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PHILOLOGICAL RECEPTION AND THE REPEATING *ODYSSEY* IN THE CARIBBEAN: FRANCISCO CHOFRE'S *LA ODILEA*

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Abstract

This article discusses *La Odilea*, Francisco Chofre's prose adaptation of the *Odyssey,* which refigures both Homer's heroes as *guajiros* (peasants) and the ancient epic itself through the adoption of an oral Cuban dialect. My examination first highlights Chofre's linguistic transformations, which I consider a model of "philological" reception, as well as the ambiguous and complex relationship that he posits between his work and the Greek source text. I then explore the broader questions that this text poses regarding vernacularity and canon, as well as their implications in *La Odilea's* two main contexts: the Cuban Revolution and the postcolonial Caribbean. Chofre's novel reveals the *Odyssey's* unique resonance across the Caribbean while also challenging existing models of classical reception.

Introduction

This article explores a novel adaptation of Homer's *Odyssey*, *La Odilea*, by Francisco Chofre (born in Valencia, Spain in 1924; died in Havana, Cuba in 1999).[1] Since antiquity, the *Odyssey* has had a rich and voluminous afterlife, inspiring numerous adaptations and rewritings which span the globe and range across the centuries.[2] In the Caribbean, Homer's epic has had unique traction, not only as a source of artistic and poetic inspiration, but also as a site of contestation in response to European colonialism.[3] In particular, engagements with the *Odyssey* in the region provide anticolonial and postcolonial responses to the legacies of the French and British empires.[4] By contrast, Chofre's *La Odilea,* written in 1960s Revolutionary Cuba, presents a seemingly playful version of the canonical epic in prose, one which is furthermore focused on the Cuban *guajiro* (peasant) experience.[5] The work consists of twenty-four novelistic "cantos" which loosely follow the plot of the ancient Greek epic's twenty-four books, now transplanted to the island's countryside. The names of Homer's heroes and gods are likewise loosely altered, as is the epic journey itself. Chofre's novel charts the wanderings of the farmer Odileo – significantly not Odiseo or Ulises, the typical translations of Odysseus in Spanish – through distinctively Caribbean landscapes, such as sugar cane fields and *cayerías* (small keys and islands), as he meets characters who readily offer lewd conversation, rum, and cigars. All dialogue in the novel is conducted in a Cuban dialect, one which poses a challenge even to native Spanish speakers. Everything in Chofre's prose adaptation, from the tropical landscape to the impenetrable *guajiro* dialect, indicates the author's focus on faithfully replicating an agrarian experience, despite its Homeric frame.

Whereas the bulk of remarkably scant scholarship on this novel emphasizes its "parodic" or "comic" dimension,[6] I argue that seeing Chofre as parodying or injecting humor into the

Odyssey is to over-simplify the complicated relationship that *La Odilea* enacts with its source text. In transforming the *Odyssey* into a novel of Cuban peasants, Chofre replaces the poetic register of epic with a prose marked by local idioms, provocative vocabulary, and a lively dialogue whose orthography matches the popular chatter of rural regions. His meticulous linguistic transformations, which I consider a model of "philological" reception, result in a novel that is uniquely centered on the oral traditions of Cuba's most remote areas. In this manner Chofre refigures this canonical ancient epic through the vernacular, a creative act of renewal which I explore through the vanguardist visions of translation as "transcreation" (*transcriaçao*) proposed by Brazilian critic Haroldo de Campos. As I discuss, however, it is difficult to determine to what ends Chofre refocuses the *Odyssey* as a Cuban oral text. Throughout the novel Chofre draws upon Homer as much as he departs from the *Odyssey*. Whereas the novel reduces Homer's heroes to the coarse level of peasants – an act which could be interpreted as irreverent – it simultaneously validates the idea of Homer, whose origins lie in oral composition, through clever linguistic transformations which effectively re-create orality in prose. *La Odilea* thus displays a tense and ambiguous relationship with its source text, one in which desecration and veneration are intimately bound together.

Once we recognize the full complexity of the relationship that Chofre establishes with the ancient Homeric source text, we are able to explore the broader questions that this text poses regarding vernacularity and canon, and their wider resonances for the Caribbean, a region onto which the Mediterranean has been projected ever since Columbus' voyages.[7] I therefore situate Chofre's reinvention of the *Odyssey* within the larger context of other prominent Cuban and Caribbean engagements with canonical ancient Greek literature, both tragedy and epic. This resignification of Homer, as I illustrate, coheres with the Cuban Revolution's cultural and

ideological shifts from the urban to the rural, reflecting in particular new revolutionary policies to eradicate illiteracy across the island. Moreover, my discussion emphasizes *La Odilea*'s "creoleness" so as to align it with its Caribbean francophone and anglophone Odyssean cousins: Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and Derek Walcott's *Omeros*. In demonstrating that the novel is part of a larger Antillean nexus, my aim is to expand current models of Caribbean classical receptions. As I contend, Chofre's painstaking efforts to cloak Greek heroes in the Cuban quotidian affords an opportunity to reflect not only on the manner in which the *Odyssey* is repeated across the Caribbean throughout the 20th century, but also on the afterlife and relevance of the Classics, especially in the American "Mediterranean" Sea. To whom does Homer belong? What are the limits of a canonical text, and what happens if some of its characteristic (and elite) markers are removed to include popular rhythms and problems? Chofre insistently raises these questions precisely by leaving unclear whether *La Odilea* desecrates or celebrates the Homeric traditions upon which it is predicated.

I. Homer *en cubano*[8]: Refiguring Epic as Vernacular

One of the most remarkable aspects of *La Odilea* is its methodical reproduction of the Cuban dialect. The few scholars who have worked on this novel praise it on the basis of its extraordinary linguistic achievement. In his review of the prose fiction produced in the early years of the Cuban Revolution, Seymour Menton (1975, 98-9) considers Chofre's novel to be one of the most "authentically Cuban…in a linguistic sense," explaining that "the literary value of the book depends exclusively on the author's ingenious reproduction of the Cuban idiom." Uruguayan writer Mario Benedetti (1969, 104) goes even further, calling it "a hilarious apotheosis of the best Cuban dialectal grace" ("una desopilante apoteosis de la mejor gracia

dialectal cubana"). While these critics are correct to emphasize Chofre's linguistic inventiveness, by saying that the novel's worth is "exclusively" dependent on this feat, as Menton claims, or that it stems from the hilarity which it induces, as Benedetti suggests, they nonetheless underestimate the complex ends to which Chofre refashions the *Odyssey*. As I illustrate, Chofre's "popularizing" practices not only introduce new heroic and linguistic paradigms centered on the ordinary and the vernacular, but they also reflect the ways in which Chofre, like Odysseus, skillfully manipulates epic language and narrative. In both cases, it is unclear whether Chofre aims to lower the register of Homeric epic or to elevate Cuban peasants by insisting on their inclusion in a canonical text.

