval on “que blanco” imitates a wolf whistle and helps shift total focus onto the Creole girl—emphasizing her gender and her race. The seven measures, shown in Example 4.2, make up the refrain that will open and close the song.

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60 Dalton, 71.


62 Ibid.
Example 4.2—The opening refrain of “Punto de habanera” (mm. 5-11)

Measure 12 marks the beginning of the first, second, and third verses. The verses, set syllabically, resume the opening *guajira* tempo until m. 20. As previously stated, “Punto de Habanera” is meant to mimic a Cuban *punto*. Since one of the primary characteristics of a *punto* is its improvisatory quality, the vocal line moves in stepwise motion to evoke an easy, spontaneously created melody. Montsalvatge supports the vocal line by using the same notes in the accompaniment. This creates the sense that the speaker, presumed to be a sailor, is accompanying himself while singing the song towards the Creole girl.

Each of the three verses, divided into eight-measure segments in mm. 12-20, focuses on a different aspect of the Creole girl. The first verse focuses on her race, “The billowing spray of your crepe skirt! Sailors, look at her! She passes gleaming in the moonlight which darkens her skin.” In this verse the whiteness and texture of the girl’s crinoline are juxtaposed to the darkness of her skin. It also sets up the scenario in which this song is taking place. The listener learns from this verse that there is more than one man feasting their eyes upon the Creole woman. Now it is
revealed that the woman is outnumbered, she becomes more vulnerable because of the sexual advances made to her by multiple men at once.

The second verse continues to build upon the sexual vulnerability of the Creole woman. Sexually explicit remarks are aggressively implied in the lines “not to suddenly escape the prison of your skirt. In your body this evening dwells the sound of opening dahlias.” Allusions to opening flowers typically reference female genitalia, and since the statement is being made towards the “prison” of the woman’s skirt, the listener understands that aggressive sexual advances are being made toward her.

The third musical statement in mm. 12-20 combines racial and sexual harassment. The lines “your waist quivers as proud as a whip, every inch of your skin is gloriously fragrant with orange and lemon trees,” culminate the height of the sailors’ sexual fascination with the Creole girl. Her skin is highlighted in particular. The references to orange and lemon trees coincide with the bucolic content of the poetry typical in a guajira or a punto. The illustrative comments made by the sailors to the woman are so descriptive that they can be interpreted as even more disturbing than ordinary harassment. The sailors’ intense fixation on the Creole woman makes her extremely vulnerable and powerless to their aggression.

The music shifts meter and tone in m. 21 on the text “Young girl, do not complain.” The opening text, “The Creole girl goes by in her white crinoline. How white!” and the line “Young girl, do not complain” are the only two repeated lines in the entire poem. Responding to that cue, Montsalvatge uses both repeated phrases as refrains in the song. Measures 21-26 act as a nested refrain facilitating the transition from one verse to another, so that the text moves continuously. The repeated lines that open and close the poem also bookend the song.
Luján’s text does not repeat the line “Young girl, do not complain” a third time. Instead of repeating the nested refrain, Montsalvatge inserts a coda from mm. 27-30 that leads to the repetition of the opening material. On the lines “The sailors look at you and feast their eyes on you” the accompaniment becomes very sparse, and a new key (F major) is tonicized. These two sudden changes in the song heighten the tension and signal the song’s climax. As the sexual disrespect from the sailors increases in each verse, so does the vulnerability of the Creole woman. At this point in the song the sailors will either act on their sexually harassing comments or let the moment pass. Example 4.3 shows the four-measure coda, the tonicization of F major and the removal of supporting accompaniment.

Example 4.3—The sparse and sudden removal of accompaniment at the coda (mm. 27-30)

When the opening melody and accompaniment stated in m. 5 return in m. 31, the tension implied by the repeated racism and sexism is resolved. Instead of taking total advantage of the Creole woman’s vulnerability, the sailors let the moment pass. Since the closing melody and accompaniment are identical to the opening, one might expect that the song would close with the introductory guajira rhythm. In the beginning of the song the *Tempo de guajira* was used to introduce who the characters in the poem were. In m. 37, however, the singer hums a vocal
flourish that ends on an imperfect authentic cadence followed by an ascending hexatonic
arpeggio. The dreamy-sounding ending creates the sense that Creole girl is walking away and
reinforces the idea that Luján’s poem captures a single moment in time.

In the poetic translation of the original musical score “Punto de Habanera” is translated as
“A Humorous Flirtation.”63 This implies that the sexual suggestions made towards the Creole girl
in the text are harmless. I believe this implication to be a severe misreading of both Luján’s text
and Montsalvatge’s musical interpretation. The emphasis on the whiteness of the Creole girl’s
crenoline implies that she is innocent and virginal, and the constant references to her as “niña”
imply that she is younger than the man addressing her. The vocal line imitates a wolf call, which
further suggest the degradation of the Creole girl by the speaker. Though the quick-moving,
stepwise melodic line suggests a playful nature in the song, there is no doubt that Montsalvatge
picked up on the degradation by the sailors. Constant references to her skin color, “Sailors, look
at her! She passes gleaming in the moonlight which darkens her skin,” could emphasize either
that her dark skin empowers her and makes her more beautiful, or that the color of her skin is the
sole reason that the sailors feel that they can make these remarks. In keeping with the themes of
poor treatment towards Black women and how it reflects the treatment of all oppressed people,
the tone of the sailors’ remarks must be understood as racist sexual harassment rather than
admiration or flirtation. Regardless of the sailors’ race, this group of men would not make the
same aggressive comments towards a White woman.

The opening song, “Cuba dentro de un piano,” introduced concepts of race and gender
and only hinted at the dominance that men exert over Black women. “Punto de habanera” is the

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63 Xavier Montsalvatge, “Punto de Habanera (Siglo XVIII),” in Cinco canciones negras (San Antonio, TX: Southern
first song to provide an explicit example of this primary theme, which will continue throughout
*Cinco canciones negras*. As the second song in the cycle, “Punto de habanera” smooths the
transition between the first song, where the themes are merely suggested, and the third song,
“Chévere,” in which racial and sexual dominance is projected in its most sinister manifestation.
CHAPTER 5

III. “CHÉVERE”

“Chévere” stands out among the five songs in Cinco canciones negras as the most violent in terms of both text and music. Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989), a mulatto, is considered the most important Afro-Cuban poet of the twentieth century because of his development of the genre poesía negra, which featured a poetic style that attempted to synthesize Black and White cultural elements. One characteristic of this genre is the use of onomatopoetic words (e.g., “Sóngoro cosongo” or “mayombe-bombe”) that try to imitate the sounds of drums or African dance rhythms. Guillén was born and educated in Cuba. He studied law at the University of Havana but made his living as a poet and journalist. In 1937 he traveled to Spain to attend a Congress of Writers and Artists and remained there for over a year to report on the Spanish Civil War.

