

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA,
AND THE ENIGMA OF IDENTITY

In 2016, one year after the premiere of the musical *Hamilton* at the Public Theater, Lin-Manuel Miranda was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. *Hamilton* was playing on Broadway in 2017, the centennial year of the publication of *Al Que Quiere* (1917), the first important book of poetry by William Carlos Williams, who was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1963 for his last collection of poems, *Pictures from Breughel and Other Poems* (1961). Besides being the first author of Puerto Rican descent to receive this award, also little known, Williams was Miranda's precursor as playwright and not just owing to their ethnic backgrounds.

Miranda's musical is based on the Alexander Hamilton portrayed in Ron Chernow's biography *Alexander Hamilton* (2004), which interprets Hamilton as a culturally marginalized man not justly recognized as a writer and thinker. Eight decades earlier, Williams had written the never-staged libretto for a grand opera in three acts titled *The First President* (published in 1936), portraying a humanized, robust and loving George Washington. Williams' motive for dramatizing a historical figure foreshadowed the reason Miranda gave *The New York Times* why he wrote *Hamilton*: "to galvanize us into an understanding of who we are today."

In 1950 Williams also wrote *Tituba's Children*, a dramatization of a theatrical metaphor that intersperses the communist-hunting hearings of Senator Joseph McCarthy with the colonial-era Salem witch trials. Tituba, a slave from the West Indies (in literary history she evolves from Caribbean Indian to African), was accused of teaching witchcraft to young white youth in her

charge. Not a musical but with verse dialogue, in this drama written nine years after Williams' first visit to Puerto Rico in 1941, the pivotal year on whose influence I will elaborate later, Williams consciously celebrated Tituba as another national heritage from his mother's Caribbean.

Tituba was accused of having highjacked the souls of colonial youth in her charge with her African witchcraft. In other words, Tituba sowed the impure spirit that Williams understood as quintessentially American, sowing as well the impure nation made up of *Tituba's Children*. This recognition of his Caribbean lineage makes Williams a precursor of Miranda if we understand that he wrote *Hamilton* identifying with the bastard son from the Caribbean island of Nevis whose social impurity made him another emblem of the cultural marginalization that as Puerto Rican Miranda shares with other minorities.

Williams is also a precursor as a writer who foreshadowed multiculturalism. Today's multiculturalism recognizes that the country may have been envisioned monoracial but prospered because it exploited its heterogeneity. The final de facto product is a multicultural and multiracial country, this problematic history patriotically corrected with redacted traditional history of The American Story, a narrative of the country as immutable and white. In challenging that tradition, Williams foreshadowed Miranda. Inspired by today's multiculturalism, Miranda wrote about the American Revolution reimagined as a multiracial event.

Finally, Miranda also invokes Williams in subtextually announcing that the real struggle is to reclaim the national narrative, the metaphorical wider warning of Hamilton's character in the closing song about himself, "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story." Williams had

questioned the traditional American Story that starts with the Puritans¹⁰⁰ by giving the nation's history a truer American reading in the essays of *In the American Grain* (1925).

Understandably Miranda would not think of Williams as precursor, either as Puerto Rican or as playwright. Williams did not resonate strongly enough as either Puerto Rican or playwright for Miranda to have made the connection. When Miranda was a college student in the late 1990s, despite the release in 1994 of my *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams*, Williams was still known only as an American poet with, except for the acknowledgment of his mother's being from Puerto Rico, canonical readings did not trace any substantive influence or import that he attributed to his Puerto Rican background. After all, as Wallace Steven's called him, he was "the America of poets." Even after my book's publication, American and island intellectuals resisting giving credence to my ascribing a Puerto Rican literary and cultural significance, a best toned down to an autobiographical curiosity.

And even if Williams had been recognized as Puerto Rican, Miranda would doubtfully have recognized Williams as a writing precursor because even though Miranda personally identifies as Puerto Rican, he does not create as a Puerto Rican playwright, writing as a generic Latino American reminiscent of Borges' duplicity in "Borges and I." Williams performed similar split in creating in two voices, Bill's in direct language and Carlos' in baroque encoding. But, if one were to compare them directly, on this question of their personal and writer's cultural identity the two sharply diverge.

