DECOLONIZING EPISTEMOLOGIES

Latina/o Theology and Philosophy

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FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS • NEW YORK • 2012

"Racism is not intellectual": Interracial Friendship, Multicultural Literature, and Decolonizing Epistemologies

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Racism is not intellectual.
I cannot reason these scars away.
—LORNA DEE CERVANTES

In a searingly powerful poem that serves as the fulcrum of her award-winning first book of poetry, *Emplumada*,[1] the Chicana poet Lorna Dee Cervantes responds to a young, white male acquaintance who has charged her with being altogether too concerned with the existence of racial discord.[2] Over the course of "Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War Between Races," Cervantes attempts to explain to her interlocutor why she has been unable to transcend the emotional predispositions and structures of feeling that have mediated her race-conscious perspective on their shared social world. Hers is a perspective, she contends, that has its roots in the emotionally toxic fallout of her everyday experiences of racism: the schoolyard experiences that have left her with an "'excuse me' tongue, and [the]/nagging preoccupation with the feeling of not being good enough"; the "slaps on the face" that her daily experiences of racism bring to her; the powerful enmity she feels from the "real enemy" outside her door who "hates [her]."[3] In response to the young man's implied argument that any perspective that participates in the logic of race-consciousness is the result of error-prone beliefs that can and should be eradicated through education, Cervantes insists that the accusation he has leveled at her cannot be adequately answered within the

terms he has set forth: "Racism," she tells him, "is not intellectual. / I can not reason these scars away."[4]

Cervantes' assertion that racism is both imbued with emotion and resistant to pure reason has found resonance in the work of several philosophers. For example, in a paper he gave at a 2001 conference titled "Passions of the Color Line," Michael Stocker argues against the philosophical view that emotions only involve or arise from beliefs. Such an account, he explains, "undergirds the hopeful view that racism or at least the emotions of racism could be eliminated by changing the beliefs giving rise to those emotions."[5] Stocker makes his argument by drawing on the work of Sartre to trace out the intractability of feelings of loathing and contempt among anti-Semites who are confronted with evidence that logically contradicts the rationalizations they construct to justify their feelings. He then demonstrates the futility of trying to change beliefs without attending to the emotions they are inextricably bound up with.

> It would not be enough that anti-Semites come to see that a particular act by a particular Jew is an everyday, ordinary act, or is even a fine act. That thought must be integrated into, and seen to conflict with, their anti-Semitism. And further, *this conflict must matter to them.* It cannot be seen just as a puzzling anomaly, of the sort that besets many, if not most, theories and generalizations. Nor can it be defended against in ways that stop it from mattering to them or moving them. They must be—and this means that almost certainly they must make themselves be—emotionally available and open to that thought and (what I see as) its obvious implications.[6]

Stocker's point bears repeating: If the anti-Semite is not, at a profound level, emotionally moved or bothered by the contradiction between what she observes and what she "knows," she need not make adjustments to her way of thinking. Even if she acknowledges that the act she has observed is a "fine act," she can interpret it as an anomaly—as the proverbial exception to the general rule. As such, she can incorporate the act into her consciousness without having her anti-Semitic beliefs challenged in the least. Her emotional involvement is thus a prerequisite to overcoming her logically unfounded views about Jews.

The philosophers Eduardo Mendieta and William Wilkerson similarly reject the rigid distinction between thought and emotion. In his contribution to the "Passions of the Color Line" conference, Mendieta prefaces his analysis of exoticization as a technology of the racist self, with an argument against the view that sees a bifurcation between mind and body. He observes that "the parceling between emotions and ideas, or between emotive responses and cognition, is but a manifestation of a [by now discredited] technology of the self, which dictates that we have to attribute to our biological natures an element of unpredictability and animalistic connotation, and to our cognitive and mental capacities a calculative, predictive nature."[7] Such a technology of the self, Mendieta reminds us, has arisen as a result of a historically contingent (specifically Cartesian) regime of subjection that fails to account for the way in which emotions are both cognitive and evaluative. Contra this view, Mendieta sees emotions as epistemically valuable. Emotions, he explains, "place us in particular relationships to the world, which is made up of things as well as other selves." Insofar as emotions help us to make sense of others and ourselves they serve as crucial hermeneutic devices—they "interpret the world for us."

Similarly, in a compelling essay about the experience of "coming out" as gay or lesbian, William Wilkerson presents some phenomenological considerations about experience that suggest thought and emotion are necessarily bound up with one another.[8] Drawing on the work of philosophers in both the analytic and continental traditions, Wilkerson argues that emotions are more than simply decorations or distractions to our thoughts.

> [O]ur moods and emotional states are not merely an extra feeling laid over our ordinary thoughts and behaviors; they are part of a horizon that actually changes and molds our thoughts and behaviors, even as our behaviors and experience reinforce our emotions. If I am angry, my anger is not just a reaction to frustrating happenings or disappointed expectations. Rather, my anger has both a reactive and an anticipatory element. . . . When I am writing while angry and my pencil breaks, I may lash out in frustration, even though in a different mood I may simply get up and sharpen it and begin again. The experience is altered by the antecedent context of

being angry, and being angry is not just an inner feeling but also a whole style of being in the world.[9]

Although Wilkerson chooses anger as the illustrative emotion in his example, his argument holds for all sorts of emotional states. Indeed, Wilkerson suggests that emotional states—as much as "taken-for-granted cultural meanings" and sedimented "habits of action and thought"—inevitably guide the initial direction that any interpretation may take by directing the interpreter's attention to some elements of the hermeneutic situation while obscuring others.[10]

One of Wilkerson's aims in the essay is to defend the realist contention (put forward by Satya Mohanty and myself, among others) that attending to one's own and others' emotions is a crucial part of those knowledge-generating projects that strive for a more objective and humane understanding of the social world.[11] Elsewhere, I have argued that although emotions are always experienced subjectively, the meanings they embody transcend the individuals who are doing the experiencing.[12] Insofar as people learn from others around them what are considered to be appropriate emotional reactions to specific social situations, emotions are at least partially conditioned by the particular social and historical contexts in which they emerge. In other words, emotions are mediated by the shared ideologies through which individuals construct their social identities. As such, emotions necessarily refer outward—beyond individuals—to historically and culturally specific sorts of social relations and economic arrangements.