While in Spain, Guillén met Néstor Luján. The two poets became good friends and exchanged their work. Montsalvatge came across Guillén’s poetry through Luján and therefore was able to set Guillén’s text to music even before it was published. In his autobiography Montsalvatge repeats Luján’s description of Guillén as “... the roughest poet of Afro-Cuban literature in whom sizzles dramatic and dark intensity.” Luján’s description of his friend is reflected in the unsettling text of “Chévere.” The word “chévere” means “bully” or “braggart.”

64 Keith Ellis, Cuba’s Nicolás Guillén: Poetry and Ideology (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983): 11. This will be demonstrated by the final song of the Cinco canciones negras.

65 Ibid., 18.

66 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 60, “...el poeta más bronco de la literatura afrocubano, en el cual creptia una intensidad dramática y oscura.”

67 The English translation given in Cockburn and Stokes (p. 225), often treated as standard in musical studies is problematic. I have altered the translation to clarify the definitions of many words.
In his autobiography, however, Montsalvatge explains that the word “chévere” is also considered a corruption of the French word “chevalier,” meaning “knight.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Chévere”</th>
<th>The bully</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chévere del navajazo,</td>
<td>The chévere with the knife,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>se vuelve él mismo navaja:</td>
<td>himself becomes a knife:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pica tajadas de luna,</td>
<td>he stabs slices of moon,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mas la luna se le acaba;</td>
<td>but the moon recedes and vanishes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pica tajadas de canto,</td>
<td>he stabs slices of song,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mas el canto se le acaba;</td>
<td>but the song recedes and vanishes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pica tajadas de sombra,</td>
<td>he stabs slices of shadow,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mas la sombra se le acaba,</td>
<td>but the shadow recedes and vanishes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y entonces pica que pica</td>
<td>and then he cuts up, cuts up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>came de su negra mala.</td>
<td>the flesh of his evil black woman!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In his musical setting, Montsalvatge switched the order of lines 5-6 and 7-8. The original ordering of Guillén’s poem is provided in the version shown here. The composer does not discuss this choice in his autobiography; it does, however, make for a better song. Putting “the song” as the final inanimate object at which the chévere cuts away before turning to his woman makes “the song” spark the climax. It implies that songs are capable of more violence than shadows.

Guillén characterizes the chévere in the poem in ironic contradiction to its French derivation. Knights are understood to be upperclass men, revered for their chivalry. The text might reflect an awareness on Guillén's part of the medieval troubadour pastorela. In that song genre, however, the situation is characteristically that the chevalier has an amorous or sexual engagement with a female of lower social status, ranging in various instances from dalliance to seduction to rape. Contrast, does not mention sexual intent. Rather, the chévere experiences unrelated frustrations that he then vents by doing violent injury to the Black woman.

68 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 60.

Guillén’s poem tells the story of a man who lacks any semblance of chivalry. He slashes ineffectually at everything he encounters, until he finally turns his knife on his Black woman. Another important aspect of a knight’s identity is his upperclass status. The poem suggests that the chévere’s higher status enables his bullying. His perceived superior place in society implies that he has power over his Black woman, the way a knight owned serfs or a slaveowner possessed slaves. While it is unclear if the Black woman is in fact a slave, there is no question that the chévere treats her as powerless and takes advantage of her vulnerability. Status isolates many of the Black characters in Cinco canciones negras. Their lower-class position disadvantages them within their society. It was presumed, because of their race, that these Blacks were slaves; this presumption in turn perpetuated their subordination to White, upper-class society.

Montsalvatge chose “Chévere” and “Canto Negro” by Guillén for their themes of race and gender. Like Luján, the composer was attracted to the Afro-Cuban percussive and rhythmic syllables that Guillén used in his poetry. He believed, in fact, that most of Guillén’s poetry should be set to music.70 “Chévere” makes an apt companion to Luján’s “Punto de habanera” because both texts put Black women in vulnerable positions vis-à-vis men. The figure in Guillén’s poem relentlessly cuts away at everything in front of him. At first the chévere slashes at insubstantial objects, only to have them disappear. As he repeats this violent pattern, the poem’s reader imagines him growing frustrated at how ineffectual his slashing is. Finally, the chévere turns to his Black woman, whose flesh he can really cut. He regards her as his “evil black

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70 Franco, 25.
woman” to rationalize his stabbing her. More important here than whether she is actually evil is that the Black woman is vulnerable.

The poem adopts the conventional structure of a romance, eight or ten lines of octosílabo (ten in this case) with the even-number lines in assonance. Guillén uses repetition in lines 3, 5, and 7 to intensify the chévere’s actions. Montsalvatge also uses musical repetition to heighten the drama of the text and evoke the chévere’s maniacal stabbing.

“Chévere” is the only song in Cinco canciones negras that is set in triple meter. In the other four songs, which are in duple rhythms, Montsalvatge used the meter to embed Cuban rhythms such as the habanera and the tresillo. By employing African-influenced dance rhythms, the composer confirms the associations of identity with the Caribbean as raised by the texts. The rhythm of the opening descending figure here is reminiscent of the second Cuban habanera rhythm introduced in “Cuba dentro de un piano” and the striking, dissonant chords used to open and close the piece, as shown in Example 5.1.

Example 5.1—The opening material in “Chévere.”

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71 Dalton, 77.
According to Montsalvatge, the melody of “Chévere” derives from a chorale that he heard played on a harmonium. It moves stepwise in Lydian mode, notated by the persistent use of B-natural following the key signature of F major. Use of the Lydian mode is a common style trait of works by Spanish composers Joaquin Turina (1882-1949) and Manuel de Falla (1876-1946) because it was commonly used to emulate flamenco styles. Montsalvatge’s use of the Lydian mode for this song thus reinforces a Spanish sound established by earlier composers. The melody is constructed in two-bar phrases. The pattern begins in m. 3 on a B and repeats the B throughout the measure, reinforcing the cante jondo technique present in the preceding songs. In m. 4 the second half of the phrase begins with a quintuplet embellishment that resolves down to A, as shown in Example 5.2.

Example 5.2—First instance of the basic melodic pattern of “Chévere” (mm. 3-6).

When the text enters in m. 3, the accompaniment begins with the vocal melody in the right hand. A few measures later, however, the melody in the right hand disappears, and the voice is supported by longer chords. The quintuplet figure, commonly associated with Spanish vocal

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72 Montsalvatge, *Papeles*, 61. The composer identifies the tune as that of “un coral luterano” or “a Lutheran chorale,” but it is not clear what he might have had in mind in using that term, as the melody does not appear to refer to any specific Lutheran chorale. It could be that he meant to suggest that he had treated the melody as a *cantus firmus*, the way J. S. Bach did in settings of Lutheran chorales.