Miranda personally identifies as Puerto Rican while writing as a Latino that, being American, has nothing to do with his island-centric Puerto Ricanness. Williams never identified

100 Whose exclusivity, according to Williams, "had nothing to do"—from his bilingual "no tenían nada que ver"—with the true inclusive idea of America.

as Puerto Rican while his work that contemplates his mother, unbeknownst to him, actually invoked Puerto Rican precursors and aligned with contemporaneous island writings. Compared, Williams and Miranda offer contrasting paradigms of that subjectivity that we call an identity, a thesis that behooves first distinguishing the profoundly different role of Puerto Rican consciousness in the life and work of Williams and Miranda.

Williams' mother Elena Hoheb was born in Mayagüez. She and her brother Carlos were orphaned at a young age and later Carlos, a doctor who practiced in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. Carlos financed Elena's art studies in France until a Dominican political crisis ruined him. Elena had to leave her studies, the central tragedy of her life, and return to Santo Domingo where she felt compelled to marry Carlos' English friend, William George Williams. They moved to New York, married, and ended up living in Rutherford, New Jersey, where William Carlos Williams was born in 1883. Elena lived unhappily for the rest of her life, not having married for love and surrounded by the condescension of people unable to appreciate her Hispanic and French refinement.

Williams' father, William George was indeed born in England, as traditional critics enthusiastically underscore, but at the age of five, fleeing the consequences of a scandal that Grandma Welcome never disclosed, she took William George to the island of St. Thomas, where she had hoped to marry an English resident of that island. A changed destiny led to William George's growing up in the Dominican Republic, where he became bilingual and a Hispanophile. William Carlos did not specify, but his father's being more literary and more the Hispanophile than the Frenchified Elena, he was probably the parent who read him the classic

Spanish poets of the baroque Golden Age, affixing Góngora and Quevedo alongside Shakespeare on Williams' mental bookshelf. Both parents chose to reject U.S. citizenship, a decision that pained Williams deeply although, owing to the devotion he had for Elena, he did not follow the pattern of sons of European immigrants, who Americanized, shed their parents' past.

Instead he tried to sustain a stasis between his Bill persona and his Carlos persona, preserving his son's devotion yet determined to be recognized as an American poet. Ezra Pound's quip that he was a "foreigner" because he grew up in a Spanish-speaking home was emblematic of the challenge to be recognized as an American poet. With that motive he reread American history, questioning the presumably truer American lineage of Pound, who condescended to him, and in that inquiry he discovered a new importance in his Hispanic roots. Williams was not a Catholic, but he recognized that it was Spanish Catholicism that sowed the truer American hemispheric disposition to inclusion, using the popular euphemism that implied race, its "mingling spirit."

Williams reminded that Spanish priests came to "lay hands," baptize, and fulfill their duty to incorporate the native soul into the Church. If the "squeamish" Puritan came expressly not to touch the native, the Spanish "married America," sexual relations that the English condemned as bestiality. For these reasons, according to Williams, contrary to the patriotic mythology of The American Story, the Puritans "had nothing to do" with America and it was the Spaniards who had earlier sown the essentially American "mingling spirit" that he inherited precisely because his mother was Puerto Rican.¹⁰¹

101 A romanticization of the Conquest indeed but, as Frank Tennenbaum, would demonstrate over two decades later in *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (1945)– making no reference to Williams– the profound contrast between slavery practiced under Catholicism and Protestantism.

Armed with that confidence, Williams launched a personal war against the traditional American culture that threatened to marginalize him as it had done to Elena, when they embodied the truest American spirit. Traditional America had perpetuated itself under the illusion of being an outer European province, the America of a falsely American tradition, which should wane with modernity. Of course, both his argument for the origin of the true American spirit and his effort to establish his own American authenticity were consequences of his always keeping in mind the Hispanic roots that nourished him by way of his mother and Puerto Rico.

