

## Culture and the City: Pedro Henríquez Ureña's New York City

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### ABSTRACT

Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir, written in 1909 while in México (but published in its entirety in 1989) may well be claimed as one of the first written accounts by a Dominican intellectual in the United States. In this paper I analyze the cultural implications of what it meant to be Dominican at the beginning of the 20th century for a non-white elite intellectual such as Henríquez Ureña in New York City. Although I view Henríquez Ureña's memoir as a depiction of travel experiences of modernity, I am also interpreting his memoir as a historically prefiguring attempt at recapturing the Dominican nation he had gradually displaced himself from (for different reasons). I argue that Henríquez Ureña's memoir is itself the literal site of exposure of a life that had been constantly marked by dislocations and relocations.

Keywords: Memoir, Migrations, Race, Early Dominican presence in the U.S., New York City, politics, identity, exile, culture, literature, intellectuals.

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## RESUMEN

Las memorias de Pedro Henríquez Ureña, escritas en el 1909 durante su estadía en México (pero sólo publicadas completas en el 1989), pueden ser vindicadas como uno de los primeros relatos de un intelectual dominicano en los Estados Unidos. En este trabajo analizaré las implicaciones culturales del significado de ser un dominicano a principios del siglo XX en la ciudad de Nueva York para un intelectual de élite no-blanco como Henríquez Ureña. Aunque a mi parecer, las memorias de Henríquez Ureña son una representación de experiencias de viaje en la modernidad, además interpreta sus memorias como un intento históricamente prefigurativo de recapturar la nación dominicana de la cual él se había desplazado gradualmente (por varias razones). Postulo que las memorias de Henríquez Ureña constituyen el sitio literal de la revelación de una vida marcada por el trastorno y la reubicación.

Palabras clave: Memorias, migración, raza, presencia dominicana temprana en los Estados Unidos, Nueva York, política, identidad, exilio, cultura, literatura, intelectuales.

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Among the critics who have interpreted the works of Pedro Henríquez Ureña, few have questioned his *dominicanidad*, or sense of his Dominican national identity, or considered whether it remained unshaken throughout the multiple travels, displacements and exiles that surrounded his life. Typically, Luis Leal, in the brief biographical note he wrote about Henríquez Ureña in 1977, assures the reader that “in exile [referring to Ureña’s stay, from 1906-1914 in Mexico] his love for his country increased, as is evident in the books and articles he dedicated to its culture” (Leal). Yet, what is really “evident” here? Is this evidence not, really, a form of counter-transference on Leal’s part? I wonder how we can so easily see through the traveling, the displacing or exiling that Henríquez Ureña voluntarily undertook, to what we suppose is underneath it, a mere *reproduction* of identities insulated from these multicultural experiences? In her famous study entitled “La pasión dominicana de Pedro Henríquez Ureña,” Soledad Álvarez ponders the role of travel in Henríquez Ureña’s national identity by noting that: “la dominicanidad de Pedro Henríquez Ureña se reafirma en el peregrinaje que fue su vida, paradoja que quizás solo pueda ser entendida en toda su significación por los dominicanos y por quienes,

como nosotros, han conocido esa tradición...” (Álvarez). Love and reaffirmation — such are the auspices under which we read Henríquez Ureña’s trajectory. But can these travels, displacements and exiles also result in very particular styles of thinking and *being* Dominican? In other words, what is this Dominican identity that Pedro Henríquez Ureña adopts in his writings, and is it really a matter of the eternal return of the same *dominicanidad*, or does it shift in relation to his different adaptations to changing cultural, sociopolitical, and geographic conditions?