74 In her dissertation Lisa Dawn Tinney interprets the figure as one that arises from idiomatic flourishes on the Spanish guitar. Lisa Dawn Tinney, “The Influence of Spanish Folk Traditions on Selected Song Cycles by Jesús Guridi, Rodolfo Halffter, and Xavier Montsalvatge” (PhD diss., The University of Victoria, 1992): 60.
flourishes, appears in the piano one measure after it occurs in the voice, so that the accompaniment is actually lagging behind the voice. The pattern repeats many times, beginning on a series of repeated notes and then resolving one whole or half step down. Montsalvatge modifies each recurring figure so that the pattern is not exactly the same every time. Once the song reaches its peak at the high F5 in m. 15, it resolves back to B♭, where the pattern originally started.

In Guillén’s poem the chévere stabs inanimate objects, which then disappear. Montsalvatge’s music reflects this by presenting the embellishing figure in the vocal line as each object is named, while in the accompaniment the figure occurs on “le acaba,” so that the lagging figure and tied notes in the accompaniment represent the object’s disappearance (Example 5.3).

Example 5.3—Accompaniment trailing behind vocal line (mm. 16-18).

Each line of text makes up two measures of music in the song. Even though the opening rhythm articulates the indicated triple meter, the Spanish prosody creates a hemiola effect in some lines, because the strongest accents fall on the fourth eighth note of each measure. This makes the piece sound like some measures are in 6/8 time with a slow duple meter rather than in 3/4. Example 5.4 demonstrates an instance of this. The bracketed numbers show where the natural
syllabic accents fall in the Spanish text and how Montsalvatge sets them in his music to create a hemiola.

\[
[1\ -\ -\ -\ -\ -\ -\ -\ -\ -\ ] \ [1\ -\ 2 - 3 - ] \ [1\ -\ 2 - 3 - ] \ [1\ -\ 2-3- ]\ [1 - -2- - ]\ [1\ -\ 2 - 3 - ]
\]

Example 5.4—Hemiola effect (mm. 7-12)

In the lines “pica tajadas de luna, mas la luna se le acaba” the dactylic rhythm of the first clause should lead the singer to perform the measure as if it were in compound meter, while the following, trochaic line falls into the notated simple triple rhythm. As Example 5.4 shows, Montsalvatge assigns the quintuplet figure to the first beat, so that it receives the strongest accent in the phrase.

Example 5.4 also illustrates how Montsalvatge arranged the text so that in some cases the stronger accents in each word become weak within the musical meter. The accent in “pica” falls on the first syllable. In m. 11, however, the syllable “pi-” is placed on the second half of the third beat, nullifying its stronger accent. Maintaining a steady rhythm in a song creates a predictable and stable tone, but here Montsalvatge instead expresses the chévere’s maniacal stabbing using the misplaced accent to counteract stability and thus suggesting the mental unpredictability of the chévere.

With every repetition of the melodic pattern, the song gains intensity, representing the chévere’s increasing frustration at his ineffectual stabbing. The melody gradually ascends until
m. 15, where it leaps to F5 on the line “pica tajades de canto.” It then descends an entire octave over the course of four measures. This melodic climax and the textual crisis thus happen at two different places. Montsalvatge’s interpretation of the poem indicates that after the chévere stabs the song, he is done stabbing intangible objects. The vocal line continues to descend, until the chévere takes the brutal step that the listener did not anticipate. In fact, at what might have been regarded as the poem’s climax, starting in m. 19, Montsalvatge abandons the previously established melodic patterns, which cues the listener that something different is about to happen. The melody drops to its lowest register in the song, responding to the nadir of the chévere’s brutality. The final quintuplet figure occurs on the word “carne” in the accompaniment in m. 21, but here it is not preceded by the pattern in the vocal line. At this moment the figure acts in counterpoint to the voice and represents the woman’s fate. The poem ends on the word “mala,” under which Montsalvatge uses an F-major triad, suggesting that the “evil [Black] woman” in the poem is not actually evil at all. The quintuplet figure, which has been used to represent stabbing and receding, also occurs for the last time on the word “mala” in m. 23, showing the finality in what the chévere has done to the woman.

“Chévere” is through-composed, bookended by identical opening and closing material. Table 5.1 outlines harmonic design of the overall song.
Table 5.1—Through-composed form of “Chévere.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Key Areas</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening/Closing (a)</td>
<td>I—V</td>
<td>mm. 1-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>I—vii°</td>
<td>mm. 3-6</td>
<td>Chévere del navajazo se vuelve él mismo navaja:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a’</td>
<td>V⁴−³—I</td>
<td>mm. 7-12</td>
<td>pica tajadas de luna se le acaba;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a’’</td>
<td>V⁴−³—I</td>
<td>mm. 11-15</td>
<td>pica tajadas de sombra, mas la sombra se le acaba,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a”</td>
<td>I—V</td>
<td>mm. 15-18</td>
<td>pica tajadas de canto, mas el canto se le acaba,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>V/V—I</td>
<td>mm. 19-23</td>
<td>¡y entonces, pica que pica carne de su negra mala!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening/Closing (a)</td>
<td>I—V</td>
<td>mm. 24-27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The return of the opening material is another aspect of the song that contributes to its disturbing text. At the beginning of the song, the purpose of the opening material was to recall a previously stated habanera rhythm and to jolt the listener’s ear by using violent, clashing harmonies on a forte dynamic marking. It also set up the first melodic pattern. The return of this music serves several purposes. When it appears at the opening, it creates an ominous mood because of the harmonic clashes. After the chévere murders his Black woman, the same eerie music returns, giving a sense of a dark finality.

“Chévere” is dedicated to Santiago Kastner (1908-1992), a Portuguese musicologist, who wrote the first biography of Catalan composer Federico Mompou (1893-1987). In 1929 Kastner moved to Barcelona, where he took lessons on the piano, harpsichord, and clavichord at the Escuela Municipal, where Montsalvatge also studied. Kastner was also an avid organologist and served as the curator for the Museum of Musical Instruments at the National Conservatory in Lisbon during the 1940s. Montsalvatge credits Kastner with promoting his career, because
Kastner had written several articles about Montsalvatge praising his music. Somewhat ironically, despite the disturbing nature of this song, Montsalvatge dedicated it to Kastner in gratitude for his support.

“Chévere” is a disturbing poem, which Montsalvatge matched with equally disturbing music. Of the five songs in Cinco canciones negras, this horrifying poem by Guillén seems to be the outlier in the cycle. Some of the devices that Montsalvatge employs, however, coincide with ideas put forth in the other songs, unifying the cycle. “Chévere” blends Spanish, Caribbean, and French modernist elements. The first of these devices is the hemiola pattern, which both counteracts the steady triple beat and imitates Spanish vocal parody also referenced in “Cuba dentro de un piano.” The recurring quintuplet figure also serves to mimic Spanish vocal styles.