Under the view I am articulating here, emotions are not merely subjective; they are not circumscribed within one body, nor do they have their origin in an individual psyche. Rather, they literally "embody" larger social meanings and entrenched social arrangements. Recent work in the field of social psychology now provides empirical evidence for this view. The social psychologist Jeannie Tsai and her colleagues have run a number of studies over the past decade showing the cultural causes and behavioral consequences of what is considered to be an "ideal affect," and the importance of cultural and situational factors for understanding the links between self and emotion.[13] Thus, through attending to the meanings and origins of our often inchoate feelings we can begin to discern the outlines of the social arrangements that sometimes constrain,

and sometimes enable, our relational lives. It is in this way that emotions have crucial epistemic value.

I have spent the past few pages arguing for the inextricable link between thought, emotion, and motivation primarily because claims about race and racism that are made by people of color are often dismissed by others as based in emotion—and as therefore irrational and epistemically unjustified. In presenting a case for the necessary interconnectedness between what goes on in our hearts and in our minds, I hope to forestall an easy dismissal of the idea that interracial friendships and multicultural literature can contribute to the project of decolonizing epistemologies. Rather than suggesting that the race-conscious perspectives and claims of people of color are not based in emotion, I acknowledge that they often are—even as I insist that such perspectives and claims can be both rational and epistemically justified. Moreover, rather than "clouding the issue" or "derailing the conversation," emotions surrounding race and racism must be seen as precisely that which we seek to understand. Insofar as emotions are key to the replication of racism, a sustained examination of how emotions about race figure into human motivation must be fundamental to any attempt to move beyond the socioeconomic arrangements that sustain racial inequality and ideologies of racism.

As I use it in this essay, *racism* describes a complex of ideas, emotions, and practices having to do with the denigration, hatred, dispossession, and/or exploitation of people who are visually, and often culturally, different from oneself in a way that is understood to be innate, indelible, and unchangeable.[14] It expresses itself through multiple registers, including folk beliefs, laws, court decisions, institutional structures, and everyday habits of interaction. In the subjective realm, those who are subjected to the racism of others experience it as emotional pain, anger, and self-doubt. In the economic realm, victims of racism experience it as a lack of opportunity or the physical dispossession of personal or communal property. In either case, the harms caused by racism are long lasting and can be handed down over many generations. Children who grow up in racist environments imbibe social attitudes about race along with their mothers' milk, whereas children whose parents have been emotionally scarred by experiences of social denigration may inherit lifelong preoccupations with the "feeling of not being good enough."[15] On a psychosocial level, it can be difficult for the racist and her victim alike to transcend

the psychological habits of racism learned in childhood. In addition, the significant economic advantages gained by the ancestors of many white Americans at a time when the forebears of most racial minorities could be (and often were) legally dispossessed of their lands and labor have not dissipated. Although some people of color have succeeded in substantially improving their economic status, the majority of them confront a systemic economic disadvantage relative to white Americans—a situation that has been, and continues to be, perpetuated across generations both through differential access to educational and employment opportunities and the ongoing effects of institutional and interpersonal racism.[16] Moreover, racial minorities have had to cope with this disadvantage in a society that (1) measures people's worth largely in terms of what kind of home they live in, what kind of car they drive, and what sort of school they attend, and that (2) assumes that what people have is what they—in some sort of moral sense—deserve. Given all this, it should not be surprising that the statements about race and racism made by people who have been victimized by racism are often thoroughly imbued with expressions of strong emotion—pain, regret, outrage, resentment. On the other hand, because many people who participate in racist practices do so unwittingly and unintentionally simply as a result of being part of a society that is organized according to race,[17] it should not be surprising that their reactions to the emotionally charged claims of their accusers frequently cover the spectrum from denial and defensiveness, through shame, to a self-righteous claiming of racial privilege. A necessary part of any antiracist project will thus be a consideration of the strong and varied emotions that are the warp and the woof of the fabric of racial relations in this country.

So if we cannot fight racism with facts, then how can we fight it? How might we go about the process of changing people's emotional horizons—which is clearly a part of what needs to happen if the problem of racism is to be ameliorated? Without suggesting that these are the only avenues to take, I propose two possible ways through which we might engage in a decolonial project with respect to race: (1) interracial friendships and (2) the teaching of multicultural literature.[18] In addition to thinking proactively about how to best fight racism, I hope to highlight the significant benefits of interracial friendships by showing that they can be particularly rich contexts for learning about the structural inequalities

that accompany our racial formations. Moreover, I want to emphasize the value of multicultural literature by showing that literature written by and about people outside the cultural and economic mainstream of a given society can play a crucial role in shifting and expanding a reader's epistemic and emotional horizons.

INTERRACIAL FRIENDSHIP

In her book *What Are Friends For?*, feminist philosopher Marilyn Friedman makes a cogent and compelling argument for understanding the institution of friendship as providing important opportunities for moral growth. Building on the work of Carol Gilligan, as well as on the work of Gilligan's critics, Friedman explores the sort of profound moral growth that can result from a deep and sustained attention to the best interests of a person other than oneself. She takes as her paradigmatic case the relation of friendship and identifies several features of friendship that make it conducive to fostering moral growth.[19]

Although my own interests are directed less toward the potential that friendships hold for moral growth than toward the potential that interracial friendships hold for expanding and decolonizing people's epistemic and emotional horizons, I find Friedman's account useful for her insightful explication of the dynamics of a certain type of friendship. Rather than including in my discussion every sort of relationship across cultures to which some people may give the name of "friendship," I focus on the sorts of relationships that are predicated on a strong degree of voluntarism, mutuality, sharing, and trust—that is, the type of friendship described and identified by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as a "character friendship." In what follows, I both build on and depart from Friedman's account to examine the way that interracial friendships can contribute in significant ways to the changing of people's attitudes about race. I start by enumerating several features that are common to character friendships before returning to a consideration of specifically interracial friendships. I propose that the sharing of experiences about race and racism within interracial friendships that are predicated on a strong degree of voluntarism, mutuality, sharing, and trust can lead not only to emotional growth regarding the illogic and evils of racism but also to an increase in the two friends' shared understanding about the way race functions in our society to maintain current relations of power. Key to

my argument is the contention that both the epistemic and emotional dimensions of interracial friendships are central to forging an effective decolonial antiracist project.