Though this section focuses on linguistic transformations, it is worth briefly noting the way in which Chofre's novel generally "translates" the *Odyssey* for Cuba, beyond adopting the epic's general format and loose plot of the original source text.[9] Instead of the gods — who present a major obstacle to any modern adaptation of ancient epic or tragedy — Chofre features a powerful family led by Zeulorio, the owner of a large estate and accompanying lands, which takes pity on the husbandless situation of La Pena (*La Odilea*'s Penelope, a pun on "sorrow"). In Chofre's world, the war was not launched because of the abduction of a woman, but rather because of an argument about yam (*ñame*). The bard Demodocus is now the blind singer Democo who warbles in *décimas*, a ballad form of ten-line octosyllabic stanzas which filled the Cuban radio of the time.[10] The famous "nobody" (*outis*) joke that marks the Cyclops episode becomes "nicojones" (lit. "no balls"), a popular expression frequently used to mean "nothing."[11] One of the most notable scenes in the ancient Greek epic sees the hero communing with the dead via necromancy.[12] In Canto XI, Odileo is likewise able to do so, this time by means of a Santería ritual. Directed by the *santero* priest Tereso, the rite requires that Odileo cut the neck of a black

chicken, strip naked, and drink five shots of *aguardiente* (a sugar-cane based liquor), as the *santero* beats him with basil stalks.[13] The necromancy which might seem out of place in other 20th-century *Odysseys* easily finds a home in the context of this Afro-Cuban religion, in which summoning the spirits of the dead is not uncommon.[14] As these examples testify, Chofre emphasizes the multiple parallels that exist between the Hellenic and Cuban. Chofre's "translations" — or perhaps more accurately transpositions as they involve a shift to prose — establish several equivalences which reflect the complex and ambiguous relationship between the novel and its source text. Throughout the novel Chofre in fact draws attention to the manner in which he enhances the *Odyssey* through the addition of a Cuban dimension. For example, the Nausicaa episode highlights Cuban patriarchal family dynamics and the place of women in this agrarian society. Since Chofre's Athena has been recast as a human — and thus no longer has the ability to send dreams — the chapter which features the meeting between the girl and hero opens with an extended preface that explains her presence outdoors.[15] In *La Odilea*, Nausi goes to the river because of the unbearable stench of her brothers' clothes:

> Pues resulta que la muchacha...dormía en una ala de la casa que tiraba al poniente, y como en todos los lugares del mundo ocurre que los hermanos machos abusan de hermanas hembras, pues, toda la ropa sucia que se mudaban iba a dar al cuarto de Nausi. Una noche…habíase levantado un brisote violento, que se paseaba por todo el cuarto de Nausi, se entretenía en el montón de ropa sucia, cargaba la peste y se la iba dejando a la joven en las fosas nasales. La pesadilla que tuvo esa noche la linda Nausi, no se la contó jamás a nadie, ni quiso volver a pensar en ella. Y al otro día, cuando las claras, despertaba la jovencita con más ruidos en el cerebro que una maraca guarachera.[16]

> Turns out that the girl…slept in a part of the house that got the breeze, and as happens everywhere in the world where macho brothers tend to abuse their female sisters, well, all the dirty clothes they took off always ended up in Nausi's room. One night…there was a violent breeze, which was dancing around Nausi's room and entertaining itself in the huge pile of dirty clothes. It carried the stink and placed it directly into the young woman's nostrils. The nightmare that the pretty Nausi had that night, she never told anyone, nor did she ever again want to think on it. And the next day, when it was light, the young woman woke up with more noises in her brain than a maraca *guarachera*.[17]

Chofre here includes important commentary on the subsidiary position of women in relation to male siblings, a perspective that foregrounds Nausi's experience far more than Homer does with Nausicaa's, reflecting *machista* child-rearing practices which differentiate according to gender.[18] This passage additionally exemplifies the manner in which Chofre inserts numerous Cuban local elements into the main narrative, in this case the maraca *guarachera* and the particular effects of the sea breeze's circulation. Such transpositions continually shift the focus away from Homer's epic, illustrating the deep Cuban imprint of the text, even in moments of extended narration which, unlike the novel's dialogue, do not follow the orthography of the Cuban dialect.

Linda Hutcheon argues that for an adaptation to be successful, it "must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences," each of whom comes with their own expectations and demands.[19] The narrative transpositions which I describe above arguably testify to Chofre's awareness of the multiple audiences who might encounter his work, and specifically of an "unknowing" audience.[20] However, the linguistic and idiomatic transformations that he enacts throughout the novel reveal a concerted effort to "Cubanize" and appropriate Homer's epic that goes beyond mere adaptation. The canto (i.e., chapter) titles are a prominent example. These

feature Cuban colloquialisms and idioms which themselves provide both lively and accurate summaries of the corresponding Homeric book, as can be seen in the following selection:

Canto I: Donde la jodedora Atenata comienza a enredar la pita

In which pain-in-the-ass Atenata begins to stir things up

Canto III: Donde Telesforo vomita y se ensucia en los pantalones

In which Telesforo vomits and dirties his pants

Canto V: Donde a Odileo no lo destimbala un tiburón, de milagro

In which Odileo is not chewed up by a shark, miraculously

Canto XIV: De cuando Odileo pega a fumarse el tabaco por la candela

In which Odileo decides to smoke the cigar by the flame

Canto XVII: Donde Odileo se mete en la boca del caimán y le toca la campanilla

In which Odileo places himself in the mouth of the alligator and touches its little bell[21]

Canto XXII: A cada aguacate le llega su ventolera

Every avocado always gets its blast of wind

Canto XXIV: Donde se acaba la jodedera

In which the screwing around ends

These cantos reflect what Benedetti (1969, 103) considers Chofre's "epigrammatic conciseness" ("su concisión epigramática"). The title of Canto V, for example, is an astute and crisp summary of the ancient epic's fifth book, which narrates the travails of Odysseus at sea against the efforts of Poseidon. The idioms employed give the novel a distinct Cuban flair: e.g., the title of Canto XVII is the Caribbean equivalent of "to place (oneself) in the wolf's mouth" ("meterse en la boca del lobo"), a popular Spanish idiom indicating "to expose oneself to danger," the equivalent of

the English "to put (one's) head in the lion's mouth."[22] The particularities of the words "caimán" (alligator) and "destimbala" (chew up), as well as other expressions such as "enredar la pita" (stir things up) in Canto I, emphasize the lexical richness of Cuban Spanish and demonstrate the manner in which it is now imprinted onto the *Odyssey*.[23] The general informal language manages to be both irreverent and enriching: Chofre aligns Homer with an explicitly brash register, while also foregrounding the distinctive variety of the Cuban dialect. This doubleness can be most clearly seen in Cantos I and XXIV through the emphatic usage of the words "jodedora," as an epithet of Athena, and "jodedera," as metaphor for the entire epic. Both stem from "joder," a verb that in Cuban (and Caribbean) Spanish typically signifies "screwing around in an annoying way," in direct contrast to its connection to sexual intercourse in Spain and elsewhere.[24] As noted previously regarding the moniker Odileo, this list of cantos also illustrates Chofre's alteration of Homeric names: instead of Atenea, Athena is Atenata; Telemachus is Telesforo, rather than Telémaco.[25] In this manner, Chofre playfully "translates" the *Odyssey*, drawing attention to the new voices that can be facilitated by the vernacular. Indeed, Liviette Obando Arce speaks of the two voices, Greek and Cuban, which comprise the text, and which are in continual dialogue with one another.[26] I propose to take Obando Arce's description of the double voices of the text seriously and to read it as Chofre both transforming and exaggerating the oral basis of Homer's own poetry. It is difficult to capture epic rhythms in prose, especially the complex system of epithets and formulae which enabled ancient bards both to compose sequences of hexameters and to communicate qualities swiftly and seamlessly. Despite this difficulty, I would argue that the idiomatic turns employed by Chofre function as the vernacular equivalent to the features of oral composition. Chofre thus posits a relationship between Cuban vernacularity and Homeric

orality. The ambiguity of this relationship and the doubleness which I highlighted above indicate that the dynamics of adaptation operate beyond humorous subversion.