The idea of travel encompasses on some level the enterprise of pursuit and discovery. The direct causes prompting these itinerant experiences invariably lead to different conceptualizations of them — namely in our distinctions between ‘el peregrinaje’ (pilgrimage), travel, displacement, exile, and diaspora, among others. Each is not only denotatively different, but enmeshed in different connotations and metaphors. It is not surprising that for a particular group of intellectuals, the instrument of the written word has been used to negotiate, construct and negate these explorations and discoveries.<sup>1</sup> The act of writing itself, and especially so in the hands of intellectuals during key historical times, has served to either provide the lineaments of *official* national discourses, or to reflect the contradictions and challenges of forging national identities amidst spaces of multiple racial, ethnic, sexual, political, and economical encounters (contacts).

That Pedro Henríquez Ureña traveled extensively and found his Dominican identity outside of the Dominican Republic does not make him an unusual case in Dominican intellectual history. In fact, as he forged his vocabulary of national identity he was, at the same time, an observer of sociopolitical instability that affected the Dominican Republic and Latin America, from the quasi-colonial privileges assumed by the U.S. in the Caribbean region to the upheavals of the Mexican revolution. These were not contingent to Henríquez Ureña’s vocation as a writer; his cultural position was inscribed in his project of writing his critical observations of Latin American societies during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which in turn reflected a cosmopolitanism that derived from his displacements and travel experiences. A precondition to Henríquez Ureña’s writing about national cultures was his physical extraterritoriality.

His memoir,<sup>2</sup> completed in 1909 while in México (but published in its entirety in 1989) may well be the first testimony written by a Dominican intellectual in the United States. Although only one third of it recounts Henríquez Ureña's first migration to New York City in 1901, this episode is charged with the kind of self-fashioning we have come to view as characteristic of modern subjectivity. This particular "reflexive consciousness of time, space and self in relation to others," to borrow Nicola Miller's terms (Miller 4), operates throughout the entire memoir to tactically shift and omit the social difficulties Henríquez Ureña must have encountered on account of his ethnicity, and instead he treats us to a detailed account of his impressions of the cultural scenes he encounters in the New York City of 1901. To approach the memoir concentrating solely on its content is to miss the important and systematic function of his omissions, which massively concern the racial and ethnic difficulties one would assume a mulatto Dominican immigrant like Henríquez Ureña would face in a country like the U.S. during a period of renewed racism (the period, for instance, of the entrenchment of segregation). If we turn to the memoir seeking evidence for this racially charged atmosphere, we will be disappointed. This points to an important critical consideration: issues of class, politics, ethnicity and race acquired *prior* to traveling to New York City are central elements to consider when analyzing Henríquez Ureña's written accounts. In other words, along with the paper map he may have carried in his pocket, Henríquez Ureña travels with an affective map in his head, which, as Jonathan Flatley notes "...is meant to indicate the pictures we all carry around with us on which are recorded the affective values of the various sites and situations that constitute our social worlds" (84). This metaphorical map is not structured as a logical flow sheet, but rhizomatically, to use Deleuze and Guattari's phrase, with the possibility of connecting any point on it to any other point, "bringing into play very different regimes of signs" (149-150).

The impress of the rhizome is apparent in Henríquez Ureña's personal writings, where we encounter contradictory and shifting views on the society he encounters that reflect, on the one hand, his new situation as an immigrant, and, on the other, the semiotic he acquired from his childhood in his Dominican society.

Being modern, Michel Foucault proposed, is not a matter of liberating the humanity in man, but instead "...[modernity] compels him to face the task of producing himself" (Foucault). If this is true, then there is no more characteristic modern text than that of autobiography, in which self-fashioning is the constitutive principle. This paper grapples with the following questions: how does Pedro Henríquez Ureña produce himself in the memoir he wrote in 1909? What experiences preceded this production? I am particularly interested in the contrast between his background as young elite intellectual in the Dominican Republic and the self he inhabited, the mask he donned in the United States. It is my initial contention that Henríquez Ureña's memoir manifests all the racial and class contradictions that founded his perception of Dominicanness or *dominicanidad*. With this ensemble of cultural assumptions, he must have been vulnerable on many levels (quotidian, libidinal, existential) to the very different ethnic and racial codes operating in the United States that he traveled to.