There are several features of character friendship that makes it particularly conducive to epistemic and emotional transformation. The first and perhaps most important characteristic is that it is a voluntary association. When we say that we are friends with someone, we usually mean at least these two things: (1) that we have *chosen* our friend because we feel affection for her and (2) that our friendship with her exists independently of biological or attributed kinship ties. This is not to say that one cannot be friends with a member of one's family—friendships among family members are both possible and frequent. Nevertheless, when one develops a friendship with a biological child or a sister-in-law, describing that relation as "friend" implies that there is a crucial sense in which the relationship transcends the kinship tie. Moreover, the voluntary nature of character friendship ensures that it is inherently self-regulating in the way that other sorts of relationships often are not. In general, economic, familial, and social considerations weigh much more heavily on marital, sibling, and parental relations than they do on friendship.[20] Indeed, because friendships exist with comparatively less institutional support than marriages and other familial structures, the relationship will survive only as long as both friends attend to it—at least intermittently. Once one person ceases absolutely to participate in the complex negotiations required to keep each attentive to the other, or begins to demand more from the relationship than the other is willing to provide, the friendship will founder or cease to exist. Indeed, the always-present threat of the friendship's dissolution discourages both coercion and taking one's friend for granted.

A natural consequence of the egalitarian nature of friendships is that friends who wish to maintain their relationship will be disposed to take an interest in and show respect for each other's perspectives—even when those perspectives differ from one's own. Accordingly, friends often come to understand each other as *particular others* who are related to, but not coincident with, the self. In other words, persons engaged in a character friendship are more likely than those engaged in other sorts of relationships (i.e., marital or parent-child relationships) to see each other with what the feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye calls a "Loving Eye."

According to Frye, seeing with a Loving Eye is a way of looking at an other that requires a certain kind of self-knowledge—that is, the "knowledge of the scope and boundary of the self." In particular, Frye explains, "it is a matter of being able to tell one's own interests from those of others and of knowing where one's self leaves off and another begins."[21] Because the loving eye does not confuse the other with the self, it "is one that pays a certain sort of attention." It is "the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination. One must look at the thing. One must look and listen and check and question."[22] The "Loving Eye" thus exists on one end of a continuum at the other end of which is the "Arrogant Eye." In contrast to the "Loving Eye," Frye explains, the "Arrogant Eye" organizes everything—including the interests, desires, and needs of the other—with reference to himself and his own interests.[23]

The kind of emotional openness encapsulated by Frye in her concept of the Loving Eye is a necessary prerequisite to a third important aspect of friendship—the sharing of experiences and stories. Close friends frequently share stories about things that have happened to them and that bear for them some moral or epistemic significance. This activity of sharing stories is important not only because it provides an occasion for amusement and social bonding, but also because it provides an opportunity for friends to learn from each other. As one friend recounts an experience to the other, she necessarily interprets the meaning of the event she is relating. In the process, she draws on the cultural myths, social meanings, and bodies of knowledge that she has access to. She thus gives her friend access to an experience and an interpretive framework that may be unfamiliar (or even objectionable) to the friend. Friedman explains, "In friendship, our commitments to our friends, as such, afford us access to whole ranges of experience beyond our own. . . . Friendship enables us to come to know the experiences and perspectives of our friends *from their own points of view*."[24] Moreover, because we care about the people with whom we form friendships, we are inclined "to *take our friends seriously* and to take seriously what our friends care about."[25] Taking a friend seriously may mean that we reconsider our own experiences, values, and interpretations in the light of the experiences, values, and interpretations of that friend. Alternatively, it may mean that we feel compelled to engage our friend in conversation—or even argue with or

rebuke her—when she touches on a subject, such as race, about which we have strong feelings. In both cases, our response will be conditioned by the intensity and nature of our emotional investment—in the friend *and* in the issue under consideration.

This brings me to one of the most crucial aspects of a voluntary friendship—the fact that friends are likely to trust each other. As Friedman notes, friends are likely to have confidence that their friend will bear "reliable 'moral witness.'"[26] Indeed, it is when friends trust each other's epistemic capacity (and moral goodness) that the sharing of stories can help both parties expand their epistemic and emotional horizons. This is because a person who trusts her friend's judgment is less likely to dismiss outright an interpretation of a story provided by that friend that radically differs from one she herself might have come up with. The listener may be doubtful, and may initially treat the story or the interpretation with suspicion. However, because she risks losing an important relationship if she persists in being dismissive or contemptuous, she will be compelled to consider seriously, even for the purpose of arguing against, the interpretation that her friend has advanced. Just as "friends don't let friends drive drunk," the person who cares deeply about her friend's character and well-being is unlikely to simply ignore those viewpoints her friend holds that she finds deeply problematic.

The interactive process that occurs when friends share stories is enhanced when one friend, in the act of helping, is called upon to participate in the process of interpreting the meaning of the other's experience. It is a common practice for a person who is having some sort of trouble—in her marriage, at her job, with her children, with the law—to seek advice from a friend she trusts. Sometimes she needs material help, but often she needs help with comprehending and analyzing the dilemma she is facing. In such a situation, she shares with her friend the details of her quandary, advances a tentative interpretation, and then seeks amendments to her reading of the situation. When the circumstances are especially troubling—as in those cases where the worldviews or abstract moral values of either friend are challenged—the process of analysis will be protracted, interactive, and even conflictive. This interactive (and occasionally conflictive) process can amount to a "testing" of the viewpoints and abstract moral guidelines both hold. It should be noted that the emotional component of this process is absolutely key to its success.

Unless both friends feel an emotional stake in the outcome of the discussion, one or both might well retreat into a position of epistemic or moral relativism. The problem with a relativist position is that it discourages genuine involvement in the dispute and prevents the person who holds it from evaluating the different interpretations as better and worse, as more and less truthful. Only when both friends care about and respect each other enough to take the other seriously, and have sufficient confidence in the other's affection to risk pushing the other past her comfort zone, does this interactive process contribute to their collective epistemic and emotional growth.

I turn now to a consideration of the significance of specifically interracial friendships. In her account of the opportunities presented by friendships for promoting moral growth, Friedman acknowledges that the kind of deep-level moral growth she esteems is a potential that is not always realized. She notes that "the more alike friends are, the less likely they are to afford each other radically divergent moral perspectives in which to participate vicariously."[27] Friedman does not elaborate on this insight, nor does she extend her investigation into the realm of antiracist activism. However, to the extent that we are interested in understanding racism for the purpose of epistemic and emotional decolonization, it makes sense to do so.