But his was a rocky romanticization of those Puerto Rican roots as it also depended on Elena's unreliable narration. Like Blanche Dubois living in her aristocratic Southern past in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Elena escaped from her sad American life to memories of an idealized Puerto Rico, presumably more cultured and implicitly also far from her son, who was more crudely American. In reality, Puerto Rico was the island to where she would never bring herself to return. If Elena felt anything of the patriotism that burgeoned on the island in the 19th century, she did not express it. Williams surely heard those feelings expressed by the family friend, Dr. Julio José Henna, an associate of the nineteenth-century independence advocate Ramón Emeterio Betances, whose influence must be conjured from Williams devoting a chapter to him in *The Autobiography*.

Williams was fifteen years old when U.S. troops occupied the island in 1898. Williams wrote, decided to forget her island as if it had been desecrated. Williams mentions Puerto Rico in passing in *The Autobiography* (1951) in the context of visiting or locating other relatives, notably excluding his two visits to the island. He did mention them to biographer Paul Mariani.¹⁰² He

¹⁰² William Carlos Williams: *A New World Naked*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990)

explained that he accepted the first invitation, in 1941, to the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras campus, because he was curious about his roots and the second, in 195X, to read at the University's campus at Elena's Mayaguez out of an interest in gathering more material for *Yes, Mrs. Williams*. One has to deduce that the second visit was really a consequence of his 1941 trip, which, from all evidence, changed the Puerto Rico that he had only known from Elena's memories, the visit during which Puerto Rico became a literary reality.

In 1941 Williams was invited to speak at a conference of Americas writers held at the Río Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico and accepted the invitation because, according to his explanation to Mariani, he was curious about his roots. His talk argued that the U.S. less like England and more like Spain in being a fusion of cultures and peoples (Mariani, 446). But, one key moment of this trip, absent from Mariani's biography but reported in San Juan newspapers, was when he was introduced to Puerto Rico's most renowned poet, Luis Palés Matos and received a copy of his collection of poems *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (*Tomtom of Kinkhead and Black Things*, 1937),

The Spanish Civil War had begun in 1936, impacting also Latin America. In Puerto Rico, the war reinforced the already active *hispanismo* consciousness that had been counteracting Anglo-Americanization, and the exile in Puerto Rico of notable Spanish artists and intellectuals reinforced that consciousness, making Puerto Rico a showcase of Hispanic culture, peaking in 1956 when world-acclaimed cellist Pablo Casals was invited to found the Festival Casals de Puerto Rico and in the same year the by-then island resident, the same year that the ailing poet Juan Ramón Jiménez, now a resident of his wife's place of birth, was awarded the Nobel Prize,

which the president of the University of Puerto Rico received in his name.

Tellingly, Williams makes no mention of Jiménez, a lyrical purist the antithesis of Luis Palés Matos, born in 1898 and who grew up not in patrician San Juan but in the heavily African coast. Blond and blue-eyed, growing in the care of black women, surrounded by Afro Puerto Rican music and ceremonies, early on he began writing poems with African imagery influenced by Vachel Lindsay's white-man's perception of Africa, his experimentation with exotic African and local negritude imagery at times clumsily poeticized *criollo* racist irony.

But in those playful and naively racist beginnings Palés discovered the Afro-Caribbean identity that his people had historically denied and were then denying during that era of nostalgia for its Spanish past to counter Anglo-Saxon colonization. Right-wing critics dismissed his racial adulteration of the traditional white *criollo* vision and left-wing critics condemned him as racist because of his exaggeratedly sexual representations of blackness, actually a celebration of Caribbean vitality against its Western decline.

Palés was indeed guilty of romanticizing the black man as a noble savage, but, at the same time was breaking away from the *criollo* culture that still clung to Spanish culture stifling Puerto Rico's true, Afro-Hispanic identity, what he called Afro-Antillean. Black sensuality redeemed his *criollo* people hollowed out of spirit, dying "of nothing." His expression of love for black woman's beauty was not solely an erotic impulse but a recognition of the African spirits inherited through her in the Caribbean, making the mulatta symbol of island Afro-Hispanic mixture.