My primary focus is on Henríquez Ureña's first encounter with the United States, an episode that he unfolds in his memoir with an astonishing lack of personal affect, as well as in the poetry he wrote while in New York City and in the letters he exchanged with his friend Alfonso Reyes. Furthermore, I argue that the memoir of this unusual 24-year-old migrant is shadowed by the lived experiences of migration, class and ethnicity that shaped his attitudes even prior to becoming a traveler to the United States. Henríquez Ureña's memoir presents us with the case of an elite Dominican intellectual, equipped with a highly self-reflexive consciousness of his nation, putting himself to the test of early 20<sup>th</sup> century New York City, a metropolis which, at that time, was receiving a flood of immigrants from all over the world. In the memoir, Henríquez Ureña sets the scene of his arrival to New York City by alluding to José Enrique Rodó's 1900 essay, *Ariel*, thus firmly placing it in a literary framework. Yet this call upon the aesthetic dimension, giving Henríquez Ureña's self-image a larger world in which he is recognized as an essayist, a poet, a cultured traveler, and a member of the Dominican elite, is catalyzed by the unexpected social and economic realities he underwent during the first visit to the United States, where he was denuded of the protection afforded by culture. Through his writing we derive some of the emotional ramifications as he endures

a change in his situation from that of a tourist with economic liberties to enjoy the cultural scene around him to that of a working class immigrant exiled in New York. And thus what is explicitly presented as a memoir relating details about culture and literary impressions is in fact also, on a latent unconscious level, a manifestation of Henríquez Ureña's existential anxiety as his affective maps cannot adapt to his real circumstances. He produced this memoir while in México partly as a form of repair work on those affective maps, reconciling his vision of New York City with his Santo Domingo education. In short, the emotions that surface in Henríquez Ureña's memoir about the Dominican Republic and about New York City are in the end emotions about class, race and ethnicity initially instilled in his Dominican home and displaced by the vicariousness of his diasporic experience; yet a close reading of the text points towards a more complex negotiation of these elements at the individual level for him and, in a general sense (in as much as his professional personality as a Dominican writer is typical of his class) as they relate to Caribbean identities. The social and cultural structures of his place of origin invariably shape his behavior and ways of understanding his situation within the various locales he migrates to.

Drawing from the recent attention of the effects of *feelings* and *emotions* on transnational paradigms, I focus on how a complicated and problematic understanding of race, class and culture acquired in the Dominican Republic resurfaces within Henríquez Ureña's memoir. The personal, catalyzing event that causes these issues to resurface has to do with a felt lack: the lack of recognition of him as a cultured intellectual that colors the entirety of his new social reality in New York City. As a result two Pedros grow out of one: the one who wrote the memoir, and the one who wrote *beyond* the memoir in letters and essays to expound on realities omitted from it.

## 1. THE NATIONAL HOME: RAISING PEDRO

Pedro Henríquez Ureña's family participated in the activities of a group of Dominican thinkers who aimed to create a firm definition of *dominicanidad*, nation and citizenship (identity), thus resolving the cultural, racial, gender and class differences of the time. As Teresita Martínez-Vergne points out in *Nation and Citizen in the Dominican*

*Republic, 1880-1916* (2005), this circle of thinkers participated in the national cause in part because: "...the young men (and a few women) who became the intellectual cream of the Dominican Republic obtained a privileged education, in some cases advanced or professional degrees, which both facilitated their entry into the old-time elite circles that combined wealth, politics, and status and legitimated their voices in such spheres of influences" (4). Such was the case with Henríquez Ureña's father, Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal (1859-1935), who came from a wealthy family and received a prestigious education in Paris, where he obtained a degree in medicine. He established strong ties with Eugenio María de Hostos, resulting in a collaborative effort to create the first public schools in the Dominican Republic and would eventually become president of the Dominican Republic in 1916. His first wife, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez (1850-1897), was already a successful poet at seventeen, when she met her future husband. Together they created a home that instilled the liberal intellectual sense of proprietorship in the nation, a progressive notion of the education of both sexes, and pride in the *patria*, which they passed on to their four children. But Francisco's publicly expressed opposition to the Dominican dictatorship of Ulises Heureaux resulted in the family being exiled for various periods of time in Haití and Cuba respectively (Martínez-Vergne 4-5).