To begin with, we should acknowledge that we rarely become close friends with people who are radically different in every way (in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, political commitments, religious affiliation, etc.) from ourselves. This is partly because we make friends with people with whom we come into sustained contact; we find our friends at work, at play, in school, at church, or in our neighborhoods. Consequently, when we make friends with people who have been racialized differently from ourselves, usually they are like us in at least a few other salient ways. For example, when two people who work together become friends, it is generally because they are comparably situated in the hierarchy of their organization. They are likely to be comparably compensated and to have a similar standard of living. The two friends may share a commitment to their profession or company and value similar kinds of activities and material goods. The most salient difference between them, in such a case, might well be how they are situated in the U.S. racial hierarchy.

Because race matters considerably for people's life experiences and opportunities in American society, friends who are differentially situated in the U.S. racial hierarchy are more likely to have had different experiences in (and to possess different perspectives on) their shared world than those who are substantially similarly situated within the racial hierarchy.[28] In the case of two friends with different racial associations, the strong potential exists that one friend will eventually share with the other her interpretation of an event that her friend might either perceive quite differently or never have had the opportunity to experience personally. Depending on how they are each identified in terms of gender, class, and sexuality, their differing views regarding what is at stake or what is to be done in response to the event might be widely divergent. It is in the process of talking through their contrary perspectives, and in discovering what it is about their own *particular* lives that might have caused them to think and feel so differently, that they can begin to imagine another way to be in the world. Thus, it is often against this backdrop of sameness of other parts of their lives that two friends of different races have the opportunity to compare the difficulties and opportunities that come their way. Through such a process of comparison, they are in a good position to learn about the differential effects of race on people who are differentially situated within the racial order.

The opportunities for the production of knowledge about how race functions in our society are, I contend, especially rich in the case of two nonwhite friends who are of different racial or cultural backgrounds. As people who have been victimized by racism—as people who have been forced to respond in some way to numerous unfair and inaccurate assumptions about their mental and moral capacities—people of color are more likely than white people to be attuned to the multifarious dynamics of race. Not only have they had to grapple with the prejudice they encounter in their own lives, but—by virtue of their close proximity to family members, friends, and neighbors who share their racial group associations—they are likely to have been witness to a wide range of racist experiences particular to their own group. Furthermore, they are familiar with the incredible variety of strategies (humor, denial, self-segregation, racism directed toward members of other racial groups, armed resistance, self-affirmation, reverse racism, etc.) that people in their communities employ to counteract racism's painful and debilitating

effects. As a result of their socially located experiences, nonwhite people have access to a virtual storehouse of emotionally charged pieces of information about race and racism—even if they never figure out how best to organize, interpret, synthesize, or process that information.

Furthermore, many people of color have developed what W. E. B. Du Bois termed a "double-consciousness"; they understand that there is more than one way of interpreting a racially charged situation. Insofar as people of color are accustomed to the disjuncture between their own interpretations of racial incidents and hegemonic or "commonsense" interpretations of those same events (think here of the initial media coverage of the 1992 L.A. uprising versus the subsequent interpretations provided by the people who were directly affected by it), they may in fact be more open than most white people are to the possibility that there are alternative valid perspectives about the issue of race. People of color are thus likely to make better interlocutors for each other when the subject is race and racism. And finally, because two nonwhite friends from different racial groups are differentially situated within the system of white supremacy, their mutual exposure to each other's situations can help them better understand *together* the overall dynamics of what is an incredibly complex system. To be sure, while blacks, Latinas/os, Asians, American Indians, and Arabs are all disadvantaged within the system of white supremacy, the system itself is sufficiently variegated that it affects each of these groups (and significant subgroups within them) differently.[29] For all these reasons, when a person of color shares her observations and feelings about race with a nonwhite friend associated with a different racial group, both friends are admirably positioned to begin the difficult process of analyzing together the complexity and perniciousness of racial formations in the United States.[30] Moreover, under some circumstances, the bond of friendship between two nonwhite friends can serve as a kind of microcosm for the sort of multigroup resistance that is necessary to address and confront the large-scale, institutionalized, and quite powerful ideologies of racism in this country.

Friendship between two people who are differently situated within the racial order thus enables a healthy and informing kind of particularizing of consciousness. When a friend you love and trust has a radically different reaction to a particular issue or event than you do, you are presented with the opportunity to realize that the view you hold on that issue is

not the only—and perhaps not even the best—view to have. Indeed, friends who take each other's differences seriously are less inclined than those people whose values have never been profoundly challenged *by people they care about* to understand their way of thinking or being in the world as the "normal" or "right" way be. A healthy particularizing of consciousness—which I contend is a significant effect of interracial friendships that endure over time—is a key step in moving away from a positivist, and therefore false, conception of objectivity. As such, it is the first step toward a fallible and nondogmatic conception of how we can (collectively) better understand the world we live in. In the case of interracial friendships, a friend who understands that her way of interpreting a racial situation is only *one* way (and maybe not the best way) is well on her way toward achieving a more objective understanding of the complicated and ever-changing meanings attendant on the racial formation in the United States. Thus, a friendship between two people associated with different racial groups in a society like our own that is organized by race always holds at least the potential for expanding each friend's epistemic and emotional horizons.

THE DIALOGIC POTENTIAL OF MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

In this section, I elaborate my claim that literature written by racial and cultural minorities can also play a crucial role in the expansion of people's epistemic and emotional horizons. Indeed, engagement with a literary work written by a racial other replicates some of the processes of an interracial friendship, but it has the advantage of being more flexible in space and time. My point is not to suggest that reading multicultural literature is necessarily more effective or important than fostering an interracial friendship. Rather, I want to suggest that reading and teaching novels by socially subordinated people can also play a significant role in the decolonization of hearts and minds.

My interest in this issue was sparked, in part, by an anecdote that Marilyn Friedman includes in her book. At a 1987 American Philosophical Association conference where she presented a version of her argument, David Solomon asked Friedman whether works of literature could inspire the same sort of moral transformation that she attributed to friendship. Her response was not to deny the possibility but to downplay it.[31] She explains: "The literary work may be more articulate than my friend,

but I can talk to my friend and she can answer me in her own terms, directly responsive to what I say and what I ask her. By contrast, I may have to extract 'responses' from the fixed number of sentences in a literary work and I am limited to interpreting those responses in my own, possibly uncomprehending, terms."[32] Curiously, Friedman's account in this quote of how communication between friends works simplifies her own very interesting and complex account of the potential that friendship holds for moral growth. On one hand it implies an unconstrained and unending responsiveness on the part of the friend who is being questioned, and on the other it ignores the possibility that the questioner will be unable to hear her friend's responses (should they be forthcoming) in her friend's "own terms." Thus, Friedman inadvertently paints a picture of intersubjective communication that is too transparent, too immediate. In fact, communication between friends—particularly among those who are talking about something about which they hold differing views—can be very oblique or be conducted in fits and starts. If the matter at hand is an especially difficult one, if it seriously challenges one or the other of the pair, then it is quite likely that the listener will initially, and perhaps even repeatedly, hear her friend's responses in *her* own (as opposed to her *friend's* own) terms. Moreover, the listening friend's ability to "get it" may come years later, after the fact, in a moment of private contemplation and reinterpretation of what her friend was telling her so many years before.