I have been arguing, then, that *La Odilea* engages with the specific complexities of Homeric utterance in a manner that goes far beyond mere caricature or irreverence. This complexity comes explicitly to the fore at the end of the novel when Chofre summons Homer himself. At this point, the novel's various registers appear on simultaneous display, from the idiomatic Spanish of the narrator to the oral dialect of the peasants in the dialogue:

> Una tarde aguachosa y triste, se apareció por el camino un anciano con más barbas que Matusalén y como el relámpago y la lluvia estaban cogiéndose las nalgas hacía rato, un matrimonio que se encontraba a la puerta del bohío viéndolos caer, se apercibieron del caduco, y movidos a compasión, le llamaron.
>
> – Vanga pacá, hombre de dios, que va a coger una pulmonía doble.
>
> – Y que está entripao como si le hubieran dao batea.
>
> Lo entraron, le sacaron la ropa y le hicieron cambiarse en el cuarto. Después, el marido y la mujer se sentaron con él a conversar.
>
> – ¿Cuál es su grasia?
>
> – Me llamo Homero.
>
> – Tiene un nombre bonito.
>
> – Parese ser como de pescao.
>
> – Y tiene familia por acá?
>
> – No precisamente, pero conosco esto como la palma de mi mano, aunque ya hase ni se sabe los años que no vengo por aquí.
>
> – Entonses, debe haber conosido a Odileo, ¿verdá?

– ¡Cómo no!

– ¿Y vivía usté por aquí cuando pasó lo de los querindangos de la mujer? Porque usté sabrá que no aparesieron más nunca.

– Yo les voy a contar, porque yo sí sé lo que pasó.

El anciano echó a vagar su poderosa mirada y entrándose en el pasado, dijo con una sonrisa:

> – "Háblame, Musa, de aquel varón de multiforme ingenio que, después de destruir la sacra ciudad de Troya, anduvo peregrinando larguísimo tiempo, vio las poblaciones y conoció las costumbres de muchos hombres…"

El marido y la mujer se miraron con asombro, y como que el anciano seguía narrándoles su odisea con abstraído gesto, acercóse el hombre a su esposa y, haciéndole un gesto significativo, díjole:

– ¡El pobre viejo está quemao de a viaje![27]

One watery and sad afternoon, an old man with more beard than Methuselah appeared by the path, and since the lightning and the rain were grabbing their butt-cheeks for some time, a married couple, who found themselves by the door of their hut seeing it all fall, saw the old-fashioned man, and moved to compassion, called out to him.

– "Com 'ere, my good man, you'll catch a double pneumonia."

– "And so soaked to the bone, it's as if he got smack'd by a punt."

They brought him in, took off his clothes and made him change in the bedroom. After, the man and wife sat with him to chat.

– "Wha's your grace?"

–"My name is Homer."

– "You have a nice name."

– "It seems a bit fishy."[28]

– "And do you have family 'round here?"

– "Not exactly, but I know this like the palm of my hand, though I don't even know how many years it's been since I come 'round here."

– "Sooo you must have known Odileo, amirite?"

– "But of course!"

– "And did you live 'round here when the whole mess of the lover boys after that woman happened? Because, you know, they never appeared again."

– "I am going to tell you, because I definitely know what happened."

The old man let drift his powerful gaze and, entering the past, said with a smile:

> "Tell me, Muse, of that man of the multiformed genius, who, after destroying the sacred city of Troy, wandered for a long time, saw civilizations and came to know the customs of many men…"

The man and wife looked at each other in wonder, and as the old man continued to tell them his odyssey with an abstract gesture, the man approached his wife, and making a significant gesture said to her:

– "The poor old guy is fried from da journey!"

The narrative continues to be full of local idioms and even indecorous expressions (e.g., the buttocks of the lighting and rain). The orthography of the peasants' speech mimics the Cuban dialect, specifically through the emphasis of the "s" sound (e.g., "pare**s**e" vs. the standard Spanish "pare**c**e," or "enton**s**es" for "enton**c**es"), as well as the omission of the consonant "d" in

the past participle (e.g. "quemao" in lieu of "quemado") or when it appears as a final consonant, resulting in an accented vowel (e.g, "usté" vs. "usted" and "verdá" vs. "verdad"). From the passage it is unclear whether Homer is likewise a local peasant, but the pull of the peasant dialect is so strong that it even affects the bard's speech, which briefly exhibits some of the features above (e.g., "cono**s**co" instead of "cono**z**co" and "ha**s**e" for "ha**c**e"). Amidst such registers which induce an effect of orality in the written text, Chofre inserts a direct quotation from the opening of the Spanish translation of the *Odyssey*.[29] The "proper" Castilian Spanish has an immediate jarring effect, leading the peasants to discount his story, the original *Odyssey*, on account of madness ("el pobre viejo está quemao de a viaje" / "the poor old guy is fried from da journey"). By dismissing the "written" Homer — as can also be seen through the inclusion of the word "odyssey" in lowercase and the resignification of his name as "fishy" ("como de pescao") — Chofre exalts the peasants as the authoritative storytellers, the true bards, an act which further underscores his innovative transformations of language and genre. This clever transposition of Homer — who was discovered in the 20th century to have been performed by illiterate bards — to an exclusive Cuban oral and peasant culture suggests the manner in which Chofre reverses the Homeric Question which hovered over the ancient epics from the 18th century onward, after Friedrich August Wolf argued that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had been composed orally.[30] The comparative research of Milman Parry and Albert Lord into South Slavic epic singers posited that these epics came from a long and established tradition of oral composition and performance.[31] The revelation of an "oral" Homer has since served as inspiration to modern artists.[32] In the same vein, *La Odilea* playfully sets two traditions, which rarely intersect, against one another: the vernacular of Caribbean peasants and Homer's *Odyssey*, experienced in 20th-century Cuba as a formal literary and written tradition typically mediated through Peninsular

Spanish translations from Spain.[33] At the novel's close Chofre thus emerges as a master manipulator who is capable of rerouting ancient epic precisely through the act of retelling or narrating epic, in the same manner as Odysseus in the Homeric epic. Indeed, many readings of the *Odyssey* stress the manner in which its hero is repeatedly presented as a bard-like figure, with a particular ability to enchant (*thelgein*) an audience through his skill in language and manipulation of the narrative.[34] Chofre's novel is thus not only remarkable in its invocation of a deliberate and triumphant orality, but also as a type of "philological" reception, one in which Cuban mannerisms, idioms, and orthography replace Homeric formulae, similes, and speeches.

