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Hamlet and Tomás González's *El bello arte de ser*[1]

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Shakespeare, as I have noted elsewhere, occupies an ambivalent position in Cuba.[2] Like many post-colonial adapters of Shakespeare, Cuban writers have to negotiate a complex relationship with his work that somehow balances respect with revision. Complicating this is the fact that Cuba is both a post-colonial and a post-revolutionary country, having overcome Spanish colonial rule in 1898, survived a US military occupation at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, and triumphed over the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Cuba's literacy movement was an important early initiative of the revolutionary government, which made a point of sending brigades of idealistic young people into the country to educate the illiterate. Cuba's ensuing high literacy rate is a badge of national and revolutionary pride, and familiarity with Shakespeare is seen as a mark of that literacy. Another point of pride, however, is Cuba's ability to maintain its independence from foreign influence and control, and Shakespeare is an outsider, a European who does not belong in Cuba. Cuban spinoffs often position themselves so as to take advantage of both of these points, appropriating the cultural capital of Shakespeare by using his plays and characters as widely recognized symbols or metaphors while remaking and reshaping the plays to bring them closer to the Cuban sensibility.

To accommodate these two positions, Cuban playwrights and artists have adapted Shakespeare in a variety of ways. Roberto Fernández-Retamar, in his 1971 essay, *Caliban*, praises Shakespeare as "the most extraordinary writer of fiction that ever existed"[3] while he appropriates Shakespeare's Caliban as a symbol of Latin America; however, he uses Shakespeare only as a starting point to launch his own discussion of Latin American culture. *Romeo y Julieta en Luyanó*, written and performed by the community theatre *Grupo de Teatro Cheo Briñas* in 1982, borrows the title of the play and the idea of star-crossed lovers, but little else from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Raquel Carrió and Flora Lauten borrowed more from Shakespeare when they wrote *Otra tempestad* in 1997, but they also took great liberties in this spinoff of *The Tempest*. They mixed characters from a number of Shakespeare plays with Cuban

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Orishas (African deities brought over by African slaves and combined with Catholic saints) to create a very Cuban adaptation of Shakespeare's play. In contrast, in 2003 Alicia Alonso, *Prima Ballerina Assoluta* and choreographer of the *Ballet Nacional de Cuba*, adapted *Romeo and Juliet* into a ballet, *Shakespeare y sus máscaras*, which is largely faithful to Shakespeare's play in spite of the translation from theatre to dance and its inclusion of the character of Shakespeare, a seller of masks, who is on stage during the majority of the ballet.

Tomás González, a Cuban playwright who has written three Shakespeare spinoffs, takes yet another approach. His spinoffs spin further off and do not adhere as closely to Shakespeare's texts as Alonso's ballet or even Carrió and Lauten's very free adaptation, yet his works are infused with more Shakespeare quotes and references than *Romeo y Julieta en Luyanó* or Fernández-Retamar's *Caliban*. His plays often have very different plots from those of Shakespeare and involve situations that would be common in contemporary Cuba, yet they incorporate Shakespeare through allusions to his plays, the use of characters' names, or the discussion of Shakespeare's works by the characters.

Tomás González (1938–2008) occupies nearly as ambivalent a position as Shakespeare does in Cuba. He described his own birth as a syncretic event because he was born to a black mother and white father, in Santa Clara, Cuba.[4] He grew up influenced by the Afro-Cuban rituals in which his mother's family took part, and by the racism that still segregated the central plaza into areas for whites and areas for blacks.[5] While in Santa Clara he founded El Teatro Experimental de Las Villas (the experimental theatre of Las Villas), and wrote poetry and plays. In 1961 he won a scholarship to study in Havana at the prestigious Seminario de Dramaturgia, operated by the Teatro Nacional. There he was taught by some of the leading theatre professors in Cuba and Latin America, and he met and studied alongside students who would become some of the most influential Cuban playwrights of their generation. His plays, his teaching, and his method of "transcendent acting," have been very influential in Cuban theatre.[6] The degree of his influence is evidenced by the number of scholars and artists who wrote about him in the 2008 edition of the Cuban theatre journal *Tablas* published just after his death, and dedicated to him.[7] Nevertheless, outside of the theatrical community, few Cubans know of him, and even a survey of current residents of his native village of Santa Clara will produce more people unfamiliar with him than acquainted with him. This relative anonymity is due in large part to his exclusion from the theatre during Cuba's Quinquenio Gris, or five year grey period.