I am not sure why Friedman feels the need to downplay literature as a source for moral transformation. Perhaps she felt unprepared to deal adequately with Solomon's question, or perhaps she interpreted it (unnecessarily, I believe) as a challenge to her argument. Whatever her rationale, Friedman's defensive response causes her to paint a static and ultimately inadequate picture of the experience of writing and reading fiction. She writes:

> Moreover, my friend's life continues to unfold in new directions that may surprise even her; while she lives, her life is still an open book whose chapters she does not wholly author as a mere self-confirmation of her own preexisting moral commitments. Thus, the lived experiences of friends have the potential for a kind of authenticity and spontaneity not available in novels, leaving only biography and autobiography as relevant analogues.[33]

With this explanation, Friedman inadvertently disparages the literariness of autobiographies and biographies, such as the way they are "plotted" by an author who selects and arranges certain biographical facts (but not others) of the life under consideration. More crucially for the present discussion, however, Friedman underestimates the complexity and semantic open-endedness of literary texts. Most importantly, she misunderstands how readers engage with works of literature that move them in profound ways. The scene of reading literature is rich in the potential for epistemic and emotional decolonization for at least the following three reasons: (1) Reading is a practice involving a person's intellectual and emotional engagement with a text; (2) reading expands a reader's horizon of possibility for experiential encounters; and (3) works of literature are heteroglossic textual mediations of complex social relations.

To begin with, a reader of a long, narrative work such as a novel will engage with it both intellectually and emotionally. In the process of reading, a reader is called upon to participate in an act of interpretation, to actively make sense of the narrative and of the characters that inhabit it. This interactive process is far more dialogic and open-ended than Friedman's description of the reader who must "extract 'responses' from the fixed number of sentences in a literary work" would imply. After all, if a reader is not sufficiently engaged by a novel, she will put it down and stop reading; she will decline the offer of friendship (or profit or amusement) that the narrative proposes to her and go her separate way.[34] If, however, she finds herself drawn into the novelistic world presented to her, her involvement will be both cognitive and emotive. The two processes necessarily go together—it is virtually impossible to follow a story line or remember the details of a novelistic setting without caring in some sort of positive or negative way about the characters whose adventures and dilemmas power the story line and provide fodder for the reader's ruminations about her own life.

Second, reading a novel can expand a reader's horizon of possibility for experiential encounters even further than the realm of friendship can. When a person reads a complex literary work of substantial length, the potential exists for her to engage in a kind of "'world'-traveling" whereby she enters into another and (depending on who she is and what the book is about) possibly quite alien, world.[35] A reader who takes up a book about a world that is far from her own will be exposed to situations,

feelings, attitudes, and characters (implied people) that she does not encounter in her everyday life. Moreover, because of their transportability through space and time, literary works allow a reader who lives in a racially segregated and economically stratified society like our own to be exposed to a variety of alternative perspectives that she might not otherwise be exposed to. Although some people do have friends from a wide variety of racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds, many more people associate only with those who are very similar to themselves. As Friedman admits, "Our choices of friends are indeed constrained, both by the limited range of our acquaintances and by the responses of others to us as we extend gestures of friendship toward them. Thus, friendship is voluntary only within the limits imposed by certain external constraints."[36] So, in the case of literature written by racial and cultural others, the effect can be that the reader is pulled in and given a kind of access to a way of conceptualizing the world that she might otherwise never be exposed to, even if she lives and works side-by-side with people of other races.

Moreover, in the case of a long, complex narrative such as a novel, the engagement a reader has with a text can be profound. It is true that a reader's engagement with a novel can be an encounter of the type that leaves her untouched and unmoved—but it need not be. The sort of engagement I am interested in here is the sort that causes a reader to question profoundly her basic understandings and attitudes. As with friendship, the potential for epistemic and emotional growth within the scene of reading will not always be realized—much depends on the quality of the reader's intellectual and emotional engagement with the novel and the "fit" between a particular reader and a particular text. A reader's engagement with a literary text can thus replicate the situation of voluntarism that one finds in friendships. This is because a reader has the power to control her exposure to materials that challenge her. She can take up books that are a good "fit" for her capacity for engagement and refuse those that are either too challenging or that fail to offer enough pleasure to keep her reading.

Central to an understanding of how and why literature holds out the potential for epistemic and emotional expansion is a proper appreciation for the semantic open-endedness of long, complex works of literature. Here I turn to the literary critic M. M. Bakhtin, who famously theorized

the constitutive *heteroglossia* of the novel form.[37] According to Bakhtin, the "novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized."[38] It is the multivoicedness he describes in this definition of a novel—a multivoicedness that is accomplished artistically in any given novel through characters' dialogue, the authorial voice(s), and the incorporation of other genres such as letters, news articles, poems, and so on—all of which bring with them their own worldview—that Bakhtin refers to with the concept of heteroglossia. The constitutive heteroglossia of the novel's form is what ensures that any given novel will open out differently into the consciousnesses of its various readers. It is, moreover, what accounts for the fact that the same novel will open out differently within the consciousness of the same reader over time.

By insisting on its fundamental heterogeneity and multivoicedness, Bakhtin in no way suggests that the novel form lacks unity or artistry. He explains, "The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions."[39] Through his use of the term "orchestrates," Bakhtin implicitly and helpfully imagines the novel as a kind of linguistic symphony in which a variety of speech types, discourses, literary styles, and incorporated genres are arranged into a stylistic unity. Insofar as we compare the novel to a symphony, we can imagine the various voices, discourses, and genres that together make up a given novel as so many different melodies, rhythms, and instruments that sound in concert to make up an orchestrated whole. And just as the different melodies, rhythms, and instruments resonate differently for the various listeners of a symphony—some of whom will focus on the melodic line; others of whom will listen hard for the bass undertones; and others who will feel a thrill of pleasure upon detecting the strains of an incorporated folk song with which they are familiar—so will the different elements of the novel resonate variously for diverse readers.