Williams patently digested *Tuntún de Pasa y Grifería* in which he recognized a kinship that he himself had expressed long before they met. Nine years before Williams read Palés'

celebration of black woman's beauty, he had written "The Colored Girls of Passernack" (1932):

"I have had my breath taken away by women of color that no white woman equals for me."

Moreover, Palés was a baroque poet as was Carlos in code, both descendants of the poet

Williams called "the Man," Góngora. And to seal matters, Palés also wrote formal poems but in

spoken language, "en Boricua,"—the colloquial way of saying "in Puerto Rican speech"—the

equivalent of Bill's giving prestige to the American Idiom.

In sum, Williams discovered a brother, an addition to what he ambiguously called, always in quotation marks, his "line," which began with Góngora, included Quevedo, Lorca and Neruda, and now Palés Matos, whom he adopted as one more of "Elena's sons." That metaphor was grounded in reality: Elena was the daughter of his maternal grandmother, a racially mixed woman from Martinique who married his Dutch maternal grandfather, thus embodying the Afro-Antillean heritage that Palés celebrated.

His reaction to reading *Tuntún* also behooves a rereading of poems written as a young man about Elena's idiosyncrasies. In retrospect those were the of an island *criollo* consciousness, his criticism of her criollo psyche coinciding with those of Luis Palés Matos and other Puerto Rican writers. Notable is his quarrel with Elena's propensity to escape, dodge crude reality:

Ah, Madam, what good are your thoughts

romantic but true

beside this gaiety of the sun

and that huge appetite?

--"Brilliant Sad Sun"

Palés satirized that propensity: "only sometimes Don Quijote/ being daft and scatterbrained,/of your Maritornes whoring/constructs a Dulcinea." Essayist Antonio S. Pedreira had summarized that *criollo* defect in the first sentence of the preface to his classic essay on island psychology, *Insularismo* (1934): "These words will lack that admiring tone that our complacency has created to measure our reality." Without knowing it, Williams's criticized Elena's proclivity to live in *sueños* in tune with Palés' Afro-Antillean antipoetry rattling *criollo* escapism of the island's defining Afro-Hispanic heritage.

Shortly after returning to New Jersey, he published his translation of Palés' "Preludio en Boricua" with a praising introduction, and subsequently wrote poems and stanzas imitative of Palés' poetry, an imitation I demonstrate in detail in my book. But the literary impact of *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* does not stop at a few poems and a translation. In that collection in which Palés celebrates the African spirits that swarm the geography that informed him, geography as shaping the man, that idea served Williams in advancing the writing of his poem about "a man as a city." To what extent he had already worked on *Paterson* is unknown, but interviewed by critic Edith Heal, Williams claimed that he was looking for a "scheme" to begin the poem "Paterson," and came upon it "in 1941" (Mariani, 445). In the first pages, verses on African women on the cover of *National Geographic*, inspire him to imitate the rhythm two of Palés' most iconic lines.

Tuntún also made Puerto Rico a more substantive heritage than the island presented Elena's sentimental reminiscences. No longer just an emblem of his Spanish roots, Puerto Rico acquired a Caribbean specificity. For that reason, it can also be deduced that as a consequence of

his reading *Tuntún* he also came up with the necessary "scheme" to finally produce the promised book about his mother, *Yes, Mrs. Williams*. Put off for decades, originally intended as a biography, it ended up being a celebration of Elena as the embodiment of the Caribbean, an adaptation of the Palesian metaphor of the turbulent mulatta.

In other words, Williams discovered, in addition to being part of his personal biography, also specifically Puerto Rican were his literary Spanish-language roots. But several reasons can explain why, if he boasted of the influence of Góngora and Quevedo, he did not divulge the literary influence of his Puerto Rican roots. One reason was that it was his pattern to conceal sources: "Let them write what they may and/perfect it as they can they will never/come to the secret of that form."¹⁰³ The other would not have been because "Puerto Rican" was not prestigious, an anachronistic application of today's biases that would not have applied to "Spanish" Puerto Rico, then. Rather, I posit because this influence was not of remote, vague roots but of his immediate identity that would confuse his established American identity as poet.