The Quinquenio Gris was a period of extreme censorship that took place roughly from 1971 to 1976, although many argue that it lasted longer than five years.[8] As Katherine Ford has noted, "the Cuban Revolution began with the promise of new hope, not just for the people of the island

but also for theater given its accessibility to the masses."[9] However, that promise began to diminish in the 1970s as the government began to define the parameters of what it meant to be revolutionary. There had been hints of such repression earlier, as when Fidel Castro, in a 1961 speech, declared that intellectuals, writers, and artists had complete freedom within the revolution, but no freedom outside of it.[10] In 1971, the parameters of what was within the revolution and what was without it were finally codified, at the First Congress of Education and Culture.

Among the ideas and practices that were condemned were intellectualism, homosexuality, and any reference to African or Afro-Cuban religious practices.[11] Theatres were especially subject to scrutiny, and those playwrights and directors who did not meet the "parameters" established as appropriate to the revolution could be censored and punished harshly.[12] Even the casting of black actors in a Shakespeare play could draw the attention of Luis Pavón Tamayo, head of the National Council of Culture, and Armando Quesada, who was in charge of supervising and censoring theatre. This was the situation Tomás González found himself in 1973 when he was staging *Hamlet* in the Teatro Mella of Havana:

> Torquemada[13] (Armando Quesada) brought me to a dark office with a lamp directed at my face … He said that my *Hamlet* was negrista [Afro-Cuban focused] because the actors that I had chosen were black. And at that time they removed me from the theatre and sent me to sing in the worst cabarets and farms all over the country. I returned to the theatre when a hiccup of the hangover removed Luis Pavón from the Segundo Cabo Palace.[14]

Although González was able to return to the theatres after the Quinquenio Gris, he had, during an important period of his career, been prevented from staging his plays or from publishing his essays.[15] Undoubtedly, this is part of why he is relatively unknown today. Those who do recall him, however, describe him as a renaissance man: a painter, a musician, a playwright, actor, director, and a talented teacher. Indeed, Inés Maria Martiatu, one of the leading scholars of González's works, has called him, "one of the more singular and little known personalities of the Cuban theatre of the revolutionary period."[16]

González's first Shakespeare spinoff, *Yago tiene feeling* [Iago has Feeling], was written in 1962. He wrote the sequel, *Ote vino en un charter* [Othello Came in a Charter] in 1987. The two works, which together form *El camino del medio* [The Middle Way], portray the love triangle between Ote (Othello), Yago (Iago), and Desdi (Desdemona) while also exploring the complicated roles of love and art in Cuba immediately after the revolution and 20 years later. In between these two works, in 1978, González wrote *El bello arte de ser* [The Beautiful Art of Being], in which a director attempts to produce a televised version of *Hamlet*.

A version of this work was performed, with the title *La otra tarde* [The Other Afternoon] by the Grupo Anaquillé, under the direction of Tomás González, in the Casa de la Comedia in Havana in 1986.

González's *El bello arte de ser*, a spinoff of *Hamlet*, undoubtedly illustrates some of the difficulties González had in staging *Hamlet* in 1973. The character of the Director is waiting for government approval of his televised version of *Hamlet*, a project that has already been rejected once, not because there was an objection to the work but because "someone, who was not Shakespeare, had problems."[17] The problems are that the director, like González, has a history of having been perceived as outside of the parameters of the revolution. He has been accused of being insufficiently revolutionary, and he has committed the "original sin of all intellectuals" by having "bourgeois origins."[18] Furthermore González, having been accused of staging a "negrista" *Hamlet*, notes which characters are black in his description of the parts at the beginning of the play. One of these characters, María Caracoles, has, like Gonzáles, worked in cabarets, which makes the Actor feel she is a less respectable actor, but she, like Gonzáles, is familiar with Afro-Cuban spiritual practices such as possession, which actually makes her a superior actor.