Montsalvatge employed the Lydian mode in the song because of its associations with Spanish influence, already exploited by his predecessors Falla and Turina. To maintain the Caribbean antillanismo style present in the cycle, Montsalvatge uses the quasi-habanera rhythm to open and close the song. The coloristic notes over basic harmonies, such as the addition of Lydian fourths to tonic triads, reference the style of French modernist composers such as Darius Milhaud.

The final element that embeds “Chévere” within Cinco canciones negras is the thematic content of the poem. Gender and race are two themes explored in “Chévere” that are also examined in the other songs. The “evil” Black woman in the poem is clearly victimized by the chèvere, who uses his superior status to bully and take advantage of those he considers below him. Though this poem presents challenges to the listener in terms of content, Montsalvatge

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75 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 61.
“Dediqué Chévere al musicólogo portugués Santiago Kastner, biógrafo de Mompou quien habia escrito sobre mi varios artículos elogiosos.”
interprets Guillén’s poem appropriately, so that the song, representing its own powerful image of the Afro-Cuban experience, fits well within the cycle.
CHAPTER 6

IV. “CANCIÓN DE CUNA PARA DORMIR A UN NEGRITO” (LULLABY FOR A LITTLE BLACK BOY)

As previously mentioned, “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito” (Lullaby for a Little Black Boy) was the starting point for the entire cycle Cinco canciones negras. With text by Ildefonso Pereda Valdés (1899-1996), this tender lullaby has become by far the most popular song in the cycle. Pereda Valdés was a noted Uruguayan poet and essayist of African descent. Although he was born and died in Uruguay, Pereda Valdés traveled all over South America as a diplomat and national representative. He was a professor of African-American literature at Universidad de Santiago y Concepción in Chile from 1920-32 and traveled around the world as an ambassador for writers of African descent. In 1936 Pereda Valdés published his Antología de la poesía negra americana (Anthology of American Negro Poetry), from which Montsalvatge drew the untitled text for “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito.” This volume of poetry contained works by Black writers from both Latin America and the United States. Among these writers were Langston Hughes (1902-1967), Nicolás Guillén, Countee Cullen (1903-1946), and Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906). Like Nicolás Guillén, Ildefonso Pereda Valdés “. . . was concerned with the position of the negro in the modern world” and used his poetry to explore and elevate the status of people of African heritage.

Xavier Montsalvatge dedicated “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito” to Mercédes Plantada (1892-1976). As stated earlier, Mercédes Plantada approached Montsalvatge and asked

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76 Ildefonso Pereda Valdés, Antología de la poesía negra americana (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Ercilla, 1936): 177.

77 The poetry by Hughes, Cullen, and Paul Laurence Dunbar was originally composed in English. Pereda Valdés translated their work into Spanish.

78 Cockburn and Stokes, 225.
for a new work to perform on her upcoming recital in Barcelona’s Ateneu. Because of her commission, Montsalvatge created his most successful song and developed his first song cycle.

Pereda Valdés’s poem is in five stanzas of verso libre and settles into six-syllable (hexasilabo) meter by the fourth line. The opening and closing stanzas consist of four lines each, while the second stanza is made up of six lines, and the third and fourth contain five. The interior stanzas would be perfectly symmetrical, were it not for the extra line in stanza 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito”</th>
<th>Lullaby for a little black boy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ninghe, ninghe, ninghe tan chiquito,</td>
<td>Lullay, lullay, lullay,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el negro que no quiere dormir.</td>
<td>so small,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>little black boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>who does not want to sleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabeza de coco, grano de café,</td>
<td>Coconut head,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con lindas motitas,</td>
<td>coffee bean,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>con ojos grandotes</td>
<td>with pretty freckles,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>como dos ventanas</td>
<td>and wide eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>que miran al mar.</td>
<td>like two windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that look out to sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cierra esos ojitos,</td>
<td>Close your little eyes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negro asustado;</td>
<td>frightened little Black boy;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el mandinga blanco</td>
<td>the white devil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>te puede comer.</td>
<td>will no longer eat you up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Ya no eres esclavo!</td>
<td>You are no longer a slave!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y si duermes mucho,</td>
<td>And if you sleep soundly,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>el señor de casa</td>
<td>the master of the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promete comprar</td>
<td>promises to buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traje con botones</td>
<td>a suit with buttons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>para ser un ‘groom.’</td>
<td>to make you a “groom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninghe, ninghe, ninghe,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duérmete, negro,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cabeza de coco,</td>
<td>Lullay, lullay, lullay,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grano de café.</td>
<td>sleep, little Black boy,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coconut head,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coffee bean.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Ninghe” is a Congolese word used to lull children to sleep. Its equivalents in English are “lullaby,” used primarily in Britain, and “bye-low,” used in United States folk lullabies. An

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79 Cockburn and Stokes, 226.
80 Paine, 141.
important tactic that Pereda Valdés uses to describe race is color imagery. One use of color imagery is in the description of the child’s head as “like a coffee bean.” Color imagery also occurred in “Punto de habanera” through color juxtaposition. The woman in “Punto de habanera” explicitly wears a white dress that contrasts sharply with the darkness of her skin. Instead of juxtaposition, here Pereda Valdés uses metaphors and similes to evoke specific colors.

Another important usage of color imagery the poem is the description of the baby’s physical characteristics. Though the descriptive similes make the color of the infant’s skin indisputable, his actual race is not as clearly conveyed. It is important to consider that the infant also has “pretty freckles.” Freckles are not a typical genetic feature in indigenous African populations. They could, however, indicate that the child is of mixed descent (un mestizo). This puts the characterization of the “master of the house” into a different context. As the poem progresses, the reader learns that the child is “no longer a slave,” but he must rely on the “master of the house” to buy him a suit to make him a groom. This indicates that the “master of the house,” presumed to be a White European slave owner, is the baby’s father. In the second stanza Pereda Valdés also uses a simile to liken the child’s eyes to windows that reflect the sea. This could indicate the baby’s eyes are not brown, as is common in Blacks, but blue. As noted in Chapter 1, Maria Elena Martínez discusses the issues of racial purification in Spanish America. In Spanish colonial societies, having “white blood” automatically granted Whites full citizenship privileges. Mulattos, next in the hierarchy, could earn citizenship rights if they proved to have a

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82 Martínez, 3.
small percentage of white blood. The baby’s mixed-blood releases him from lifelong slavery, though the color of his skin will clearly subject him to racism.83

The speaker in the poem, presumed to be the boy’s mother or nanny, sings to the baby and offers the suit as an incentive if he goes to sleep. She states that it will make him “un groom.” With the English word “groom” in quotation marks, the reader can infer that the woman is probably quoting the English-speaking master of the house, who is probably White and English-speaking and whose interest in the baby could be out of paternal obligation.