Through a radical textual and generic realignment of the *Odyssey*, then, Chofre transforms the ancient epic into a novel of Cuban peasants. In an early review of the novel, Mario Benedetti (1969, 103) suggested that *La Odilea* was Homer "passed through Chofre" ("Homero pasado por Chofre"), an act which functions as a healthy blast of fresh air for the reader ("resultará para el lector una saludable ráfaga de aire fresco"). As he elaborates, this feat ultimately revitalizes the original source text:

> *La Odilea*, en la que un viejo mito [*La Odisea*, claro] cargado de prestigios, y a la vez, de la consiguiente retórica acumulada por los siglos, se revitaliza al pasar por el humor y el lenguaje populares.[35]
>
> *La Odilea*, in which an old myth (the *Odyssey*, of course), charged with prestige, and at the same time with the corresponding rhetoric that is accumulated throughout the centuries, is revitalized when it is passed through popular humor and language.

Benedetti's emphasis on the act of "passing" ("pasado" and "al pasar," which I underline above) suggests that Chofre is "translating" the *Odyssey* in a broad sense, evoking the word's roots in

Latin, *translatio*, as a "carrying across."[36] However, even in the narrow sense, translation is not a neutral practice, and always involves more than language, since culture and power are implicated in the act.[37] This is especially the case in the Americas, where translation has been seen as complicit with colonization, highlighted by the work of Eric Cheyfitz as "the central act of European colonization and imperialism."[38] As Benedetti suggests, Chofre's reinvention of Homer through the vernacular and the Cuban *guajiro* experience involves a rebalancing of power dynamics, in which subaltern views are grafted onto a text "charged with prestige" and which wields great cultural capital.[39] The idea of a revitalization through the subaltern at the same time coheres with other 20th century Latin American visions of translation, specifically the vanguardist poetics of translation as textual renewal proposed by Brazilian critic and translator Haroldo de Campos, which he calls "transcreation" (*transcriaçao*).[40] Campos, who translated many European canonical texts including Homer, compares translation to a blood transfusion ("tradução como transfusão. De sangue"), as an act that directly imports fresh new perspectives into the source text.[41] At the same time, he recognizes this as an ambiguous practice, adding that ironically this is also an act of "vampirization," as it transforms the translator into a vampire who is nourished precisely by sucking the blood of the source text ("Com un dente de ironia poderíamos falar de vampirização, pensando agora no nutrimento do tradutor").[42] Elsewhere he describes creative adaptations akin to a "demonic possession" ("possuída de demonismo).[43] Though Campos' ideas speak to the Brazilian metaphor of *antropofagia* or cannibalism initially proposed by Oswald de Andrade,[44] they nonetheless emphasize the creative dimension of translation and its ability to alter the source text, particularly in an unexpected context and by diverse communities. At the same time these notions emphasize the ambiguities involved in the act of translation; as Campos recognizes, these are metaphors that can travel in reverse

directions. *La Odilea* is crucially not a translation of Homer's epic, but the wider imaginaries of translation as transcreation that Campos evokes helps elucidate Chofre's "philological" reception and refiguration of the *Odyssey*. In particular, the ambiguities allow us to ask key questions, such as who benefits from Chofre's "blood transfusion" or "demonic possession"? What is being transfused, and into whom? The instability of these metaphors reflects the instability of Chofe's practices in which what he parodies and what he dignifies is less clear.

II. A Revolutionary Epic and The Repeating *Odyssey* in the Caribbean

Having explored the linguistic strategies by which Chofre reinvents the *Odyssey* and the multifaceted relationship that he establishes with Homer in so doing, I now want to argue that we can only fully understand Chofre's strategies by locating the novel within two concentric circles of context: both within its immediate historical and political environment and within the broader Caribbean region. Contextualizing the novel in this manner not only connects it to the wider political efforts of the Cuban Revolution to "democratize" culture, but it also clarifies the ways in which Chofre deviates from other prominent engagements with ancient Greek literature at the time, especially tragedy. I additionally suggest that an equally productive solution can be found by situating Chofre's novel within the broader poetics of the anglophone and francophone Caribbean.[45] Specifically, I place *La Odilea* alongside the two works which arguably form a Caribbean Homeric "canon": Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Journal of a Homecoming*, 1939), the first text in the region to appropriate key aspects of the *Odyssey* so as to highlight Antillean racial realities, and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), which recasts the classical heroes as St. Lucian fishermen.[46] This wider lens enables us to see the rich and complex

resonances of Homer across the region, and the seminal role of the *Odyssey* in the articulation of multiple Caribbean realities.

A consideration of *La Odilea* in light of other engagements with Greek literature in mid-20th century Cuba is essential. Though Chofre's novel is cited as an example of "escapist" Revolutionary literature – that is, literature that does not contain any overt reference to the Cuban Revolution–[47] it was certainly produced within this context, by an author who was immersed in revolutionary cultural life as a writer of radio and television scripts.[48] Indeed, Chofre's work can be read as another example of the unique afterlife of ancient Greek literature in the late 1950s and 1960s, when Cuban playwrights embraced Greek tragic source texts in order to create hybrid adaptations that cleverly blended Cuban and Hellenic elements.[49] These adaptations not only celebrated the new egalitarian experience ushered in by the Revolution but were themselves also a direct response of Fidel Castro's call to artists to employ new media to articulate the new revolutionary culture society, as I have highlighted elsewhere.[50] Virgilio Piñera, for example, relates how in choosing to "Cubanize" the House of Atreus in *Electra Garrigó*, he sought a more radical mode of reception, that of "systematic rupture" in order to avoid "absolute repetition."[51] This mode involved exposing ancient characters to Cuban *choteo*, the act of parodying the sacred and authoritative.[52] In this respect, the parodic dimensions of *La Odilea* follow in the footsteps of Piñera's seminal play.

However, a brief exploration of the connection between *La Odilea* and the 1961 Literacy Campaign (*Campaña de Alfabetización*) highlights the innovative nature of Chofre's reinvention of ancient Greek literature.[53] This campaign was responsible for eradicating illiteracy across the island, and particularly in the rural countryside; as Antoni Kapcia (2005, 22) writes, Cuba became "a mass reading society for the first time."[54] The Literacy Campaign unleashed tens of

thousands of predominantly urban young Cubans as "alphabetizing brigadiers" (*brigadistas alfabetizadores*) into the countryside (*campo*).[55] One of the key results of the campaign was what Kapcia (2005, 135-6) terms "cultural democratization," a key part of which involved asking Havana elite "to identify with a different cultural community, the Cuban world they had previously ignored, taken for granted, or perhaps theorized, instead of their natural tendency to identify with a wider global community of cultural producers." In other words, this urged Cuban artists and intellectuals to forge an alternative rural imaginary instead of simply continuing to reproduce the elite and the urban. Besides helping eliminate the divisions between social classes, this and other efforts concentrated on providing equal access to education and culture. According to Par Kumaraswami (2016, 48), the bulk of revolutionary cultural policy thus aimed "to democratize particular forms of culture, that is, to make them more accessible to the Cuban people in terms of both production and consumption." Literature, with its connection to elite culture, was given prominent attention in these cultural reforms.[56] It is against this background that we must understand Chofre's *Odilea*. Transforming an ancient epic "charged with prestige" into a novel of *guajiros* served the aims of the two institutional processes which Kapcia and Kumaraswami describe: not only does this act bring an overlooked Cuban community – one furthermore considered to be the nation's backbone – to the fore, but it also produces a highly accessible and local version of a text rarely studied outside the university.[57]