In addition to mirroring some of the difficulties that González experienced with his own staging of *Hamlet*, the play is also an example of González's use of Shakespeare to examine many elements of Cuban culture. An English play about a Danish prince may seem like an unusual vehicle for exploring issues of Cuban life and Cuban theatre. However, since *Hamlet* is itself a play that makes many references to acting and that involves a ghost, a Cuban spinoff of *Hamlet* proves to be an ideal vehicle for a playwright interested in the relation of spiritual possession to theatre, in the ways that Cubans are haunted by their absent loved ones, and in how the latter type of haunting can impede the possession necessary for theatre. The latter is of especial interest to this writer's development as González influenced Cuban theatre not only with his plays but also with his method of transcendent acting, which combines aspects of the theories of Stanislavski, Grotowski, and Artaud and also incorporates the spiritual possession of the Afro-Cuban religion, Santeria.[19]

In *El bello arte de ser*, González uses *Hamlet* to bring up two very important elements of Cuban life. First he uses it to depict the tensions between the Cubans who have stayed behind and suffered in Cuba, faithful to the revolution even though they may see the inherent flaws in it, and the people who left Cuba for a better life elsewhere, even though they may regret doing so and long for their homeland and loved ones. Second, he uses the play to introduce the issues of spirits, haunting, and possession, which are essential aspects of Afro-Cuban culture and, according to González, essential elements of theatre. In fact, the ideas of haunting and possession function on multiple levels in this play. The characters, like so many Cubans and Cuban-Americans since the Cuban revolution, are

haunted by the people who left Cuba or the people they left behind. At the same time, González, who has argued that spiritual possession is the true origin of the theatre, frequently portrays his characters in a state of possession. They go into trances and channel the voices of past loves or lost family members, and when recalling the past they are described as acting "like one possessed." Finally, González's spinoff is haunted by references to and quotes from *Hamlet*. González suggests, through these many different types of possession and haunting, that possession is a necessary part of theatre, and that while the haunting by absent loved ones is an unavoidable part of Cuban life, a person who is too haunted by the tragedy of separation will be incapable of either good theatre or of a satisfying life.

El bello arte de ser is filled with references to what might be called the national tragedy of Cuba – the tragedy of separation, exile, and abandonment. Most Cubans are unable to travel freely, and most Cubans have some family member who has left the island in pursuit of a better life elsewhere. Complicating this situation is the fact that the political restraints of both Cuba and the US make visits between these family members difficult, if not impossible. Fearing a loss of its most talented and educated citizens, the Cuban government has long made it difficult or impossible for Cubans to leave.[20] Meanwhile, the US government's embargo on trade with Cuba, in place since 1960, prohibits most US citizens from travelling to the island, and at times US policies have even limited the frequency with which Cuban-Americans could travel to visit family in Cuba.[21] As a result of these governmental policies, families have been separated, and the loved ones who have left Cuba are often looked on with a complex mixture of envy, resentment, love, and disdain by those who stayed behind. Claudia Lightfoot, in her literary and cultural guidebook to Havana, notes that this complex tapestry of emotions colors life in Havana and in Cuba:

> Exile, partings, loss, and longing are woven into the Cuban psyche. Under the warmth, the sensuality and fun that overwhelm visitors to the island is a deep, often invisible vein of tragedy …. Innumerable numbers of people have been scarred by the loss of those who have gone. There are very few people who have not lost family, friends, and lovers to the great divide. Simple verbs like "to leave" and "to stay" carry a whole national sub-text of meaning. *Se fue* (s/he left) or *se quedó* (s/he stayed) have a sad resonance that needs no explanation. The idea of leaving is both an eternal hope and pain …. Since 1959, hundreds of thousands have left the island, most never to return. Those who have stayed willingly or unwillingly have a whole inferiority-superiority complex in relation to the diaspora, ranging through feelings of jealousy, betrayal, pity, and disdain.[22]