Gender roles are also an important factor in this poem. Like “Punto de habanera” and “Chévere,” this poem represents men exerting violent or sexual dominance over Black women. While the other two songs explicitly refer to this dominance, “Canción de cuna dormir para un negrito” only implies it. From his musical interpretation, however, it is clear that Montsalvatge interspersed dissonance into this tender lullaby to convey tension between the woman rocking the cradle and the White master. Both the music and the poetry support the implication that the baby is illegitimate and was conceived against the woman’s will, possibly through rape, which also links it with the physical violence against the Black woman in the previous song.

The foundation for this lullaby is an habanera rhythm, which begins in the first measure and continues as an ostinato through the rest of the song, outlining the roots and fifths of the chords. While the same ostinato habanera pattern from “Cuba dentro de un piano” is used for “Canción de cuna para dormir,” the rhythm takes on a different character in this latter song. In “Cuba dentro de un piano,” the habanera ostinato represents the desperate attempt to retain Cuban culture. In this lullaby the ostinato is meant to symbolize the rocking of the cradle. It

83 Ibid., 6.
outlines diatonic harmonies and provides a solid foundation for the more dissonant harmonies in the right hand or in the melody. Rather than working against the music as a way to hang on to slivers of Cuban culture as it does in the opening song, the habanera ostinato in “Canción de cuna para dormir” is steady. The dissonance the right hand and the voice work against the ostinato pattern. That being said, it has been previously emphasized that the habanera rhythm is a result of African infusion. The fact that it is so pervasive throughout the song and the cycle to such a substantial extent shows an attempt to show African influence. Example 6.1 shows the first four measures of the song with the ostinato pattern.

Example 6.1—Habanera ostinato pattern.

In this tender lullaby Montsalvatge colors functional diatonic harmony with added dissonances. The melody of the first eight-measure phrase begins with three measures of descending minor third intervals that outline I and IV chords. Beginning at the second sub-phrase in m. 5 however, the listener hears the first “blue” note (non-chord tone) on the words “chiquito” and “negrito.” Montsalvatge emphasizes the effect by inserting a triplet figure that contains an F⁷, which is diatonic, and an F♭, which is not. Because these “blue notes” are placed under terms of endearment, they can be interpreted as gestures of affection towards the baby. As the song progresses, however, the “blue” notes signify different meaning depending on the word under which they are placed. Example 6.2 shows the first eight measures of the melody and how diatonic notes are replaced by “blue” ones. This undermining of melodic stability is duplicated in
the accompaniment. Under the first four measures of the melody the right hand plays half-note chords that are based on triads with added dissonances, while the left hand plays the ostinato.

![Example 6.2](image)

Example 6.2—First eight measures of “Canción de cuna para dormir de un negrito.

At m. 5 the right-hand accompaniment changes. It switches from half notes to a *tresillo* rhythm (syncopated rhythms found in Afro-Cuban music in 2/4 time, as shown in Example 6.3) that articulates a chromatic chain of parallel minor-seventh chords that ascend twice as fast but in half steps rather than whole steps. The overall direction of accompaniment remains the same. The layering of Afro-Cuban infused dance rhythms reinforces the *antillanismo* style that Montsalvatge employed prominently both in this cycle and throughout his compositional output.

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Example 6.3—Tresillo rhythm

These rising dissonant chords, which seem to appear as counterparts to the descending ninth progression used to open “Cuba dentro de un piano,” again suggest the music of the French Impressionists. Lisa Dawn Tinney also suggests that the chromatic ascent mimics the idiom of a guitar as the player moves up the frets on the fingerboard. The simple and repetitive melody supported by a stable bass line creates a hazy and dream-like mood, but the seventh chords imply a subtext. The edgy quality of the chords also indicates that the world in which the mother lives is a dissonant one.

The first ten lines from the poem, divided as 4+6, are merged to create one strophe in the song. Strophe 2 likewise comprises the next ten lines in the poem, as two stanzas of five lines each. In the music, however, Montsalvatge places the same accompaniment under line 4 of each stanza, despite the fact that it does not represent the same point in each stanza of the text. He treats both stanzas as lines of 4+6. The remaining four lines make up a third, abbreviated verse. Table 6.1 shows the modified strophic form (AAA’) with measure numbers. Instead of writing five stanzas of equal length, Pereda Valdés opens and closes the poem with four-line stanzas, leaving one stanza with six lines and two with five. The repetitive nature of modified strophic form works well for a lullaby, in contrast to the sequential phrases used in the preceding song, “Chévere.”

85 Dalton, 87.
86 Tinney, 62.
Table 6.1—Modified strophic form in “Canción para cuna dormir a un negrito”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strophe</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A (Strophe 1)</td>
<td>mm. 1-22 (22 measures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A (Strophe 2)</td>
<td>mm. 23-44 (22 measures)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’ (Strophe 3)</td>
<td>mm. 45-57 (13 measures)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second verse begins on m. 23 with the same music as the opening verse. The “blue” notes in the melody occur at the same point, the beginning of the second sub-phrase, now on the words “frightened” and “devil.” In this case, the “blue” notes highlight moments of fear rather than of affection.

“Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito” ends with a compressed version of the melody. The final verse begins in m. 45 with the same diatonic sub-phrase on minor thirds and then moves to the sixteenth-note section that occurs later in the verse. This eliminates the points where “blue” notes in the melody occur, though a $C^b$ does appear in the accompaniment in m. 51 under no text, merely “Mmm,” which could reinforce either fear or affection. In this case the unsettled tone is still present, but only in the background. The closing five measures end completely diatonically, without any “blue” notes in the melody and with the ostinato acting as a tonic pedal tone to bring the song to a satisfying final cadence.

If the opening song, “Cuba dentro de un piano,” is in fact setting itself up to quote music, then “Canción de cuna para dormir” is an example of another tune the created persona recalls. “Canción de cuna para dormir” is an excellent representation of Montsalvatge’s balance between his antillanismo style and the harmonic techniques he learned from Les Six. It definitely has a place alongside the quoted “El abanico” melody recalled in the opening song, and the return of
the *habanera* melody further emphasizes the relationship. Montsalvatge was drawn to Ildefonso Pereda Valdés’s poem because of its themes of African-influenced speech, Afro-Cuban experience, and gender roles. “Canción de cuna para dormir” is not just a lullaby that a mother sings to her child, it is an examination of the gender roles from the point of view of a woman whose vulnerability has been exploited and her child, the product of that violence.
“Canto Negro” makes an effective finale to Cinco canciones negras because of the tone of the text and the playful nature of the song. The title could also be translated as “Black Song,” indicating that the song itself has dark or ominous content. Montsalvatge continues the themes of race and gender in this second poem by Nicolás Guillén, using onomatopoetic African sounds to drive his interpretation. One of the most important ethnic groups that participated in the amalgamation of Cuban population and culture were the Congolese, who arrived late in the slave trade in the 1840s. Because the Spanish masters allowed slaves to continue their traditions of drumming and dance, the music of the Congolese survived and was well integrated into Cuban society by the 1930s and 40s. In Cuba the Congolese reconstructed many of their traditional instruments, of which the guagua, a wooden drum, is the only surviving idiophone. The guagua is made of a hollowed-out tree trunk and struck with two sticks. A rumba-inspired song called the guaguancó emerged, which combined song and dance.