Consequently, the 1941 experience changed him privately, leaving him, one must deduce, conflicted. He had been invited to that 1941 conference in recognition of his achievement as American poet, of course, but also because the island governor's then-wife, the poet Muna Lee, recognized his being "a Puerto Rican poet," and also as he had already demonstrated in *In the American Grain*, because of his publicly expressed Hispanic consciousness. Hispanic prestige had been defended by the Transcendentalists against the populist bigotry underpinning the war with Mexico. More recently it was boosted by F.D. R.'s Good Neighbor Policy (1933). Popular ethnic xenophobia always existed as the Williams family and notably Elena discovered but also

103 "The Cure," in *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, Vols. II* (New York: New Directions, 1986),

among the learned a modicum of Hispanic prestige, what empowered Williams, honoring Elena, in keep the Carlos in his name as a poet and title a book *Al Que Quiere*.

That Hispanic prestige also benefitted a small island migration that began arriving in New York after Puerto Rico was extended U.S. citizenship in 1917, a community of predominantly white *criollos* that became part of the then-monolithically understood Spanish community expanded by the Spanish immigration that had begun in 1880 and would further grow owing to conflicts that culminated in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Williams openly identified with that community, supporting the Republic and publishing translations of Spanish poets. He also kept in touch with the writers and intellectuals of that composite "Spanish" community who were Puerto Rican.

One conduit to that community was the family friend Julio José Henna, a sure recommendation to his medical studies, and founder of the French Hospital that later hired him. His membership in that community was what led him to Dragon Press, run by the translator and Hispanist literary critic Angel Flores, who published Williams' first book of short stories, *The Knife of the Times and Other Stories* (1932). In other words, prior to 1941 Williams's idea of his Puerto Rican heritage happened to coincide with the prewar migration's Hispanist *criollo* consciousness, not the Puerto Rican consciousness he would have after returning in 1941.

But if his great admiration for the classical Spanish poets did not compel him to identify as Hispanic, Palés Matos' being his soul mate did not compel him to identify as Puerto Rican. He was too American and familiar with American xenophobia to risk expressing difference publicly and, to assure his American credentials, he still sensed the need to express his Carlos side in baroque code. After the war, whether as Bill or as a Hispanic-purist Carlos, found it even more

difficult to acknowledge any connection to the problematic, more racially mixed diaspora.

Williams never refers to the postwar migration even though he more than anyone else was aware that it was made up of what he called the "pure products of America." He maintained this silence despite being a daily, meticulous reader of newspapers and magazines, and an assiduous follower of culture, according to Mariani (9). No mention of the widely-reported creation of the cosmetic Commonwealth to feign the dismantling of colonialism, nor of the subsequent shooting up of Congress by Puerto Rican nationalists. He could not have avoided the "Bridge between Two Cultures" publicity campaigns, also in *Life* and *Look* magazines. Even though he kept abreast of New York's artistic life, he never commented on the 1957 success of *West Side Story*. And yet, surely because he sensed not having many more years left, in 1959, two years into the play's Broadway success, he published *Yes, Mrs. Williams*, which associated Elena and him with what was considered the infestation of an inferior breed of "Spanish."

To summarize, Williams' Carlos consciousness claimed Hispanic literary roots through his Puerto Rican mother Elena, never identifying as Hispanic or Puerto Rican. And yet in poems on Elena he echoes Puerto Rican themes that he later discovered in the poems of Palés Matos. Should we in retrospect, knowing what we now know, repeat with Muna Lee and insist that Williams is also a Puerto Rican poet? More ironic still, based on today's social definitions, Williams doesn't even qualify as Latino, the epithet intuitively attached to Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Lin-Manuel Miranda publicly identifies as Puerto Rican but neither do his plays nor his musical compositions contain any elements from which one could extrapolate a Puerto Rican theme or consciousness. Nevertheless, in writing *Hamilton*, a musical that claims that America is

a multicultural and multiracial country without any influence of Hispanic culture, Lin-Manuel Miranda becomes the more authentic Latino writer.