A similar inferiority-superiority complex is evident in *El bello arte de ser*. Those who stayed envy the freedom of those who left and feel abandoned

by them, but they also repeatedly refer to them as degenerates, defectors, and traitors. Those who left often feel a great nostalgia for Cuba and regret not having stayed, but they still frequently criticize those who did stay for their lack of initiative. In this spinoff of a play about a man haunted by the ghost of his father, all of the characters seem haunted, by loved ones who have actually died, by the ghosts of those who have left the country and their loved ones behind, or by the ghosts of those they themselves have left. The most haunted, however, is the Actor, perhaps because he has both been abandoned and done the abandoning. Plagued by his pain and guilt, he seems incapable of the spiritual possession that González feels is essential to theatre.

The complicated, conflicted relationships between the Cubans who stayed in Cuba and the Cubans who left fill *El bello arte de ser*. The play opens with the Actor and the Director, whose names are never given, entering a restaurant and beginning a conversation about the televised production of *Hamlet* for which the Director is hoping to obtain governmental approval. The Actor, who is now in Cuba considering the role of Hamlet in this production, has, like Hamlet, just returned from Wittenberg.[23] He was able to take this trip to Wittenberg because of a scholarship, which, we later learn, was originally supposed to be for the Director. In order to get the scholarship for himself, he suggested to the selection committee that the Director was not sufficiently revolutionary and that he, the Actor, would be better suited for this opportunity. He took the scholarship even though it meant betraying his friend and separating from his girlfriend, Ofelia, for three years. Now that he has returned he finds that both the Director and Ofelia resent him for the opportunity he had and for his willingness to abandon them. Like Ophelia, Ofelia has had to suffer the abandonment and betrayal of her lover. She stayed in Cuba while the Actor went to Wittenberg, and when she managed a surprise visit she found him with another woman.

The Director once had a chance to travel to Moscow to study, but he gave it up when the mother of his girlfriend intercepted a love letter which she took to mean that he had dishonored her daughter. She shamed him into staying and marrying the girl, and though this was 20 years ago, he still regrets the missed opportunity; moreover, the Actor still criticizes him for the fear that kept him from going to Moscow after his marriage. The Actor's father left his wife and young son to go to Argentina. This devastated the Actor's mother and left the Actor longing for a relationship with the father he only knew from photographs. Much later, the Actor's mother left for Miami, and never called or sent money to her son. These partings are not even limited to the terrestrial and mortal. Ofelia and one of the waiters at the restaurant in which the play is set are, we eventually learn, Martians, and when the waiter chooses to return to Mars in their spaceship, Ofelia prefers to stay behind. Maya, a former lover of the Director, left Cuba when the Director refused to declare his

love for her. In her letters home she tells her family about her great success in the United States. However, during a brief visit to Cuba she confesses to the Actor and Director that these are lies – she has been forced to make porn films and to work for the mafia in order to survive. She now says that she is the "living dead" and a "ghost." But Beatriz, another former lover of the Director, and one who really died and is a ghost, tells Maya not to be so theatrical and declares that she is no ghost: "you are only a defector, one who chose poorly."[24] The play is filled with references to ghosts and with stories of loved ones being separated, and frequently those references overlap. The absent loved ones and their memories are the ghosts that haunt the other characters.

The many ghosts and spirits that haunt this play are significant because spiritual possession is a key element of González's method of transcendent acting. In his essay, "Possession, privilege of the theatrical," González notes:

> The origin of the theatre is in the possession. The incarnation originates in the acts of the "possessed," of the one who has ascended, who channels gods, spirits, or saints; and this incarnation is not just that of a character, but of an archetype. It is in these transports of possession that we find the origin of the theatre.[25]

According to González, acting should not simply be a matter of performing but rather of being possessed by the role. The title of his spinoff, *The Beautiful Art of Being*, points not only to Hamlet's famous question, "To be or not to be," but also to his own belief that an actor should *be* a role, or be possessed by a role, rather than simply performing a role. But in this same essay González also observes that theatre requires that the actor eliminate his personal issues in order to allow possession by the archetypal: "There is theatre when man, emptying himself, that is, destroying the obstacles of his daily personality, makes contact with the universal archetype."[26] In *El bello arte de ser* the Actor is more haunted than many of the other characters because he has both been abandoned and abandoned others. His pain and guilt prevent him from achieving the "transport of possession," and until he can empty himself of the "obstacles of his daily personality" he will not be able to truly be possessed by a role. We see this clearly when the Actor is first goaded into remembering and reliving the experience of his mother leaving him to go to Miami, and then is promptly asked to rehearse the closet scene with the actress who will play Gertrude.