Montsalvatge dedicated the final song in Cinco canciones negras to Piérrette Gargallo (1922-2010), the daughter of renowned Aragonese painter and sculptor Pablo Emilio Gargallo (1881-1934.) Pablo Emilio Gargallo moved with his family to Barcelona in 1898 because the city was an emerging artistic center. Gargallo received his artistic training in Barcelona and quickly established himself as a Cubist and avant-garde sculptor. Pablo Picasso remained one of

87 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 61.
89 Ibid.
his closest friends until Gargallo’s death in 1934. Gargallo was also a good friend of Montsalvatge. Gargallo’s only daughter Piérrette also became a sculptress, and Montsalvatge was a great admirer of her work. Montsalvatge also greatly respected Gargallo’s work and all his efforts to help elevate Spanish culture. Gargallo died nine years before Cinco canciones negras was written, so “Canto Negro” could be a tribute to him as well as to Piérrette.

“Canto Negro” was published in a collection called Sóngoro consongo in 1931. “Canto Negro” is the original title of the poem, indicating that the text was probably meant to be interpreted as a song. The percussive vocables that Guillén employs in “Canto Negro” evoke the joy of making sounds for sounds’ sake. Montsalvatge captures this jubilation in his musical interpretation. (Many of the words are meant to be percussive vocables and therefore are not translated.)

90 Montsalvatge, Papeles, 61.
“Dediqué el Canto Negro a Pierrette Gargallo, hija única del inclito escultor aragonés a la que me unió una buena amistad, escultora ella de deliciosas figurillas que están muy lejos de ser vulgares «bibelots.»”

91 Ibid.


93 Cockburn and Stokes, 226.
¡Yambambó, yambambé!

Repica el congo solongo
repica el negro bien negro;
congo solongo del Songo
baila yambó sobre un pie.

Mamatomba,
serembe cuserembá.

El negro canta y se ajuma,
el negro se ajuma y canta,
el negro canta y se va.

Acuememe serembó
aé,
yambó,
aé.

Tamba, tamba, tamba, tamba,
tamba del negro que tumba;
tumba del negro caramba,
caramba, que el negro tumba:
¡Yamba, yambó, yambambé!

“Canto Negro” is more exemplary of Guillén’s poesía negra style than “Chévere,”
because of his use of Congolese onomatopoeias. Phrases such as “Mamatomba, serembe
cuserembá” are used for percussive effect. The vocables are not Congolese “words.” They are
meant to imitate the sounds of Afro-Cuban instruments and dance rhythms. The most important
part of “Canto Negro,” as of the entire genre of poesía negra, is how the syllables sound.

There is, however, more to this “joy” than meets the eye. As previously stated, Guillén’s
text and Montsalvatge’s music both exploit the Sambo stereotype that developed as early as the
1700s. Sambo was a ubiquitous archetype who promoted the delusion that all Black men are
happy, enjoy their work, and are grateful to White men for giving it to them.94 While working,
Sambo enjoys singing and dancing, or “shuckin’ and jivin’,” as exemplified by the vocables and

94 Goings, xxi.
the playful nature of the song. The Sambo stereotype is used to depict Black men as no threat to Whites, just as the woman in much of Afro-Cuban literature is shown as the victim of oppressed people.

While poem works well as a finale to the cycle because of the “happy” tone that it expresses, it remains consistent with the themes of oppression towards Blacks that run throughout Cinco canciones negras. In the songs prior to “Canto Negro” the musical interpretations of African identity have been aurally dark and ominous. The characters in the other poems wrestle with their pre-determined racial and gender roles. Until “Canto Negro” the songs have positioned African racial identity in the Caribbean and South America as a hindrance to happiness and success. The final song in Cinco canciones negras, however, exploits the Sambo stereotype by reveling in percussive sound.

Montsalvatge slightly altered the text of “Canto Negro” for musical reasons. He added the outburst “¡Aôe!” to convey excitement and to reinforce the African syllables. He also interspersed the opening percussive lines in various parts of the song to create a refrain in the music that does exist in the poem. At the climax of the song and the entire cycle Montsalvatge uses the closing line from the first stanza to end the song, “baila yambó sobre un pie.”

The Spanish word “rumba” probably derives from the Congo words tumba, tambo, or macumba and originally referred to a collective secular festivity. Variants of these words can be found in Guillén’s poem. In Havana and the surrounding towns the word simply meant “a feast.” Eventually “rumba” came to identify a Cuban musical genre and gave rise to its own instruments.

95 Ibid.
96 Dalton, 92.
97 Rodriguez, 823.
such as the *tumbadora*, which is also known as a *conga*.\textsuperscript{98} It is clear from the percussive words in Guillén’s poem that the sounds are onomatopoetic of the *tumbadora* drums. Because *tumbadoras* are drums, the *rumba* emerged as a musical genre centered around rhythmic dance and song.

The song genre *guaguancó* was created to accompany the *guagua* drum, an early *tumbadora*.\textsuperscript{99} The *guaguancó* has a fixed form. It always begins with a *diana*, a series of meaningless syllables sung by the soloist. The *diana* also contains the first choral refrain, which repeats in between sections of new material, as the song progresses. After establishing the *diana*, the singer or group of singers will improvise poetic lines on new music.\textsuperscript{100}

In this song Montsalvatge combines elements of the *guaguancó* into a loosely arranged five-part rondo form, ABA\textsuperscript{1}CA\textsuperscript{2}. The *diana* opens the first half of the A section and returns in m. 32 as a kind of refrain. Table 7.1 delineates each section and shows the harmonic structure.

Table 7.1—Five-part rondo form of “Canto Negro.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key Areas</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>G major—E\textsuperscript{b} major—G major</td>
<td>mm. 1-18 (<em>diana</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A\textsuperscript{1}=mm. 3-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A\textsuperscript{2}=mm. 15-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>C major—D major</td>
<td>mm. 19-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A\textsuperscript{1}</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>mm. 32-39 (<em>diana</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>E\textsuperscript{b} major</td>
<td>mm. 40-51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A\textsuperscript{2}</td>
<td>G major</td>
<td>mm. 52-58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid, 824.