Miranda's first major play was *In the Heights* (2005), a musical adaptation of the classic drama he surely read or saw in his high school (because it was taught in all of them), *Our Town* (1938) by Thornton Wilder, about the lives of the inhabitants of a fictional small American town. Miranda's play portrays the lives of members of the community that formed during his youth in Washington Heights, predominantly Dominican, as if it were a village. Reminiscent of *Our Town* in being about individual competitions and the lure of a larger world, residents of the "Heights" (Upper West Side Manhattan) are portrayed as immigrants who, according to the Dominican narrator Usnavi, are looking for "a better life."

Miranda wrote an earlier, one-act version of *In the Heights* in his sophomore year at Wesleyan University, where it was staged, drawing the attention of influential Wesleyan graduates in the theater world, who invested in Miranda's fleshing it out in preparation for a Broadway play. That assignment would require the collaboration of Puerto Rican writer Quiara Alegria Hudes. After an off-Broadway premiere, the collaboration turned out to be a smash Broadway hit that has been performed internationally. A film version had to wait for its premiere until June 2021, delayed by a year due to the Covid pandemic.

The play triumphs because of Miranda's genius as a composer despite the slackness of the libretto, according to Charles McNulty of *The Los Angeles Times*, who described it as "overstuffed and oversimplified." Clive Barnes of *The New York Post* criticized it as "sentimental and untruthful." And the truth is that the play is set in a neighborhood as fictional as *Our Town* but not as believable. The actual Heights does not have the history of African-American Harlem

or El Barrio to imagine it as a metaphorical village but, more important, the play performs a suspension of historical reality.

The Dominican immigration, which represented the start of the noncontiguous Latin American influx to the eastern states, *latinos* fleeing poverty or political oppression and attracted by the promise of post-civil rights benefits. By 2005, on the East Side of Manhattan El Barrio was turning Mexican. In *In the Heights*, the characters enjoy a harmony with their American life only limited by finances in a script that dodges the social experience of living in a country torn by race. *In the Heights* is a more joyful depiction. But can one write of Latinos, especially of Dominicans as if making no social statement if, being predominantly black, they are inherently metaphors of social statement?

Starting out with that implausibility, gives a license for more. The most paradigmatic is the situation of Nina, the Puerto Rican student who was attending Stanford University in California and returns to "the Heights" after having lost her scholarship because her two jobs did not allow her to keep good grades. Her father runs a taxi cab service in The Heights. If a New York Puerto Rican went all the way to Stanford, it had to be because she had all her expenses paid and if not, she could get a student loan to supplement her studies. Hard to believe is that she and her parents hadn't worked out the finances before she left for California. It didn't make sense for the father to sell his business, which would appear to be his having already attained a "better life." They lived in the gentrifying Heights in Manhattan.

In 1979 the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater promoted Edward Gallardo's *Simpson Street* as the first English-language play by a second-generation writer from the Puerto Rican diaspora. When I saw the production, having grown up from my childhood near Simpson Street in the

Bronx, the play seemed to lack credibility, the characters embodiments of social formula. A young man from a family in conflict over obviously working-class but presumably Puerto Rican grievances ends up hoping to solve his problems by escaping to California, the state where many Americans were finding the golden promised land and in this case a symbol of redemptive assimilation.

Decades after that production, Gallardo revealed in the *Miami Herald* that he was Cuban. One deduces that he had fooled the actress Miriam Colón, the founder of the Puerto Rican Traveling Theater. In retrospect, Gallardo simply borrowed the types and images and thus assembled a Latino drama before the epithet existed. Similarly, *In the Heights* relies on abstracted Dominican and Puerto Rican characters with no conflict other than clichéd American socioeconomic circumstance.