The Actor still feels haunted by his mother's departure. The Director, to prepare him for rehearsing the emotional confrontation between Hamlet and Gertrude, and perhaps also to punish him for his own abandonment of Cuba and his friends, forces him to recall the experience of being a young man waiting for his mother to send him some money so that he could join

her in Miami, money which she never gathers as "The expensive joys of the city of Miami" consume all her savings.[27] The Actor sadly joins in with the recollection, seemingly becoming possessed by it, as he recounts how:

> The boy was always kneeling in front of the telephone. He prays for the miracle of the ring of a long distance call. And the mother … the mother never calls and the beloved face fades away with time …
>
> (Crying.)[28]

He is at first openly resistant to the conversation. Then he joins in "sadly," and as the Director gently encourages him to remember, he finishes the recollection in tears, overcome by the memories. He is not so much remembering as reliving the experience. The Actor is, to use González's word, the incarnation of the experience.

He is, however, unable to be possessed by anything else. This is evident when the Director informs the Actor that he wants him to rehearse a scene from *Hamlet* with the part of Gertrude being played by María Caracoles, an older, black woman with a wig of straight, blonde hair, heavy make-up, and loud and flashy clothing, who chiefly performs comic roles and who works in a cabaret. She is not what the Actor had in mind to play Hamlet's mother, and he makes that clear to the Director when he exclaims, "Maria Caracoles in a work as serious as this! It's Shakespeare's *Hamlet*!"[29] Nevertheless, he reluctantly agrees to try the rehearsal. The tension always evident between Hamlet and his mother in the closet scene is magnified here, since we sense that what is really being enacted is the drama between the Actor and his absent mother. The two mothers may have angered their sons in very different ways, but both have committed acts that their sons find incomprehensible and unforgiveable. One has married her late husband's brother and the other has abandoned her son and her country for Miami. The scene breaks down when both the Actor and María Caracoles become overly emotional. María, offended by Hamlet's comments about his mother, pulls a phone out of her purse and calls a policeman named Polonius, asking him to arrest a delinquent who she thinks is going to kill his own mother, and declaring, "a mother is always sacred, no matter what she does."[30] When she tries to leave, the Actor, furious, grabs her arm and detains her; she then pulls a knife out of her purse.

The Director intervenes at this point, calming both of them. He then explains to María Caracoles, who is uncertain who this "Chispia" [Shakespeare] person is, that she doesn't need to understand, only to play the part of the queen, Gertrude. It is here that the real value of María Caracoles becomes evident. She may look nothing like what the Actor thinks Gertrude should look like, and she may not even know who Shakespeare is, but she understands González's theory of possession as the root of acting. Once the Director tells her to act like a queen, she does so, and she also takes it upon herself to explain the role of possession in acting to the Actor:

> You are the actor. You have to play your part as if wrung out, as if it took the juice, the life itself out of you. Boy, you have to take everything you've got inside, what's far back, and what's further beyond! (Shaking as though possessed) … You have to rid yourself of all the evils that are bothering you. Take out everything that you have inside and you're going to see, my white boy, how the public reacts. We, the artists, are more witches than anything else.[31]

While the Actor continues to quibble about the Director's suggestions, Maria Caracoles is willing simply to let the role possess her. She does not need to understand or argue about how the work should be interpreted. She allows to role to come through her. At the same time she understands that the Actor is unable to be possessed by his role because he is still haunted by his past. She notes that "This boy needs a dispossession. He's very burdened."[32] Though María Caracoles gives a brief account of her own history, which includes some unhappy love affairs and some dangerous experiences, she is able to leave her past behind and to allow a role to possess her. But the Actor, still possessed by his own drama, continues to argue with the Director's instructions. He is already too possessed by his past to allow himself to be possessed by Shakespeare.