Montsalvatge divides the *diana*, the opening fifteen-measure A section, into two shorter parts that alternate with the B and C sections. As in “Cuba dentro de un piano,” the A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub> subsections bring the music back to the tonic. In the opening song of *Cinco canciones negras*, however, the recurring music functioned as an interruption to the narrative. Because it served as an interruption, Montsalvatge did not employ modulatory harmonies to let the listener know when the recurring music was coming. The recurring music returned without warning, and the interruption sounded very jarring as a result. In “Canto Negro,” by contrast, Montsalvatge placed the bulk of the poem’s narrative in the B and C sections and used the percussive syllables as a refrain. Thus the Afro-Cuban vocables are emphasized, while the poetic narrative, with the main content, is suppressed. Montsalvatge not only highlights the African words, but he does so by employing a song form derived from the Afro-Cuban tradition.

Traditionally, the rhythm of a Cuban *rumba* juxtaposes duple pulse (4/4 or 2/2) structures over triple pulse (12/8 or 6/8) structures. “Canto Negro” utilizes the *rumba* rhythm throughout song. The melody is set in a straightforward duple meter. What creates the juxtaposed triple rhythm is the very obvious *tresillo* in the piano part. Example 7.1 shows the first appearance of the *tresillo* rhythm, also discussed in Chapter 6. Once the *tresillo* rhythm is introduced in m. 1, it serves as an ostinato throughout the rest of “Canto Negro.”

Example 7.1—*Tresillo* rhythm as ostinato in “Canto Negro” (mm. 1-2)
The use of the *tresillo* rhythm further embeds “Canto Negro” in Afro-Cuban tradition. At the start of the C section in m. 40 the word “tamba” is repeated in a steady rhythm to evoke the sound of the drum over the *tresillo* rhythm.

The melody alternates between states of stability and unpredictability, imitating a drunk man trying hard not to seem drunk. Leaps of a fourth, fifth, or octave on words such as “¡Yambambó!” sound like exaltations and are playfully unpredictable. Singers often exaggerate Montsalvatge’s written slurs to communicate drunkenness. Even though the text is not entirely made up of African vocables, therefore, the actual narrative in the poem becomes muddled. Examples 7.2 a and b show the differences in Montsalvatge’s melodic treatment between the African vocables and narrative lines of text.

Montsalvatge sets one percussive word per measure and crams whole lines of narrative text into just a few measures. The treatment of the text in “Canto Negro” shows that Montsalvatge believed the African words to be more important than the poem’s narrative. Because the melody communicates joy and the revelry of the vocal sounds themselves, the listener comes away from the song remembering the nonsense words rather than the poem’s narrative.

Examples 7.2 a—Montsalvatge’s treatment of African percussive syllables (mm. 13-18.)

Example 7.2b—Montsalvatge’s treatment of longer narrative poetic lines (mm. 19-26)
The overall harmonic structure of “Canto Negro” set the five-part rondo to a large-scale plan of I—IV—I—♭VI—I, with dissonance added to the triads to create color and cacophony reflective of the poem. Although there is no prescribed harmonic plan for the guaguancó fixed form, the genre incorporates an improvisatory element in the non-refrain sections. The diminished octaves in m. 31, a device commonly used by Milhaud, first appeared in “Cuba dentro de un piano” and turn up even more distinctly in “Canto Negro.” The added seconds also represent the rasgueado guitar-strumming technique, which like the cante jondo, is another flamenco style trait characteristic of the Roma or gypsy people.\(^{101}\) When the díana or A\(^1\) section returns for the first time in m. 32, it resumes the basic tonic harmonies and layered rhythms established in the original presentation of the A section. A chromatic scale in diminished octaves in the accompaniment leads the measure back to the tonic key.

In “Canto Negro” Montsalvatge vividly conveys the staggers, hiccups, and fluctuating moods of drunkenness. The melody reflects that state by fluctuating between static and disjunct periods over a tresillo rhythm that never wavers. In addition to dance rhythms, Montsalvatge also played with the Afro-Cuban song form guaguancó as an appropriate response to Guillén’s percussive Congolese syllables. In the improvisatory sections of the prescribed song form Montsalvatge experimented with coloristic pitches that reference his love for post-Impressionistic French music.

Like “Punto de habanera,” “Canto Negro” communicates a joyful sound with a far more ominous undertone. The song exploits the Sambo stereotype, making the character appear naive and childlike. Guillén employs Congolese vocables to communicate “happiness,” while

\(^{101}\) Dalton, 94.
Montsalvatge uses slurs and rapid percussive vocal lines to make the Black man silly rather than troubled or capable of more complex, adult emotions. Montsalvatge’s effective portrayal of the Sambo stereotype makes for an ominous close to *Cinco canciones negras*. Like the earlier song, “Punto de habanera,” this song sounds happy and joyful while actually being sinister and dark. The happy-sounding tempo and rhythm combined with the ominous undertones present in each song make for an appropriate finale to *Cinco canciones negras*. The exploitation of gender roles is a theme that lies at the heart of *Cinco canciones negras*. The theme is re-worked in “Canto Negro,” however, to apply the abuse to Black men rather than Black women. Even so, the application of the Sambo stereotype requires “Canto Negro” to sound joyous and triumphant, which still makes for a strong close to *Cinco canciones negras*. 
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Each of the songs in Cinco canciones negras interprets the Afro-Cuban experience in its own individual way. One element that unifies the cycle is the textual content. All the poems were written within the decade preceding Cinco canciones negras, and they therefore reflect contemporaneous snapshots of Black culture in the Caribbean. Each poem addresses themes of identity in terms of race and ethnicity, and gender. As the cycle’s title implies, race is a key theme that runs through all the songs.

One of the ways the race of the poetic subjects is identified is through the use of language. Afro-Cuban vocables are used in Valdés’s “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito,” with “Ninghe, ninghe” used to lull the child to sleep, and in Guillén’s “Canto Negro,” which uses vocables extensively to imitate Afro-Cuban percussive instruments and to communicate joy in making sound. Both “Cuba dentro de un piano” by Alberti and “Canción de cuna para dormir” contain insertions of English words into the Spanish-language texts. The final lines of Alberti’s text bemoan how “SÍ turns to YES,” which reflects the power of the infiltration of Cuba by the United States during the Spanish-American War, as well as the perceived disintegration of the Spanish language on the part of both Alberti and the poetic speaker. In “Canción de cuna para dormir,” the woman rocks the child to sleep and talks about how the boy’s father will buy him a suit to make him “un groom,” combining a Spanish article with an English noun. This gesture is so subtle that the listener may not even be aware of the change, reflecting how deeply entrenched English is in the Spanish vocabulary.
Another key theme that pervades Cinco canciones negras is the violent and often sexual oppression of Black women by men. The most obvious example of this is Guillén’s “Chévere,” in which the speaker cuts away at his Black woman’s flesh. The aggressive sexual harassment in Luján’s “Punto de habanera” is another example of Black women’s being forced into vulnerable situations. “Canción de cuna para dormir” also suggests that the Black woman in the poem has been violently and/or sexually abused by a White male. Although her situation is not elucidated in detail within the song, “Cuba dentro de un piano” refers to a “fallen mulatto woman,” indicating that the woman is poor and has probably been subjected to harsh racism and sexism.