White Miranda played the role of the Dominican Usnavi— a name suggestive of the influence of Pedro Juan Soto's protagonist in his novel *Usmail* (from "U.S. Mail")— and like Miranda as a Dominican the cast of characters is Dominican or Puerto Rican in name more than in having any specific manner of behavior or expression or memories, nor were the actors cast to do Sobeing variants of generic Latino. Given that they are all Latinos, there is a nuance of wanting to escape a suggested ghetto that is otherwise romanticized.

In that ambiguity we experience the joys and frustrations of longing for "a better life" from budding Americans, a dream apparently achieved outside The Heights and presumably away from *latinos*. Nina returns to California promising Benny that she is coming back (to return from Stanford to her high school graduate boyfriend, really?), Kevin and his wife presumably leave the neighborhood after selling his taxi business, Vanessa the hairdresser has always longed

to live in Greenwich Village but belatedly discovers a love for Usnavi who had always talked of returning to Santo Domingo and now seems to be the only one inclined to stay in the Heights. A taste of Latino to exactly what point is not clear except to enjoy good music.

In 2005, when *In the Heights* was first performed, Latino consciousness was beginning to be the epithet of American identity for all Latinos/*latinos*. In *In the Heights* Miranda created metaphors for burgeoning multiculturalism, the subtextual theme that would inspire the production of *Hamilton*. More explicitly American in theme and, for obvious reasons, without Latino characters despite the Latino actors, *Hamilton* fulfills Latino expectations in invoking solidarity with racial minorities and the multicultural consciousness that aspires to redefine America. Exuberant solidarity even at the cost of much not well thought out.

Miranda was rudely awakened to this criticism when he transported the original cast to perform *Hamilton* in Puerto Rico. He wrote *Hamilton* as an American either reflecting on or just adopting a Latino identity, islanders wary of the difference between Latino and *latino*. The island's nationalists protested his romanticizing a figure in the history of Puerto Rico's colonizers. Miranda, who identifies personally as Puerto Rican compartmentalized not only his own Puerto Ricanness but the existence of a consciousness of Puerto Rico as something more than an object of poeticized pride. And island nationalists were not the only ones who accused him of writing with a one-eyed view of history.

The African-American novelist and playwright Ishmael Reed reacted by writing the play *The Haunting of Lin-Manuel Miranda* (2019), in which he criticized *Hamilton* as the result of an excessively felicitous reading of the nation's history, of a blindness to its sadder reality. Miranda as Reed's character is awakened in the night by some of the historical figures he omitted from his

musical, including the slave owned by Hamilton's sister. Like a tourist being forced back to places he had failed to see on his first visit, Reed's Miranda learns of a history that his musical overlooked and apologizes for his ingenuousness.

Miranda is arguably a victim of a Latino/*latino* ambiguity. In Spanish neither *puertorriqueño* nor *latino* are racial epithets, what Latino and of Puerto Rican is in English. So as Spanish *puertorriqueño* or *latino* Miranda would not intuitively respond with the racial consciousness that Reed presumes would be intuitive for a Latino Puerto Rican. On the other hand, his Puerto Rican consciousness is of an island tradition of fervent cultural patriotism that does not translate into addressing Puerto Rican culture intellectually. And neither is Miranda, strictly speaking a Newyorican, as his personal story does not descend from the postwar diaspora. His parents, both professionals fleeing an economic crisis in Puerto Rico, arrived in New York City much later, a product of the island's industrialization and the already achieved civil rights opportunities and socioeconomic and educational benefits gained by disgraced Newyoricans.

In other words, Miranda grew up in New York but far from the marginalization that "Newyorican" evokes, which might explain why none of his theater descends from *West Side Story*. I am not referring to the dramatization of gang stereotypes but of the backstory of poorer and darker islanders induced to uproot themselves for the benefit of the rise of those who better fit in the new, whiter industrialized island. Miranda does not express an awareness of ties to that history in the two works that have established him as a playwright and composer. To create the musical *The Capeman* Paul Simon wrote as if he were a postwar diaspora Puerto Rican inevitably invoking *West Side Story* as a theatrical precursor.