The Actor's interactions with Ofelia shed further light on his character. He is both too haunted by his relationship with his mother and too self-absorbed to allow himself to be possessed by a role, or to allow himself to love someone else. Ofelia shares a name with the Shakespearean character, and she, like Ophelia, has been abandoned by her former lover. But González's Ofelia is a very different character. She is not the innocent, confused girl who is manipulated by her father and her lover. When Ofelia enters in the third act of *El bello arte de ser*, she quickly makes it clear that she is in control. When the Actor wants to nostalgically recall their former love, she insists on taking a cold, hard look at how things were. When the Actor wants to rekindle their romance and tells Ofelia that he loves her, she tells him firmly that Hamlet never said that and he must stick to the text: "Hamlet never says that. Come on, speak the text."[33] She does admit that she loved him, but she declares that he was only in love with himself:

> I did love you, Hamlet. I loved you with a body like a waterlily, pristine and fragile. However, you only loved your own body loving. How alone I felt in the middle of your love. You were never with me, you weren't with me. You superimposed another image over me.[34]

He was, she suggests, merely acting the part of a lover, not being her lover. He is so haunted by this "other image" that he cannot really be in love. At her insistence, he confesses what has haunted him:

> My mother slept in my bed after my father left. He went to Argentina on a hot air balloon. My mother loved him too much. She saw his traces in me. But the odors of my mother intoxicated my existence. They marked me. Beneath my bed there are furious black horses, demented horses that bite. That's why I can't get out of the bed. "Mama, they will eat my feet! Don't leave me!"[35]

The series of painful departures and abandonment have left a chain of wounded, haunted people. The Actor's father abandoned his wife, who, haunted by his absence, passed that haunting on to her son. She first kept him too close, "marking him" with her fear of abandonment, and then she abandoned him when he felt unable to survive without her. Haunted by the loss of both parents, the Actor was unable to really love Ofelia, and he abandoned her and his friend, the Director, creating regrets and guilt by which he is also haunted.

This confession leads to the Actor's "death" scene. He is shot by an invisible "maternal bullet."[36] The memory of his mother abandoning him wounds him, and when he clutches his wound and begs Ofelia for help, she refuses. In this play it is Ofelia who "must be cruel only to be kind."[37] She not only refuses to help him, but as he lies there she criticizes him for his self-centered behavior, for his decision to leave her, and finally for taking the Director's scholarship. She says at first that he has to die so that she can be free of him, but then she explains, "you still sound possessed. Remember that you are dying, not for others but for yourself. Nobody is seeing you now!"[38] When the Actor suggests that the news of his death will be in the papers the next day and will make him famous, Ofelia asks, "Who will care about your death? What have you done for others?"[39] Her comments may be cruel, but they serve to jolt him out of his self-absorption and also to make him realize that his simply acting a death scene without really being possessed by the role is not transcendent theatre and of little interest to anyone. He still has not mastered the beautiful art of being because he still cannot free himself from his personal ghosts in order to make room for possession by the archetypal.

Possession does, however, happen on another level. Even as the Actor is being haunted by his abandonment and abandoning, and even as these ghosts hold him back from transcendent possession, the play is haunted by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It is through acting out the scenes from *Hamlet* that the Actor confronts both the haunting memory of his mother abandoning him and the haunting guilt of his abandonment of Ofelia and the Director. Even when they are not rehearsing scenes, the Actor and the Director frequently quote the play. When the Actor feels he is being manipulated by the Director he asks in Spanish: "Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe?"[40] He toasts the Director by saying, again in Spanish: "Give me that man/ That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him/ In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,/ As I do thee."[41] The