Chofre's act of "democratizing" epic prompts further reflections on the differences between *La Odilea* and the adaptations of Greek tragedy mentioned above. Despite injecting quintessential Cuban elements into ancient source texts, plays such as Piñera's *Electra Garrigó* and José Triana's *Medea en el espejo* (*Medea in the Mirror*), are nonetheless centered on the urban experience of Havana: Piñera's Atreidae are bourgeois Havana residents who live in a

large house with a six-columned veranda, whereas Triana transforms Jason and Medea (who is mixed-race) into lower-class characters who occupy the city's tenement buildings.[58] Though these authors likewise feature local idioms and phrases, none emphasize the Cuban dialect in the manner of Chofre. In these Cuban Greek tragic adaptations, the source texts of Sophocles and Euripides co-exist and mix with local elements, whereas *La Odilea* highlights a tense and ambiguous relationship with the ancient epic through major shifts in genre and heroic focus. *La Odilea* thus does not merely adapt a canonical text; its change of subject, setting, and language results in a palimpsest-like text which, though containing traces of the original, nonetheless emphasizes its novel usage of the original. As my discussion above illustrates, this can be read in two ways: either we understand Chofre's act as an acceptance or even veneration of the authority of Homer's epic, or we read it as a resolute attempt to efface the original by boldly proposing a Cuban equivalent. For the first time, Cuban peasants, characters previously excluded from literature and history (and in fact from literacy itself), are given a voice, but whether they are themselves elevated through the medium of ancient epic or whether the epic itself is demeaned through their inclusion is unclear. If we accept the former, then Chofre's *Odilea* could be considered as an example of what Emily Greenwood (2019, 580) calls "subaltern classics," denoting "an anti- and post-colonial tradition of engaging with the classics in sympathy with the dispossessed, the pre-proletariat, the colonized, and with minority cultures." Indeed, the choice to set ancient epic heroes in the Cuban countryside and the prominence given to the local language illuminates the way in which Chofre reclaims epic. But at the same time the brash elements of *La Odilea* visibly desecrate the *Odyssey*, which now prominently features profanities thanks to Chofre's transformations.[59] *La Odilea* posits a different and far more complex relationship with ancient literature than that found in the adaptations of Piñera and Triana.

This Cuban contextualization, however, only partly explains the implications of transforming Homer into a Cuban peasant. An examination of wider Caribbean poetics is required if we wish to consider the way in which the *Odyssey* resonates across the region. Specifically, it is necessary to clarify the manner in which Chofre could be said to "creolize" Homer. In the anglophone and francophone Caribbean, "creolization" has had a long and productive history as a term which speaks to the region's unique and hybrid diversities, as evidenced by the seminal work of thinkers such as Kamau Brathwaite and Édouard Glissant.[60] When deployed in relation to language, the term can be especially useful, as it denotes a particular tension between oral and written traditions, while also revealing the wider dynamics of colonization, race and linguistic contact which operate across the region and from which these traditions derive. Given its different inflection in Spanish, where *criollo* tends to describe people who consider themselves to be culturally European, the term is not generally applied to Hispanophone contexts.[61] I would nonetheless argue for the value of applying it here as it productively allows us both to align *La Odilea* with other Caribbean engagements with Homer and to examine the manner in which writers "repeat" the *Odyssey* across the 20th century. In focusing on "repetition" I follow in the footsteps of Antonio Benítez-Rojo, who urges in *The Repeating Island* that the Caribbean be conceptualized as a single region – a modern and hybrid space which not only continually repeats itself but is also fundamentally marked by a plantation infrastructure, a violent colonial past, and the sea, all of which themselves are structured around repetition.[62] An examination of these acts of "repetition" is necessary for a more coherent understanding of the import of an ancient epic across a region that is typically fragmented along linguistic and colonial lines. Instead of developing singular and parallel readings of the various

Caribbean *Odysseys*, such a move enables us to see the multiple ways in which this ancient text is invoked across the 20th century in this distinctive region.

Creolization enables us to see the manner in which Chofre, though himself a Spaniard,[63] exalts the Cuban dialect beyond the political and institutional encouragement of the Cuban Revolution. Considered an inferior form of Castilian Spanish, Cuban – as well as Dominican and Puerto Rican – Spanish has historically been demeaned, similar to the manner in which Caribbean creole forms of English and French have been held in contempt as adulterated and derivative forms of the colonial language. Kamau Brathwaite's concept of "nation language" is instructive in illuminating both the wider colonial implications as well as the critical racial and classist dimensions usually attached to such negative perceptions: as he (1993, 260) describes, it is the English "spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadors." He further stresses the unique nature of the "nation language," and the manner in which it deviates from the standard English language: "English it may be in terms of its lexicon, but it is not English in terms of its syntax. And English it certainly is not in terms of its rhythm and timbre, its own sound explosion. In its contours, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, would be English to a greater or lesser degree" (1993, 265). Whereas linguistically Caribbean Spanish is more uniform than the creole languages derived from French and English in the rest of the Antilles,[64] nonetheless the Spanish dialects of the Caribbean find themselves in a similar "diglossic" situation, as the linguist Humberto López Morales indicates:

> son situaciones de diglosia, es decir, de uso discriminado de dos variedades genéticamente emparentadas, la lengua estándar y una criolla procedente de aquella. Una variedad baja, popular, manejada por todos, y otra sobreimpuesta, culta, la alta, a la que

> sólo unos pocos tienen acceso. Esta última es la lengua del poder, la del gobierno, la de las enseñanzas medias y superiores, la de los tribunales, la de la alta cultura, etc. La baja, el criollo, es el vehículo de la comunicación en contextos domésticos.[65]
>
> These reflect a diglossic situation. That is, of the discriminated use of two varieties which are genetically related, the standard language and a creole one which proceeds from it. One low variety, popular, managed by all, and the other one superimposed, learned, high, to which only a few have access. This last one is the language of power, of government, of medium and high learning, of the law courts, of high culture, etc. The lower one, the creole, is the vehicle of communication in domestic contexts.

Given the forces at play between the local and "standard" language, the latter being imposed through colonialism, as well as the submergence and denigration of the local version of the language, he and other linguists thus speak of a Spanish Caribbean "creole" dialect.[66] We may think here of Nigerian novelist Ken Saro-Wiwa's "rotten English," the subtitle of his 1985 novel *Sozaboy*. To write intentionally in the Cuban vernacular is to insist on the inclusion of a colloquial form of speaking that is typically invisible in the written form, where it must always conform and transform into standard Spanish.[67] Recent theories of world literature have begun to pay attention to the manner in which vernaculars plays a crucial role in the emergence of local literary traditions. Alexander Beecroft (2015, 148), for example, suggests that those who write in the vernacular, though addressing a "narrower audience," are nonetheless engaged in a project of constructing "cultural community." Whereas the specific case of the Caribbean requires particular nuance, such a notion accentuates a concerted and conscious effort both to resist marginalization and to inject new voices into the main Spanish literary tradition.