The concept of heteroglossia is thus helpful for understanding how and why a truly complex, multilanguaged, multiperspectival novel will change for a reader over time and will, in a nontrivial sense, be a different novel for different readers. This is not to suggest that any particular novel lacks its own intentionality or that its author does not have a meaning

or message that she wants to convey and that we would do well as responsible readers to try to discern. Rather, the concept of heteroglossia shows why the meaning of a novel is not exhausted either by the author's intentional or by the logic of the novel's plotline. Insofar as meaning only ever comes into existence through the interpretive process, it can never be absolutely fixed. So, although on one level heteroglossia must be there *in* the text, on another level the disparate elements of that heteroglossia must be recognized and *actively interpreted* for meaning to come into being in the consciousness of the individual reader. A reader's experience of a novel will depend to a significant extent on her past experiences, her formal training, her cultural exposure, and the circumstances in which she reads the novel—all of which together form her interpretive horizon and condition her readerly practices and expectations.[40] And because people change—because they have additional experiences, sometimes receive more formal training, and occasionally expand or narrow their cultural horizons, their experience of a given novel will also change with subsequent rereadings. I have modified my interpretation of Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* several times as my attitudes about the dynamics of female friendship, the implications of marital infidelity, and the desire for security vis-à-vis self-exploration have altered over the years. I still love the novel; I still think it is a great work of art; but my experience of the novel and my judgment about its "meaning" have changed over the course of many rereadings and in the light of several significant changes in the circumstances of my life.[41] Sometimes (as with my experience of *Sula*), a novel will seem to get "better," as a reader discovers ever-new subtleties and meanings. Other times, however, a novel will seem to get "worse," as a reader becomes bored with the thinness of the narrative or is newly offended by the themes and attitudes the novel conveys. The literary critic Wayne Booth describes something of this sort in his excellent argument for a serious reconsideration of the way literary critics think about ethical criticism. He writes, "The 'very same' *Count of Monte Cristo* that at sixteen I thought the greatest novel ever written is now for me almost unreadable."[42]

The richness of any particular novel is due to a great deal more, of course, than the novel form's constitutive heteroglossia. Much depends on the theme of the novel and the treatment its author has given to that theme. It is important to note here that the process of writing a novel

involves a lot more than plotting out a narrative that merely confirms the author's preexisting ethical or political commitments. Certainly, there may be some authors who compose novels that way—authors who have political or ethical agendas and who will force the details of a plot to conform to their preexisting vision. But others, such as Toni Morrison, approach writing as a process of exploration. Indeed, Morrison writes as a way of delving into a question or situation that she finds intriguing or troubling. In a 1985 interview conducted by Bessie Jones, Morrison formulated the question that motivated the novel *Sula*: "If you say you are somebody's friend as in *Sula*, now what does that mean? What are the lines that you do not step across?"[43] Elsewhere in that same interview, Morrison explains that she views writing as a way of testing out the moral fiber of her characters in order to see how they respond to difficult situations. She writes, "Well, I think my goal is to see really and truly of what these people are made, and I put them in situations of great duress and pain, you know, I 'call their hand.' And, then when I see them in life-threatening circumstances or see their hands called, then I know who they are."[44] Moreover, because Morrison regards writing as a process of moral and epistemic investigation, she does not write about ordinary, everyday people or events. Instead, she plumbs the hard cases—the situations where "something really terrible happens." She explains: "That's the way I find out what is heroic. That's the way I know why such people survive, who went under, who didn't, what the civilization was, because quiet as its kept much of our business, our existence here, has been grotesque."[45] The process of writing a novel can thus be a process of exploration in which the "answer" surprises even the author.

The semantic open-endedness of all good novels, including those that treat racial and cultural difference in interesting and complex ways, might seem to pose a difficulty for my larger argument that multicultural literature can contribute to a better understanding of the functioning of the racial order in a given society and thus be useful in a decolonial project. But that would be the case only if I were arguing that reading a work of multicultural literature *always* or *directly* has the effect of making its reader less racist and more knowledgeable about her implication in structures of racial inequality. My claim is far more limited. Instead, I am arguing that the novel form's constitutive heteroglossia enables a reader to engage dialogically at a deep emotional and epistemic level with the

difficult questions around race, culture, and inequality raised by good multicultural novels. Such a dialogic interaction can, I suggest, prompt a reader to question and then revise some of her assumptions about structures of racial and economic inequality and how they are sustained.[46] And while questioning does not lead ipso facto to epistemic and emotional growth, the former is at least a precondition for the latter.

The Cervantes poem with which I began this essay demonstrates the failure of understanding that occurs when the elements of friendship I have been extolling as necessary for decolonizing epistemologies are missing from a dialogue about race. The question that is implied by the title—"You are an intelligent, well-read person. All such persons understand that racism is silly and illogical. As an intelligent, well-read person myself, *I* do not believe in racial discord. How, then, can *you*?"—introduces the less than ideal terms under which the exchange between the poet and the young white man is taking place. Because the young man's question implies a challenge to rather than a sincere interest in the poet's perspective—because he sees her with an "Arrogant Eye"—he begins the exchange by denying her interpretive capacity. He fails to extend to her the friendly presumption that she will bear "reliable moral witness" and so cannot consider the possibility that she may know something that he does not know about the way race works in their shared world. His "arrogant" stance toward the poet is what allows him to make an appeal to their sameness at the expense of the racial difference that she insists must be acknowledged if her experiences are to make any sense. Thus the poem is an answer to the young man's question and a passionate defense of the poet's race-conscious perspective on their shared social world. Finally, it is an anguished appeal for understanding that simultaneously acknowledges the far greater possibility of misunderstanding: "(I know you don't believe this. / You think this is nothing / but faddish exaggeration. But they / are not shooting at you)."[47] With this last line, the poet further demonstrates her recognition that the young man's social location inhibits his ability to recognize the existence of a racial order that affects them each very differently; she perceives that as a white man in a social order that overvalues both whiteness and maleness, he has never been targeted by the "bullets" of racism that are "discrete and designed to kill slowly."[48] So, although she makes several appeals of her

own that acknowledge her potential sameness to him,[49] the poet finally refuses to uphold the young man's arrogant perception of their shared social world—to do so would be to gloss over the racial difference that shapes her very experience of it. She tells him that despite her best efforts to shut out the "sounds of blasting and muffled outrage" that disrupt her poetic reverie, she finally cannot ignore the daily "slaps on the face" that racism, unbidden, brings to her.