What ties Cinco canciones negras together thematically is that the Black female is used in these songs to represent the experience of all of oppressed people. The Black woman bears the brunt of poverty, sexism, and racism, and she is often bullied or disrespected by men in aggressive ways.

Common poetic themes are not the only unifying factor in Cinco canciones negras, however. Montsalvatge employs his antillanismo style to interpret musically the experiences of Black men and women. The use of antillanismo gives the pieces a sense of locale, making them sound Cuban. It thus gives an identity to the characters that makes them specific people. Aside from dance rhythms and the employment of Afro-Cuban language, Montsalvatge also uses musical flourishes and the Spanish cante jondo to imitate vocal techniques distinctive to the Caribbean style. Cante jondo is used in each of the five songs, sometimes to accentuate particular lines of text and, in the case of “Canto Negro,” to disguise the poetic narrative in order to focus on percussive sounds. In “Cuba dentro de un piano” the song begins with the habanera rhythm in the accompaniment. When the singer first enters, she sings in the cante jondo style.
This sets up the entire cycle for two important musical features that characterize the Cuban sound and give the poetic speakers an identity.

Dance is a driving force behind all the songs in *Cinco canciones negras*. Beginning in the 1940s Montsalvatge spent most of his early career fascinated with various *habanera* rhythms. Throughout his childhood Montsalvatge had been enchanted by the songs he heard sailors singing on the Costa Brava.\(^{102}\) This energized an interest in Cuba and eventually led to his compilation of original folk tunes and texts. According to Roger Evans, war-torn Spain left many of its citizens in financial trouble. Montsalvatge could not afford personal recording equipment. The composer managed to entertain many of these sailors at his home and encouraged them to sing *habaneras*, the songs of their work and recreation, which he would then notate.\(^ {103}\) After nearly eight years of compilation, Montsalvatge, Néstor Luján, and Catalan composer Josep Maria Prim published *Álbum de habaneras* in 1948.\(^ {104}\)

Montsalvatge uses numerous musical techniques to interpret race. One of the first devices he employs is musical form. “Punto de habanera (Siglo XVIII)” and “Canto Negro” both show Montsalvatge’s use of traditional song forms such as the *punto* or the *guaguancó* and prescribed musical improvisatory phrases such as the *diana* to represent the music of indigenous Afro-Cuban cultures. Another device Montsalvatge uses to convey the race of the poetic subjects is African-derived dance rhythms. In “Cuba dentro de un piano,” which introduces the entire cycle, an *habanera* rhythm of a triplet followed by two eighth notes is the first steady rhythm that the listener hears. Montsalvatge continues playing with *habanera* rhythms in “Canción de cuna para

\(^{102}\) Montsalvatge, 48, quoted in Evans, 57.

\(^{103}\) Evans, 57.

\(^{104}\) Xavier Montsalvatge, Néstor Luján, Josep Maria Prim, *Álbum de habaneras* (Barcelona: Editorial Barna, 1948).
dormir,” and layers other rhythms, including the *tresillo* (“Chévere”), a Spanish triplet, and the *guajira* in “Canto Negro.”

“Cuba dentro de un piano,” alternates between a recalled folksong and a personal narrative to illustrate Cuban culture pre- and post-Spanish-American War. The song laments the disintegration of identity in Havana, especially the African elements that created Cuban culture.

“Canción de cuna para dormir un negrito” describes a woman rocking an African infant to sleep while she fantasizes about the baby’s partial African ethnicity. “Punto de habanera (Siglo XVIII)” and “Chévere” most explicitly depict men who exert dominance over vulnerable Black women, either sexually or through physical violence.

One of most intriguing aspects of the first song, “Cuba dentro de un piano,” is that it sets itself up as incorporating quoted music. It is important to consider the consequences of that for the remainder of the cycle. It might make all the following songs appear to be further quotations. In particular the lullaby, “Canción de cuna para dormir un negrito,” has the qualities of another preexisting tune. If the entire cycle then consists of songs from one speaker’s recalled memory, then the speaker in the first song would become the speaker in all of *Cinco canciones negras*. The multiple ethnicities of the poets in *Cinco canciones negras* combined with the Spanish ethnicity of the composer might cause the listener to question the cycle’s authenticity. By setting up the opening song to “recall” the four following songs, however, the authenticity of the cycle is resolved. Having only one speaker throughout the cycle creates unity, because a single, clearly identifiable persona is created. This means that it is not Montsalvatge but the speaker who is drawing these interpretations. Creating a persona makes this speaker more authentic, as he/she has the authority to say things that the composer himself, as a White Spanish man, would not.
The persona, combined with Montsalvatge’s carefully researched and developed antillanismo sound, give Cinco canciones negras a poetic unity that sends a powerful message about identity and oppression in Cuba.

Before singing Cinco canciones negras the singer must make several decisions about the speaker(s). First, the singer must decide whether to adopt the persona or to treat each song as the voice of a different character. This makes a substantial difference as the singer moves from one song to the next. If the singer decides to treat the songs as five separate monologues, then he or she must make five separate decisions about the race and gender of each character. In some songs, such as “Canción de cuna para dormir a un negrito,” the gender and racial choices are obvious. Most of the songs, however, are much more ambiguous about who is speaking. If the singer decides to adopt the unifying persona, then only one choice has to be made. Though the cycle was written by a male composer and is set to poetry by male poets, it was commissioned and premiered by a female, and the five songs center more around a female experience than a male one. I believe that the persona introduced in “Cuba dentro de un piano” is best understood as an Afro-Cuban female voice, recalling the folksongs, dance rhythms, and musical forms of her past.

The research that Montsalvatge conducted to help develop his antillanismo style gives further authenticity to the persona adopted in the opening song. While Montsalvatge never traveled to Cuba, he recognized ties to and musical influences of Spain that were far closer than the music of the Austro-Germans. Montsalvatge rejected the Wagnerian preferences of his teachers in order to pursue a more distinctive Spanish style that was fueled by the music of the French post-Impressionists. More importantly, by compiling these five poems, Montsalvatge
makes a strong statement about racism and sexism in Cuba. *Cinco canciones negras* creates an identity through sound and musical form, expressing the racial and sexual oppression of Afro-Cuban women.
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Spanish Poetry and Poets


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**Approaches to the Study of Songs**


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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