The sense of patriotism and writing nurtured at home for the Henríquez Ureña children was a direct reflection of their mother, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez. Today, Salomé Ureña de Henríquez is not only recognized for her poetic prowess, but also for her efforts to reform the educational system in the Dominican Republic. She was one of the first Dominican women to advocate for Eugenio María de Hostos's positivism, presenting views on education and culture that clashed drastically with those of the Heureaux regime. This vision of education separated from the Catholic doctrine was one that Salomé also brought to her home, allowing her children the possibility of developing their educational interests without any limitations.

Growing up in a home that privileged education, Pedro Henríquez Ureña's early childhood was imbued with the early teachings of an *americanista* and *antillanista* ideology, deriving from his father, and a humanistic and spiritual vision he inherited from his mother and her poetry. In this fashion, early associations of home, nation,

literature and identity are woven into Henríquez Ureña's childhood memories and are inextricably linked to his mother. The relationship between mother and son was a strong one and it manifested itself very early on as suggested in the lines above. Salomé's admiration for her precocious son reproduced itself, as would be expected, in the poems "¿Qué es patria?" and "Mi Pedro," which she dedicated to him and which invariably demonstrates the strength of their relationship. Through Salomé, Pedro also acquired a passion for literature that was directly linked to the impact her nationalist poetry has in Santo Domingo.

This sense of being a participant in the onset of Caribbean modernity is further developed through the interactions the family maintains with prominent figures such as José Martí, Eugenio María de Hostos and Ramón E. Betances. Pedro Henríquez Ureña's early encounters at home, which made the multiple cultural and sociopolitical realities faced by the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Cuba respectively into living experiences, situate him precociously in a contact zone of sorts (Pratt 7). As such, Henríquez Ureña's *home* can be viewed as a site of encounter for the (dis)similar historical trajectories under which the Hispanic Caribbean islands had developed; yet it was also a site in which, consciously, intellectuals were creating an alliance to advocate for a *pan-Caribbean* ideology that would wrest the destiny of the region away from the moribund influence of Spain.

The first point of entry into the memoir is through Henríquez Ureña's precise description of his family's ethnic background, starting with his grandparents:

Mi abuelo Noel Henríquez...era hijo de holandés é inglesa...Mi abuela paterna tenía sangre de los últimos indios dominicanos que permanecieron en la población de Boyá. (Henríquez Ureña 2000, 29)<sup>3</sup>

My grandfather Noel Henríquez...was the son of Dutch and English parents...my paternal grandmother had the blood of the last Dominican indigenous population that lived in Boyá. (My translation)

There is no mention in this or any other section of an African cultural or ethnic influence on his family even though, as we can assess from various images of Henríquez Ureña and his family, they were racially mixed. My usage of the term *mulatto* to convey Henríquez Ureña's racially mixed condition is one that he himself does not assume, nor



does he state an elaborate racial consciousness in any of his writings, and this illustrates an initial void in terms of racial self-perception in his memoir at a point where one would expect it to surface. The usual textual strategy of composition intervenes here, with an offer of information on his grandfather's Dutch and British ancestry that strategically overwrites any mention of an African ancestor. And, in fashioning his own life to fit the lineaments of the official myth of the Dominican Republic, he too, calls upon a most probably mythic connection to an indigenous past in tracing his grandmother's ancestors to "los últimos indios dominicanos." Racial constructions in the Hispanic Caribbean are bound to class and ethnicity, which are, further, determinants of a very particular notion of nationality (Candelario, Duany, Torres-Saillant). In the case of the Henríquez Ureña family, affluent professionals in the political class, it is probable that their racial status was never contested in the Dominican Republic.