Director, meanwhile, returns to the topic of Shakespeare so frequently that the Actor becomes annoyed and exclaims "What does Shakespeare have to do with this?"[42] or "Shakespeare yet again!"[43] The Director also frequently returns to the importance of performing *Hamlet*. He insists that this is the time to perform *Hamlet*: "*Hamlet* must be performed now – the people are prepared to receive it."[44] And when the Actor argues that it has been performed often, the Director asserts that each *Hamlet* is different:

> There can be as many *Hamlets* as performances and each will be a different *Hamlet*. Good plays are machines that stimulate speculation. They are like pieces of jazz. Each jazz musician makes the same piece his piece, executed in his own style.[45]

The metaphor of the Jazz improviser helps to clarify the different types of possession and to show how González has balanced his reverence for Shakespeare with his desire to spin the play into a uniquely Cuban play. *El bello arte de ser* is possessed by Shakespeare, not in the way that the Actor is haunted by his past so that he cannot break free from it to express himself, but rather in the way that an actor, according to González, should be possessed by the archetypal spirit of the role. This type of transcendent possession requires that the actor (or writer) not be so haunted by his personal issues that he cannot make room for the archetypal. However, it does not mean that a person possessed by this spirit does not bring some personal style to the part. Like an actor, the jazz musician must be able to put aside personal concerns in order to let the music move through him, yet he must also be able to improvise and interpret the song in a unique way. González, like a jazz musician, lets Shakespeare speak through him, but with a Cuban accent, expressing the national tragedy of Cuba and González's own theory about the role of possession in theatre.

Notes

1 Research for this article was funded in part by a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

2 See Donna Woodford-Gormley, "In Fair Havana, Where We Lay Our Scene: *Romeo and Juliet* in Cuba," in *Native Shakespeares: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage*. ed. Craig Dionne and Parmita Kapadia. (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008) 201–211, and Donna Woodford-Gormley, "Devouring Shakespeare: Cuba, Cannibalism and Caliban." *REAL: The Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature*, 29 (2013):131–148.

3 Roberto Fernández-Retamar. *Todo Caliban*. (Havana: Fondo Cultural de ALBA, 2006), 15. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

4 Inés María Martiatu. Introduction to *El bello arte de ser y otras obras*. Ed. Inés María Martiatu. (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2005), 10.

5 Martiatu, Introduction, 10; Armando López. "Levitar en Santa Clara." CubaEncuentro. www.cubaencuentro.com/cultura/articulos/levitar-en-santa-clara-79506.
6 For more information see Inés María Martiatu, "Importante momento de la historia del teatro cubano contemporáneo." *La Jiribilla: Revista de Cultura Cubana* 734 (27 June –3 July 2015). http://epoca2.lajiribilla.cu/articulo/10636/importante-momento-de-la-historia-del-teatro-cubano-contemporaneo and "introduction" 5–9.
7 See, for example, the articles by Alberto Abreu, Elaine Centeno Álvarez. Barbarella González, Patricia González Gómez-Cásseres, Inéz María Martiatu, and José Milián, all in *Tablas* 3–4, 2008.
8 Martiatu says that for some the Quinquenio Gris was really a *decenio*, a decade, of grey. Inés María Martiatu, "Tomás González: el autor como protagonista de su tiempo." *Tablas* 3–4 (July–December 2008): 141.
9 Katherine Ford. "Sounds and Silences of the Habanero Stage: Theater and the Cuban 'Quinquenio gris' (1971–1976)" *Colorado Review of Hispanic Studies* 8–9 (2010–2011). 353.
10 Fidel Castro Ruz, "Discurso pronunciado por el comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Ministro del Gobierno Revolucionario y Secretario del PURSC, como conclusión de las reuniones con los intelectuales Cubanos, efectuadas en la biblioteca nacional el 16, 23, y 20 de Junio de 1961." PortalCuba.cu. www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f300661e.html.
11 For more information on the Quinquenio Gris see Andy Petit. "Revisiting the Quinquenio Gris, 1971–1976." *AfroCubaWeb*, www.afrocubaweb.com/quinquenio-gris.html.
12 In 2007 the issue of the parametration and the Quinquenio Gris again became prominent in Cuba. A television program featured some of the chief censors of this period and portrayed them as people who had made important cultural contributions to Cuba. Some of the intellectuals and artists who had been discriminated against during this period began to email back in forth in what became known as the Little Email War (Guerrita de los correos), and the issue was once again an important topic of debate in Cuba. Today, most Cubans condemn this period as unjust.
13 Torquemada was the Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. Clearly González felt the Quinquenio Gris was a similar sort of inquisition.
14 López.
15 Martiatu, *El rito*, 70.
16 Martiatu, Introduction, 5.
17 Tomás González. *El bello arte de ser y otras obras*. ed. Inés María Martiatu (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2005), 127.
18 González, *El bello*, 84.
19 For more information about his method of transcendent acting, see Inés María Martiatu, "Taller de actuactión transcendente: ¿el nacimiento de un método?" in *El rito como representación*: *teatro ritual caribeño*. (Havana: Unión, 2000.) 115–151; Elaine Centeno Álvarez, "A Tomás González: palabras atesoradas en su memoria," *Tablas* 3–4 (July–December 2008): 139–143; and Alberto Abreu. "Tomás González: El bello arte de ser y los juegos carnavalesco de la negritud," *Afromodernidades*. afromodernidades.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/el-bello-arte-de-ser.
20 In order to leave the country they must apply for permission and they must have an invitation from the country they plan to travel to. The applications, which require a substantial fee, are frequently denied with no explanation.