This brief consideration thus allows us to see the broader implications of casting Homeric epic in the Cuban vernacular. In a sense it widens both our geographic and historic perspectives, allowing us to think about the dynamics and "deep time" of the Caribbean,[68] into which European languages were imported in the act of colonization, and the manner in which these colonial languages have evolved in the region through (violent) contact with other voices.[69] Specifically, it allows us to align Chofre with other similar "creole" aspects of both Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* as well as Walcott's *Omeros*, which respectively precede and follow Chofre.[70] This polyphonic and polyglossic dimension of Caribbean creole languages can be most visibly seen in *Omeros*, which takes a more multi-layered approach that reflects the complexities of St. Lucia which received two European languages, French and English.[71] Gregson Davis' recent work on Césaire describes the Martinican's aims to forge a "vulgar eloquence," while also claiming that Walcott was engaged in a parallel project to create "an Anglophone Caribbean pseudo-epic language" one that expressly captures the rhythms of the St. Lucian Creole.[72] Though Césaire's invocation of the *Odyssey* differs from Chofe's and Walcott's more literary projects, particularly as Césaire relies more on the use of Homeric "archetypal motifs" (such as *katabasis*) specifically to explore Black identities,[73] his poem can also be considered as a "creole" project. For all that Césaire eschews Martinican Creole in the *Cahier*, as Derek Walcott writes, Césaire's poem sounds "like a poem written tonally in Creole."[74]

This focus on the "creole" aspects of the texts reveals shared aims, despite their diverging approaches to the *Odyssey*. Firstly, the use and insertion of the vernacular forcefully brings to mind the Caribbean's unique heritage from the outset, giving voice to its multiple violent and opposed histories which created the region's distinctive multiplicities. Through the additional adaptation of an ancient text such as the *Odyssey*, these Caribbean authors additionally mobilize

the cultural prestige of the canonic Western tradition to establish the legitimacy of their respective projects, even as in Chofre's case this prestige is simultaneously transposed into an emphatically provocative form of the vernacular. At the same time, the specific use of this ancient epic forces us to think of the physical trajectories which enabled these adaptations of the *Odyssey* in the first place. Inspired by the Odyssean notion of *nostos*, Césaire writes of his journeys from Martinique to Paris and back, the latter being cast as a *katabasis*.[75] Walcott's migrations took him to Trinidad and the United States, and to other international destinations. Chofre migrated from Spain to Cuba, where he stayed, but *La Odilea* was able to leave the island through Mario Benedetti's sponsorship.[76] As an epic of journeys and the sea, the *Odyssey* obviously speaks to the Caribbean experience. The case of Chofre's *Odilea*, however, makes clear the multiple ways in which this text resonates across the region, revealing through the medium of orality the ancient epic's broader concerns with movement, migration, and multiplicity. Within this context, Chofre challenges us to hear the equivalences between Greek and Cuban. In particular, he demands that we recognize Homer's *outis* (no one) as simultaneously mocked, retained, transformed, and made available to all in a cry of "nicojones."[77]

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[1] In 1949 Chofre emigrated from Spain to Cuba, where he lived until his death. See Domingo Cuadriello 2002 for a brief biography. See also note 63 below.

[2] See, e.g., Stanford 1954, Ricks 1989, Graziosi and Grenwood 2007, Hall 2008, McConnell 2013, Eccleston 2019, and the entries in Part III ("Homer in the World") of Pache 2020. This article was unfortunately written before the publication of Zerba 2021.

[3] See, e.g., Greenwood 2007 and McConnell 2013.

[4] See, e.g., Greenwood 2010, 39: "The reception of the *Odyssey* in anglophone literature in the modern Caribbean is an example of a text that was expropriated by colonial writers to underwrite empire, and has subsequently been revisited and rewritten to undermine empire and its legacies and to revise (perceptions of) the region's history". McConnell (2013, 1) labels them "The *Odysseys* of Postcolonialism". See also Greenwood 2020b. For traces of a colonialist mindset within Homer's *Odyssey,* see Dougherty 2001, 129 n. 28 and Hall 2008, 75-9; cf. Wilson 2017b, 88.

[5] The date of composition is uncertain. The first printed version is dated 1968 but the book received an honorary mention in the 1966 *Casa de las Américas* literary prize.

[6] Previous work label *La Odilea* as a simple "parody" of Homer or identify it as a "humorous" novel ("novela humorística", to quote Fornet 1994, 72): Fornet 1994, Muñoz 2010, Obando Arce 2016, Robles Mohs 2017, Moreno 2018, Losada García 2019, and Alonso Alum 2020. With the notable exception of Obando Arce 2016, these tend not to engage with theories of parody nor their lengthy histories, for which see, e.g., Genette 1997, Rose 1993, and Dentith 2000. Likewise, they do not discuss ancient texts which parody Homeric epic such as *Batrachomyomachia* and Lucian's dialogues. In general, *La Odilea* is absent from general considerations of Cuban engagements with ancient Greek tragedy, e.g. Miranda Cancela 2006 and 2020, or even from examinations of parody in Hispanic-American novels, e.g. Sklodowska 1991.

[7] See Boitani (1994, 59-62) on Columbus' complex associations with Ulysses (via Dante and Tasso). These links stemmed from the reception of his journal entries which detailed the Americas as a *nova terra* full of marvels, e.g., when Columbus confused manatees for sirens when sailing off the coast of Hispaniola (present-day Dominican Republic and Haiti) on 9th

January 1493 (in Markham 2010, 154). For the multiple Neo-Latin epics devoted to Columbus, some of which evoke the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, see the overview by Hofmann 1994. On the Caribbean as the "New World Mediterranean" (a phrase coined by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier), see Dash 1998, 82-106 and Greenwood 2010, 4-8.

[8] I take this phrase from the back cover of the 1968 edition (= Chofre 1968): "Por primera vez se transformó **en cubano**, en el lenguaje popular y campesino, uno de los mitos de la cultura universal: *La Odisea* de Homero." ("For the first time one of the myths of universal culture, Homer's *Odyssey*, was transformed **into Cuban**, into the popular and peasant language"; my emphasis). All translations from Spanish are mine.

[9] An early interview reveals Chofre's methods of composition. According to López Morales (1969, 179), Chofre would obsessively read and reread the Spanish translation of the *Odyssey,* after which he would close the book until he had absorbed its message, and finally he would "launch himself to write it in his own way" ("se lanzaba a escribirlo de su propia manera").

[10] See my earlier discussion (Andújar 2015, 368) of the *décima* as "the sung vernacular mode most readily available to the Cuban masses"; cf. ibid. 366 and 368, n. 15 and 16.

[11] Though in the novel it appears as "nicojones" this expression is typically written as two words "ni cojones". Losada García (2019, 299) considers Chofre's translation of *outis* into *nicojones* to be "the most Cuban adaptation" ("cubanísima adaptación"). Cf. Laguna (2017, 66), who cites Fidel Castro's usage of this word in response to the notorious 2003 prank call to the Cuban leader by Miami radio hosts Enrique Santos and Joe Ferrero.

[12] On ancient Greek encounters with the dead and necromancy, see Johnston 1999 and Ogden 2001, respectively.

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[13] Chofre 1968, 98 = Chofre 1974, 116. Throughout I refer to the two printed editions of *La Odilea*: the 1968 first edition printed in Havana (and released in subsequent editions, most recently 1994 by Editorial letras cubanas) and the 1974 printing in Buenos Aires, part of the series edited by Mario Benedetti, Colección ESTA AMERICA (The series "this America").