## 2. MEMORY, SELF AND DISPLACEMENT

Growing up during the dictatorship of Ulises Heureaux,<sup>4</sup> Henríquez Ureña witnessed the persecution of his father and mother, which was severe enough to force them into multiple exiles to Haiti and Cuba. The culminating blow was the death of Pedro's mother in 1897, from which ensued the disintegration of the home and family (his father remarried shortly after). At that moment in Pedro's father's life, his political affiliations made it dangerous to stay in the Dominican Republic. Perhaps Henríquez Ureña wrote his memoir at such an early age in order to organize these traumatic experiences, creating a home out of a longing for home. The act of writing his memoir (or evoking memories of that past) became his way of affirming himself as a Dominican, a member of the Dominican community, a timeless status undimmed by any further displacements away from the Dominican Republic.

Henríquez Ureña's 1909 memoir was not his first attempt to write an autobiography, since he had been keeping a diary, which he later destroyed. In this act of destruction, and his consequent determination to write his life into textual existence anyway, there seems to be a clear focus on self-figuration, and nowhere is this most clearly depicted than when he proclaims:

Ya alguna vez emprendí un diario, cuando tenía quince años, 1899, y lo continué hasta 1902; pero lo *destruí* porque en él apenas apunté otra cosa que impresiones literarias y hechos de vida externa. Pero ahora quiero *componer* (sí, componer) una relación detallada de mi vida con los puntos que han ido quedando en mi memoria, especialmente en *cosas literarias*. (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 28, my emphasis)

Some time ago I took on a diary, when I was 15 years old, 1899, and continued it until 1902. But I *destroyed* it because in it I barely noted anything but literary impressions and facts of outside life. But now that I want to *compose* (yes, compose) a detailed relation of my life with the points that have remained in my memory, especially regarding *literary things*. (My translation)

Why would the author make us aware of the existence of a previously destroyed diary? This would seem to underline the artificial status of the life story before us, as it is disconnected from the testimonial voice. And this, in turn, makes one wonder what is missing from *this* memoir. What were the exact observations of “hechos de vida externa” that seemed so unimportant to Henríquez Ureña that they merited destruction? Furthermore, if this memoir is, as it were, built on the destruction of memory, what is its purpose as a memoir? A memoir doubly suspect, in as much as it is written not by a celebrity, but by an as yet relatively unknown young man, who, in the course of it, casually disqualifies the outward incidents of his life, or, in other words, the very element that justifies the memoir form.

Henríquez Ureña’s allusion to a destroyed text within the one we have helps us see that even this early on, his writing consciousness was layered. It is important to appreciate the tantalizing hint, here, which indicates that this memoir may be a mere counterfeit, an artifice veiling other problematic experiences, a text (in which the narrative is supposedly governed by the truth of a real experience) disguising another text (in which testimony to that real experience is not just shoved aside, but physically destroyed). The act of destroying the diary, which related the day-to-day events he lived until its destruction, is, as the writer emphasizes, necessary to *compose* a relation of his life. It is necessary to keep the question of the diary in mind because, in his description of New York City, Henríquez Ureña will assume a distance that makes his description seem more like an extensive theatre review of the city space encountered, all the while surprisingly excluding his social and political lived experiences (Díaz Quiñonez 201).

Self-writing is a performative act of re-presentation, and as such it operates within a compositional dialectic of omission and insertion of the precise events (among an extensive possible set of them) to be highlighted within the fabric we have come to recognize as a memoir or an autobiography. From this point of view, memory is not a neutral, but a selective and symbolically charged act. This performative dimension of autobiography is elaborated in Sylvia Molloy's foundational work, *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in Spanish America*, where she writes that autobiography is: "... a retelling, since the life to which it supposedly refers is already a kind of narrative construct. Life is always, necessarily, a tale: we tell it to ourselves as subjects, through recollection; we hear it told to or we read it when the life is not ours" (5). Molloy discerns a very Western subjectivity at work in autobiographical writing in Spanish America, one that can also be seen in Henríquez Ureña's memoir, especially when he drifts into extensive listings of plays, operas and theatres he visited in New York City while leaving out any mention of potential racial, ethnic or social difficulties.