In a heteroglossic statement near the end of the poem that is at once subtly ironic and heart-wrenchingly sincere, the poet assures her young white male interlocutor, "I am a poet / who yearns to dance on rooftops, / to whisper delicate lines about joy / and the blessings of human understanding."[50] The sincerity of the statement stems from the fact that she envisions a world in which "the barbed wire politics of oppression / have been torn down long ago" and in which "the only reminder / of past battles, lost or won, is a slight / rutting in the fertile fields."[51] The irony stems from the fact that this is finally a poem about racial *misunderstanding*. Unless the young white man starts to care about the poet enough to risk "trying on" her interpretive claim and its implications for his own epistemic and emotional growth, and until he enters into a dialogue that acknowledges her as a worthy interlocutor who might have something to teach him about the world he lives in, "the blessings of human understanding" will remain frustratingly out of reach for them both.

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25. See Orlando O. Espín, *Grace and Humanness: Theological Reflections because of Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2207).
26. See, for example, John H. Elliot, "Paul, Galatians, and the Evil Eye," in *The Social World of the New Testament*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey and Eric C. Stewart (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2008), 223–34.

"RACISM IS NOT INTELLECTUAL": INTERRACIAL FRIENDSHIP, MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE, AND DECOLONIZING EPISTEMOLOGIES | PAULA M. L. MOYA

1. *Emplumada* was the winner of the 1982 American Book Award. The poem under consideration is situated right in the middle of the second (and middle) section of the book.
2. For their insightful comments and helpful criticisms, I am indebted to David Kim, Michael Hames-García, Ernesto Martínez, and Alex Woloch.
3. Lorna Dee Cervantes, "Poem for the Young White Man Who Asked Me How I, an Intelligent, Well-Read Person Could Believe in the War between Races," in *Emplumada* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 36. Hereafter Cervantes, *Emplumada*.
4. Ibid.
5. This quote and the block quote below are taken from a paper prepared by Michael Stocker for the proceedings of the "Passions of the Color Line" conference: "Some Issues About Emotions and Racisms" (unpublished manuscript, 2001), 1–29 The planned publication has not appeared in print. Some of the material around the quote cited in this paper can be found in the book Stocker wrote with Elizabeth Hegeman titled *Valuing Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
6. See Stocker, "Some Issues About Emotions and Racisms," 1–29 (my italics). See also Stocker with Hegeman, *Valuing Emotions*.
7. This and the following quotation are taken from a paper prepared by Eduardo Mendieta for the same, never published, conference proceedings: "Technologies of the Racist Self" (unpublished manuscript, 2001), 1–15.
8. William S. Wilkerson, "Is There Something You Need to Tell Me? Coming Out and the Ambiguity of Experience," in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 256–67.
9. Ibid., 259–60.
10. Ibid., 260.
11. When I speak of objectivity, I am not appealing to a God's-eye "view from nowhere" but rather to a postpositivist conception that acknowledges the unavoidability, and indeed, epistemic necessity of interpretive bias. By itself, the "subjectivity" of emotion does not disqualify it from contributing to projects that strive for objectivity.
12. See Paula M. L. Moya, "A Symphony of Anger," *Phoebe: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Feminist Scholarship, Theory and Aesthetics* 8, no. 1/2 (1996): 1–13; Paula Moya, "Postmodernism, 'Realism,' and the Politics of Identity," in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Garcia (Berkeley: University of Califonia Press, 2000), esp. 91–99. See also Susan Babbitt, "Feminism and Objective Interests," in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (New York: Routledge, 1993); Satya P. Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Identity: On 'Beloved' and the Postcolonial Condition," *Cultural Critique*, no. 24 (1993): esp. 45–55.
13. See Yulia E. Chentsova-Dutton and Jeanne L. Tsai, "Self-Focused Attention and Emotional Reactivity: The Role of Culture," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 98, no. 3 (2010): 507–19; Jeanne L. Tsai, "Ideal Affect: Cultural Causes and Behavioral Consequences," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 2, no. 3 (2007): 242–59; Ying Wong and Jeanne Tsai, "Cultural Models of Shame and Guilt," in *Handbook of Self-Conscious Emotions*, ed. R. Robins Tracy and J. Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 210–23 .
14. I follow historian George Fredrickson's understanding of racism as "not merely an attitude or set of beliefs" but rather something that "expresses itself in the practices, institutions, and structures" in a way that "either directly sustains or proposes to establish a *racial order*, a permanent group hierarchy that is believed to reflect the laws of nature or the decrees of God." George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 6. See also Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), esp. 69–76.
15. Cervantes, *Emplumada*, 36.
16. See Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. L. Moya, eds. *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010); Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer, *Racial Domination, Racial Progress: The Sociology of Race in America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010); Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*.
17. Markus and Moya, *Doing Race*.
18. I use the term "multicultural" here as a kind of shorthand to refer to those works of literature that treat in interesting and complicated ways the social fact of race, the dynamics of cross-cultural encounters, and the destructive

capacity of racism. Generally, though not always, such works are written by persons who have been racialized as "subaltern" or "minority" subjects in a society (such as our own) that is largely economically and socially stratified along lines of class, gender, ability, and race.

19. By friendship, Friedman means "a relationship that is based on approximate equality (in at least some respects) and a mutuality of affection, interest, and benevolence. Friendship, in this sense, can occur between or among lovers or familial relations as well as between or among people not otherwise affiliated with one another." Marilyn Friedman, *What Are Friends For? Feminist Perspectives on Personal Relationships and Moral Theory* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).
20. Frye notes that it "is one mark of a voluntary association that the one person can survive displeasing the other, defying the other, dissociating from the other." Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983), 73.
21. Ibid., 75.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 66–67.
24. Friedman, *What Are Friends For?*, 197–98 (my italics). She continues: "Through seeing what my friend counts as a harm done to her, for example, and seeing how she suffers from it and what she does in response, I can try on, as it were, her interpretive claim and its implications for moral practice. I can attend to what happens as a result of her acquiescence and accommodation or as a result of her resistance and rebellion" (198).
25. Ibid., 192–93.
26. Ibid., 189.
27. Ibid., 202–3.
28. When and if race no longer "matters," this statement will no longer hold true.
29. For a discussion of this point, see Linda Martín Alcoff, "Anti-Latino Racism," in this volume.
30. I am speaking, of course, from experience. Over the past twenty-one years, I have had many friends of various backgrounds who have taught me a great deal about the way race is implicated with other social hierarchies such as class, gender, and sexuality to produce the U.S. racial formation. Perhaps the two friends from whom I initially learned the most about race in this country are two African American women with whom I worked closely (at different times in my life) over the course of several years—one an academic, the other a former schoolteacher and civil servant. These two