[14] See, e.g., Matibag 1996 and Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2011, 33-87. Chofre may in fact be exploiting an established connection between ancient Greek religion and Santería, as the *orishas* (deities) of the Santería pantheon have been compared to, and even aligned with, Greek and Roman gods since the seminal work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz; see, e.g., Matibag 1996, 228, Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2011, 35 and 42. By contrast, in *Omeros*, Walcott's protagonist Achille experiences, as a result of a severe sunstroke, a hallucinatory journey to Africa, where he meets the shades of his ancestors, on which see Davis 2007, 194-5 and Nayak 2014. Cf. Orpheus' ability to descend in the underworld by means of Candomblé (another Afro-Atlantic religion like Santería) in the 1959 film *Black Orpheus*.

[15] This crucial meeting happens not in Canto VI but in Canto VII, only one of a handful instances where Chofre deviates from the Homeric structure. This is due to the fact that the entirety of Canto VI "Donde Odileo se la pasa durmiendo" ("In which Odileo stays asleep") consists of a single sentence: "in this canto nothing happens, but the one that follows is a hot mess" ("en este canto no pasa nada, pero el otro viene que jode"); Chofre 1968, 58 = Chofre 1974, 69.

[16] Chofre 1968, 59-60 = Chofre 1974, 71-2.

[17] *La Odilea* has never been translated. I have done my best to translate these as accurately as possible but in some cases it is impossible to find an appropriate approximation in English. Guaracha is a type of Cuban tropical music; the singer Celía Cruz is one of the most famous *guaracheras*.

[18] On the suppression of women's voices in ancient epic, see, e.g. Katz 1991, Felson-Rubin 1994, and Doherty 1995. On the ways in which Homeric epics have been rewritten by 20th and 21st century female writers (in many cases precisely to include those absent voices), see Cox and Theodorakopoulos 2019. Cf. Wilson 2017a, 37-48 ("Goddesses, Wives, Princesses, and Slave Girls").

[19] Hutcheon 2006, 128. Her view coheres with work on reception theory that recognizes the receiving audience's role in determining meaning through their "horizon of expectation", as proposed by Hans Robert Jauss.

[20] Arguably in a Caribbean context "knowing" audiences are a tiny minority. As Kamau Brathwaite (1993, 265) writes, "the hurricane does not roar in pentameters", a claim which articulates the incommensurability between European and Caribbean cultural horizons.

[21] I.e., the uvula.

[22] Cf. the entry for "boca de lobo" ("wolf's mouth") under "boca" in the open-access *Diccionario de la lengua española* published by the Real Academia Española: https://dle.rae.es/boca (accessed 28 February 2021). On the title of canto XXII, Obando Arce (2016, 6) explains: "'A cada aguacate le llega su ventolera', dicho cubano que significa que cada persona, en algún momento, recibe lo que merece." ("'Every avocado always gets a blast of wind', a Cuban saying which means that every person, at some moment receives what she deserves").

[23] On the richness of Cuban Spanish due to its multiple ancestries (stemming from various African, European and Indigenous peoples), see López Morales 1970 and 1992.

[24] Cf. entries 1 and 5 for "joder" in the *Diccionario de la lengua española*: https://dle.rae.es/joder?m=form (accessed 28 February 2021)

[25] Throughout the novel, many characters' names are shortened to reflect Cuban (and Caribbean) practice, e.g., Odileo is also addressed as Dileo or Odi and Telesforo as Forito. On names in *La Odilea*, see Robles Mohns (2017), who sees the novel's complex onomastics as a reflection of its "carnivalesque" mode. In the novel, epithets are not as common as might be expected, but are potent when used, e.g. "la jodedora Atenata", cited above, or Zeulorio "el que más mea" ("he who pees the most"). For a comparative study of epithets in the *Odyssey* and *La Odilea*, see Alonso Alum 2020, 101-3.

[26] Obando Arce 2016, 6: "En este sentido, se ponderan las dos voces que conforman el texto: una no cancela, silencia u oculta a la otra, sino que están en contracanto o contrapunto: un diálogo entre culturas" ("in this sense, we can think of the two voices which comprise the text: one does not cancel, silence or hide the other, rather they are in countersong or counterpoint: a dialogue between cultures").

[27] Chofre 1968: 224-5 = Chofre 1974: 259-60. For the reader's ease, I have underlined places where the orthography follows that of the dialect and not of standard Spanish, some of which I discuss below.

[28] Here, the peasants draw attention to the fact that Homer's name in Spanish, "Homero", contains the word "mero", the grouper fish commonly found in the Caribbean Sea, which is furthermore emphasized through the natural elision in "Me llamo Homero" caused by the silent H. Through this example, Chofre points to the potential of ancient epic to be reappropriated and subverted, even before it is translated. Arguably this act of "fishy" resignification anticipates Derek Walcott's creole etymologizing of Homer's name as *O-mer-os*; see Greenwood 2020a, 34-5.

[29] This is the 1910 translation by famed Spanish Professor of Greek Luis Segalá y Estalella, originally published in Barcelona, and available open-access online: https://es.wikisource.org/wiki/La_Odisea_(Luis_Segalá_y_Estalella) (accessed 28 February 2021).

[30] Wolf 1985. For an overview of the Homeric question, see Turner 1996 and Fowler 2004.

[31] Parry 1971, developed by Lord (1995 and 2000).

[32] Harrop 2018, Macintosh and McConnell 2020, 37-58.

[33] Cuban intellectual Laura Mestre Hevia (1867-1944) previously attempted translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into Spanish (the first woman to do so), but because of her gender she faced considerable difficulties in publishing them; only fragments were published. See Miranda Cancela 2001, 2012a and 2012b; Tabío 2012. On translations of Homer in Latin America see Crespo and Piqué 2012.

[34] E.g. Goldhill 1991, 65-8; Murnaghan 2011, 124-130; Bakker 2013, 5-12. See also the simile in *Odyssey* 21.406-9 which directly equates Odysseus' stringing of the bow to the stringing of a lyre.

[35] Benedetti 1969, 103.

[36] An alternative translation of this could emphasize the alimentary and scatological hints in Benedetti's suggestion of Homer "passed through Chofre" resulting in a "healthy blast of air". That is, rendering "pasado por" as "ingested", i.e., Chofre "ingesting" and then "passing" Homer.

[37] Modern translations of the *Odyssey* have involved uncritical views of translation, such as Shewring 1980. In his (ibid.) overview of English translations of the *Odyssey*, though he acknowledges the difficulties of rendering the Greek into a modern language (whether in verse or

prose), Shewring adopts translation practices which foreground the Homeric original and the invisibility of the translator. The recent work of Wilson (2017b, esp. 86-91, and 2019) has provided important and timely correctives to such outdated views, taking on board the insights of translation studies which regard translation as an act of interpretation, but also pointing out the some of the work that remains to be done, e.g., on feminist and ethical translations (Wilson 2019).

[38] Cheyfitz 1991, 104. On the violence of translation as the vehicle through which "Third World" cultures are commodified and taken to the West, see Dingwaney and Maier 1995.