21 Under Bill Clinton Cuban-Americans could visit families once a year. Under George W. Bush, Cuban-Americans visiting family could only visit for two weeks, once every three years and could only visit parents, grandparents, or siblings, not aunts, uncles or cousins. Under Barack Obama, Cuban-Americans could visit family, broadly defined, as often as they liked with no limit on the length of stay. Americans who did not have family in Cuba could still only travel to Cuba for certain approved reasons, such as religious activities, humanitarian aid, professional research, academic conferences, and athletic events; however, flights on commercial airlines were introduced. Donald Trump, prior to his election, criticized the opening of relations with Cuba and threatened to reverse the actions of his predecessor. During his time in office, he did limit the ability of non-Cuban Americans to visit Cuba, ban US cruise ships from visiting Cuba, and create a list of Cuban entities with which Americans were prohibited from doing business. He also banned US commercial and charter flights to Cuban cities other than Havana and put a cap on the number of charter flights permitted. He did not officially restrict the ability of Cuban Americans to visit family; however, the reduction in flights and the elimination of flights to cities other than Havana made such travel more difficult and expensive.
22 Claudia Lightfoot, *Havana: A Cultural and Literary Companion* (New York: Interlink Books, 2002), 176–7.
23 In addition to being the famous university at which Shakespeare's Hamlet studied, Wittenberg, at the time this play was written, was in the communist German Democratic Republic, which explains why only loyal revolutionaries would be eligible for this scholarship.
24 González, *El bello*, 100.
25 Tomás González Pérez, "La posesión (privilegio de la teatralidad)," In *Rito y representación: los sistemas mágico-religiosos en la cultura cubana contemporánea*, ed. Yana Elsa Brugal and Beatriz Rizk. (Madrid; Frankfurt: Iberoamericana; Vervuert, 2003), 204.
26 González, "La posesión," 201.
27 González, *El bello*, 56.
28 González, *El bello*, 56.
29 González, *El bello*, 60
30 González, *El bello*, 61.
31 González, *El bello*, 65.
32 González, *El bello*, 64.
33 González, *El bello*, 118.
34 González, *El bello*, 119.
35 González, *El bello*, 119–120.
36 González, *El bello*, 121.
37 All quotations from Hamlet are from William Shakespeare. Hamlet. In *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2016.) 3.4.162.
38 González, *El bello*, 120.
39 González, *El bello*, 121.
40 González, *El bello*, 56; Shakespeare, 3.2.339–340.
41 González, *El bello*, 57; Shakespeare, 3.2.64–67.
42 González, *El bello*, 48.
43 González, *El bello*, 60.
44 González, *El bello*, 87.
45 González, *El bello*, 87–88.

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