women are very different from each other (and from me) in a number of salient ways (sexuality, religious affiliation, age, life trajectory, work experiences, geographic location), but what they have in common (besides the fact that they are both middle-class, college-educated African American women) is that they are incredibly intelligent women who can articulate insightfully what race has meant for the way they and others around them have been gendered, sexualized, and situated within a global economic order. Additionally, they have in common the fact that I care deeply about them. In each case, we have seen and helped each other through some of life's most difficult transitions (death, divorce, job loss, breakups, affairs, moves across the country, parental disappointments, intimate betrayals, murder, and suicide) and celebrated together some of life's most affirming events (marriage, graduations, school acceptances, new romances, new home purchases, parental achievements, job offers, and job promotions). They have each, at different times and in different ways, through their words and through their experiences, helped me discern the subtle racial dynamics that infuse our daily lives and permeate our most intimate interactions. We have learned together through humor and with laughter, in anger, though sorrow, and by way of profound emotional pain. We have pushed each other way past our comfort zones on several notable occasions, and I am the wiser for it.

31. Friedman writes: "I certainly do not preclude the possibility that all of these sources and more, not solely friendship, may contribute to moral transformation." Friedman, *What Are Friends For?*, 202.
32. Ibid., 201.
33. Ibid., 201–2.
34. For an excellent book that uses the metaphor of friendship to discuss how readers interact with books they read, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. 169–79.
35. I am taking up María Lugones's suggestive phrase "'world'-traveling" to indicate the different subjective worlds we humans occupy. See Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Traveling, and Loving Perception," in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 77–100.
36. Friedman, *What Are Friends For?*, 209.
37. Bakhtin focused his theorizing on the novel. However, his insights can be usefully extended to other genres, many of which have been, as Bakhtin notes, "novelized." See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*,

trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). The heteroglossic advantage of the novel (after it fundamentally changed the landscape of literature so that all genres had been "novelized") is that it is longer (more voices can enter the text simply by virtue of the fact that there is more space for them to exist in) and that its form is looser (thus allowing for a wider variety of types of voices to be incorporated into the same work).

38. Ibid., 262.
39. Ibid., 263.
40. I do not have the space to develop this idea in this essay, but I want to briefly note that seeing a long, complex work as a heteroglossic orchestrated unity that sounds differently to different people can help us to think more complexly about the question of literary value. Those of us who work in the academy are duly educated into some works of literature—but not others. It is quite possible, then, that some canonical works of literature may not so much have trans- or cross-cultural value as that their new readers are taught to become "good" readers of them—that is, the new readers (as part of their entry fee to the academy) take on as their own the culture or worldview of the canonized texts.
41. Toni Morrison sees this sort of contextual dialogism as a desirable aspect of the novel-reader relation. She explains: "The open-ended quality that is sometimes problematic in the novel form reminds me of the uses to which stories are put in the black community. The stories are constantly being retold, constantly being imagined within a framework." Nellie McKay, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," *Contemporary Literature* 24, no. 4 (1983): 413–29. Hereafter McKay, *Contemporary Literature*.
42. Booth, *Company We Keep*, 34–35.
43. Bessie Jones, "An Interview with Toni Morrison," in *The World of Toni Morrison: Explorations in Literary Criticism*, ed. Bessie Jones and Audrey Winson (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1985), 138.
44. Ibid., 141. Morrison reiterates this interest in an interview with Nellie McKay. She says, "It's the complexity of how people behave under duress that is of interest to me—the qualities they show at the end of an event when their backs are up against the wall." McKay, *Contemporary Literature*, 420.
45. Jones, "Interview with Toni Morrison," 141.
46. If I am to believe my many students who tell me so (and I have no reason not to), good multicultural literature really does have the capacity to powerfully implicate its readers and make them examine their own relation to the economic and social structures that reinforce racial and cultural hierarchies.
47. Cervantes, *Emplumada*, 35.
48. Ibid., 36.
49. For instance, Cervantes begins the poem with a reference to her own imaginative universe, a land in which there are "no distinctions . . . no boundaries . . . no hunger, no / complicated famine or greed." Later she asserts, "I am not a revolutionary. / I don't even like political poems."
50. Ibid., 36.
51. Ibid., 35.

EPISTEMOLOGY, ETHICS, AND THE TIME/SPACE OF DECOLONIZATION: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CARIBBEAN AND THE LATINA/O AMERICAS | NELSON MALDONADO-TORRES

I thank Ada María Isasi-Díaz for requesting this contribution and organizing the conference where it was first shared, and Eduardo Mendieta for his insightful comments to an earlier version of the essay.

1. Enrique Dussel, "Origen de la filosofía política moderna: Las Casas, Vitoria y Suarez (1514–1617)," *Caribbean Studies* 33, no. 2 (2005): 35–80. For an elaboration of the concept of "espanto" see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "La descolonización y el giro des-colonial," *Tabula Rasa* (Colombia) 9 (July–December 2008): 66.
2. Esiaba Irobi, "The Philosophy of the Sea: History, Economics, and Reason in the Caribbean," *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* 1, no. 3 (2006): http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/wko/dossiers/1.3/Elrobi.pdf (February 14, 2010).
3. This passage is taken from a summary of John E. Drabinski's book manuscript entitled *Abyssal Beginnings: Glissant, Philosophy, and the Middle Passage* posted by the author in http://www.jdrabinski.com/Abyssal_Beginnings.html. See also J. Michael Dash, "Writing the Body: Edouard Glissant's Poetics of Re-membering," *World Literature Today* 63, no. 4 (1989): 609–12.
4. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Post-Continental Philosophy: Its Definition, Contours, and Fundamental Source," *Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise* (Fall 2006). http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/wko/dossiers/1.3/1.3contentarchive.php (February 14, 2010); see also Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Toward a Critique of Continental Reason: Africana Studies and the Decolonization of Imperial Cartographies in the Americas," in *Not Only the Master's Tools: Theoretical Explorations in African-American Studies*, ed. Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Press, 2006), 51–84.