[39] Instructive here is the work of Guillory (1993) who, in elaborating on the meaning of "cultural capital" for a literary canon, draws our attention away from notions based solely on the representational function of literature, and instead towards the networks and places which inform the distribution and creation of the literary canon.

[40] See Tápia and Nóbrega 2013 and Gessner 2016.

[41] Cited in Tápia and Nóbrega 2013, 215.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Campos (2005, 209) calls this "transluciferation" (*transluciferação*). This was developed in direct response to Walter Benjamin's conception of the "angelical" function of translation; see Campos and Wilder 1982.

[44] Vieira 1999, 96-7. Andújar and Nikoloutsos (2020, 6-7) outline some of the ways in which Andrade's *antropofagia* has been mobilized in classical reception.

[45] Andújar and Nikoloutsos (2020, 5) provide a brief overview of differences in the reception of Greco-Roman antiquity in the various sub-regions of the Caribbean.

[46] On Césaire, see, e.g., Davis 1997a, 20-61, 2008, 2016 and M^c^Connell 2013, 39-70. On Walcott, Davis 1997b, Farrell 1999, Greenwood 2010, M^c^Connell 2013, 107-154, and Greenwood 2020a. Davis 2007 discusses both.

[47] Menton (1975, 98) defines "escapist" in specific terms, as excluding "any possible reference to the Revolution".

[48] According to Domingo Cuadriello (2002), after working in a ranch in Camagüey as an agricultural worker, Chofre moved to Havana, where he was active in the Revolutionary media, including television, Radio Progreso, and the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* (Rebel Youth).

[49] See, e.g., Miranda Cancela 2006, Andújar 2015, Nikoloutsos 2015, Bromberg 2020.

[50] Andújar 2015, esp. 372-4. See also Gordon-Nesbitt 2015.

[51] Cited in Andújar 2015, 370-1.

[52] Ibid. On choteo see Mañach 1969.

[53] *La Odilea's* unknown date of composition makes it difficult to establish a solid connection with the Literacy Campaign; see note 5 above.

[54] See also Kumaraswami 2016, 9 who cites UNESCO data reporting that illiteracy was reduced from 23% to 2%.

[55] Kapcia 2005, 119-20.

[56] Kumaraswami 2016, 48. Kumaraswami and Kapcia (2012, 76) describe the Literacy Campaign as "the initiative which most changed the conditions, opportunities – and also responsibilities – attached to literature."

[57] On the relative inaccessibility of Homer at the time, see Miranda Cancela 2012a and 2012b.

[58] See Piñera 2008, 180 and Nikoloutsos 2015, 334.

[59] I do not know whether Chofre was inspired by James Joyce's *Ulysses*, notorious for its profanities and obscenities. Fiddian (1982, 85) discusses a famous debate on *Ulysses* – specifically on its influence on the novel *Rayuela* by Argentine writer Julio Cortázar – held in Cuba in 1968 involving prominent intellectuals José Lezama Lima and Roberto Fernández Retamar, which suggests that Joyce's novel was well known among educated circles.

[60] E.g. Brathwaite 1971 and 1974 (cf. Richards 2002); Glissant 1999a (where *Antillanité*, i.e., "Caribbeanness" is the focus) and 1999b, 30; Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1993. See also Shepherd and Richards 2002.

[61] Mazzotti 2015 provides a summary; cf. Murdoch 2015 on the term in the Caribbean context. It is important, however, to note that in the1960s Cuban intellectuals, most prominently Roberto Fernández Retamar, began to find great value and resonance in the work of Frantz Fanon; see, e.g., Fernández Retamar 1965. These and other views of Cuban concerns and realities (e.g., Fernández Retamar 1967) would later feed into his influential *Caliban* (1971), which would mobilize Shakespeare's Caliban as a symbol for Cuba.

[62] Benítez-Rojo 1996.

[63] Chofre is from Valencia, a region in which Valencian is spoken instead of Castilian Spanish. The language was suppressed during Francisco Franco's dictatorship, when Chofre migrated to Cuba. The reason behind Chofre's emigration from Spain is not clear but accounts of Valencia under Franco stress the manner in which both the local industry and agricultural sector suffered under the dictator; see, e.g., Palacio Lis and Ruiz Rodrigo 1993, 12.

[64] López Morales (1992, 23 -5) explains the manner in which Caribbean Spanish differs from the Creole languages derived from French and English in the rest of the Antilles.

[65] López Morales 1992, 25-6.

[66] López Morales (1992, 32) discusses "the dialectal Caribbean zone" ("La zona dialectal caribeña"). Cf. Davis 2016, 458 who discusses the diglossia of Martinican speech.

[67] Another notable Cuban novel written in the vernacular, Guillermo Cabrera Infante's 1967 *Tres Tristes Tigres* (*Three Sad Tigers*), opens with a "warning" ("advertencia") to the reader that the novel is written in "Cuban", which tends to be "a secret language" ("un idioma secreto"); Cabrera Infante 2016, 13. The novel likewise engages with a classical text, Petronius' *Satyricon*, as in an interview Cabrera Infante revealed that the novel is "a failed translation of the *Satyricon*" ("una traducción fallida del *Satiricón*"); Bensoussan 1970, 4. On the notion of failed or "mistranslation" see Bellei 2020.

[68] Dimock 2001, Butler 2016.

[69] Indeed these are contact languages which changed precisely after mixing with West African languages; Cruse 2015, 2.

[70] I am not suggesting a direct influence in any direction. Chofre may have been aware of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, which was published in Cuba in 1942 as *Retorno al país natal* in a translation by Lydia Cabrera, an edition which was additionally illustrated by the eminent Cuban artist Wifredo Lam; Watts 2000, 32-4. Alonso Estenoz's (2017) study on Jorge Luis Borges' reception in Cuba also suggests that the Argentine writer was unlikely to have been an influence on Chofre. He (ibid.) notes both the general scarcity of Borges' works before 1959, and manner in which he was excluded from the Cuban literary canon subsequently as a result of his support of the Bay of Pigs invasion; this exclusion lasted until the late 1980s.

[71] Neumann 2020 offers a recent consideration of the "vernacular worlds" in Walcott's poetry. On the polyglossia of *Omeros* see also Farrell 1999, 285.

[72] Davis 2016, 457.

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[73] Davis 2007, 207.

[74] Cited in Noël-Ferdinand 2014, 113-4. However, McConnell (2013, 56-7) notes that Creolists such as Raphaël Confiant accuse Césaire of "creolophobism"; cf. Noël-Ferdinand 2014, 113 n. 5.

[75] On the ways in which Césaire's *Cahier* represents multiple journeys via the Odyssean motif of the sea-voyage, see McConnell 2013, 66. On the paradigm of *katabasis* see Davis 2007.

[76] Benedetti (1969, 9) mentions that in both 1966 and 1967 he was one of the judges of the Casa de las Américas literary prize; this is how he first encountered Chofre's *Odilea*.

[77] I am grateful to the journal's two anonymous readers, as well as to Elena Giusti, Emily Greenwood, Justine McConnell, and Joe Moshenska, whose suggestions improved this article. Select portions of this paper were presented in Bogotá, Cambridge (MA), Havana, London, and Oxford; I would like to thank those audiences for their useful feedback which helped shape this article. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Jorge Fornet, who first drew my attention to Chofre's extraordinary novel during a 2016 visit to Casa de las Américas.