Miranda identifies with Puerto Rico after a childhood in which he traveled annually to Puerto Rico to spend a month with his grandfather in the town of Vega Alta. He has donated money to restore the island after Hurricane María and used his personal influence to petition Congress for measures to alleviate Puerto Rico's crushing debt. His passion for Puerto Rico was also expressed in his organizing that original-cast production of *Hamilton* on the island. The island is definitely *latino*, so given his island-centric identity, in *In the Heights* as composer and playwright, Miranda's Latino voice was an artistic creation.

Very Latino too was his updating American history with minority actors. Postmodernist Latino does not understand literature as a vehicle of ideation, using metaphors as modes of revealing, an "elitist" expectation. It is foremost experiential, documentary; hence the facility of adopting presentism, history being the preservation of teaching metaphors. And from there follows the advocacy of replacing with a racially-liberated Latino consciousness a presumably white supremacist Hispanic historical identity. The Founding Father's inscribed ideals do not have ideational power to be relevant in the form a congress of white men, so Latino requires that African American and Latino actors perform the revolution so Latinos can believe the revolution was also about them.

Ironically, in having conceived the multicultural *Hamilton*, Miranda was vindicating Williams' thesis that the truest, American "mingling spirit" was sown by the Spanish, who seeded the multiracial consciousness that Miranda inherited as Puerto Rican long before Latino presumed to invent it. Nevertheless, because of that naive coincidence, Miranda is celebrated as a Latino writer.

In contrast Williams does not enter into the Latino discourse because, to begin with, his

writing is traditionally literary, using ambiguity and metaphor. Williams also traced his Puerto Rican heritage as Hispanic roots, not having racialized Hispanic as a default whiteness, what a woke Latino generation was to do. Furthermore, not lending itself to the contemplation of nuance, Latino also ignores that in *Yes, Mrs. Williams* Williams introduces his mother Elena as having inherited African roots through her mixed mother from Martinique, the self-recognition of race that he learned to embrace from Luis Palés Matos. Seen from another angle, through *Yes, Mrs. Williams* and his poems on Elena, Williams engages, if unconsciously, in the Puerto Rican literary discourse notwithstanding that island intelligentsia refuses to recognize that participation.

In the windy tunnel of identity, perspectives blow from all directions. Williams, who never publicly identified himself as Puerto Rican, leaves us with poems and prose that translate into English a Puerto Rican literary discourse whose existence Miranda gives no evidence of knowing. On the other hand, Miranda publicly announces his Puerto Rican identity and his concern for Puerto Rico's material needs without writing anything to do with Puerto Rico's historical struggle to define itself. His parents' home town embraces him as native son.

On the mainland, Williams, who presaged multiculturalism is not recognized by the Latino consciousness while among the American youth Miranda enjoys the status of Latino superstar for advancing multiculturalism. Finally, there are islanders who believe that neither is truly Puerto Rican, denying that Puerto Rico long ago ceased to be an island and is now the hub of what novelist Eduardo Lalo calls Greater Puerto Rico.

In 1997 the Nagasaki-born novelist Kasuo Ishiguro won the Nobel Prize as a Briton. There are British and Japanese who debate his identity. The same could be debated about the novelist William Henry Hudson (1841-1922), author of *Green Mansions*, of British parents

whom, even though he wrote in English, Google describes as an "Argentine author." The "American philosopher" George Santayana was born in Spain and never became an American citizen. At the age of 49, he left Harvard and the country for Europe to never return, leaving a canonical bibliography of insight on American culture, which he claimed to have "borrowed." The Frenchified Julio Cortázar left Argentina to never return but wrote as an Argentine writer, his hallmark novel *Rayuela* set in a Buenos Aires short on setting details, its author a speaker of French-accented Spanish. As I write Jhumper Lahiri launched her latest novel that she wrote in Italian, her new language of choice, which she subsequently translated into English.

Williams maintained a strictly intellectual relationship with his Puerto Rican identity and Miranda maintains a strictly personal and non-intellectual relationship with his. Identity is defined by the story one chooses to tell. In the end, as Miranda discovered the Hamilton inside him through the telling of Ron Chernow, we are all left singing the song Miranda wrote for Hamilton, "Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story."