The narrative fragmentation in Henríquez Ureña's memoir can be also placed, symbolically, in tandem with the many displacements he goes through as a Dominican in exile. Even the writing of the memoir itself is done in transit. The wall of references and reviews of the New York theater scene found in Henríquez Ureña's memoir seems to operate as a screen memory, a literary mechanism that allows him to present himself in relation to the European archive rather than as a mulatto drifting through New York and experiencing the thousand shocks of his downward shifting status. Do we, as readers, have a right to his pain? Is that part of the contract of reading the memoir? Or is it that we as readers are necessary adjuncts to the repression of memory, here — and as we are inducted into a memory of performances attended, the narrating self can ever more confidently forget what is omitted from the text — can ever more confidently 'compose' himself. In fact, literature, or "*cosas literarias*" is the apparent driving force behind Henríquez Ureña's memoir, and perhaps his way of returning to the primary family unit — remembering that *cosas literarias* were the specialty of his dead mother. His literary formation and his maturing critical observations are what he seeks to highlight, and as such he recurs to an accumulation of narrative, cultural and artistic images to aid him in

this self-representation. The action of transferring the raw reportage of the diary into the smoothed out flow of the memoir allows Henríquez Ureña the possibility of escaping the restraints (the daily details, the contingencies, the non-thematized time) that are an invariable concomitant of diary writing. And by restraints I note Henríquez Ureña's own wording of "hechos de vida externa" to illustrate the social reality he did not want to represent in diary form. Yet we do know something about these "hechos de vida externa" from a source outside the diary. In those of Henríquez Ureña's letters that were written around the same time as the composition of the memoir, the repressed external incidents, in terms of racial, ethnic and political views of the United States, appear. By comparing these two testimonies we have no need to speculate about the textual strategy of omission — rather, we can see it in action.

On the threshold of a new century, the new Dominican government, headed by Juan Isidro Jiménez, faced bankruptcy from the debts left by Ulises Heureaux, who was assassinated in 1899. In a sign that the family fortunes had brightened (along with the positivist tendency to which they belonged), Pedro Henríquez Ureña's father was named Isidro Jiménez's Minister of Exterior Affairs. Commissioned with the task of reducing the foreign debt accrued by Heureaux, Francisco Henríquez, along with Pedro and his eldest brother, Francisco, embarked on a trip to the United States. Although Pedro had, as a teen, already spent time outside of the Dominican Republic in Haití, this did not prepare him for the experience of visiting the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The abrupt transformation of his economic situation while in the United States reflected the changing political fortunes of his family in the Dominican Republic when Francisco Henríquez found himself caught in the battle between Jiménez and Horacio Vásquez, the two principal combatants for power in the Dominican Republic. Unexpectedly, "external things" temporarily suspended the aura of privilege in which Henríquez Ureña had always lived.

Although he did not foresee it, when the 16-year-old Pedro Henríquez Ureña left the Dominican Republic in 1901, he was beginning a long journey, one that would always put a distance between him and his *patria*. Initially, he does not want to experience the New York City of the turn of the century in terms of a *montage* of Latin

American and Caribbean cultural and ethnic encounters (Laó-Montes and Dávila 2). In fact, upon entering the New York area on the steam boat that brought him and his relatives in through Puerto Rico, Henríquez Ureña reaches immediately for those European references in which he has been taking such pride in his theater reviews:

Llegamos, por fin a Nueva York, el 30 de enero...dos impresiones, sin embargo, recibí ese día, que tardé en repetir: la primera, las casas campestres de ciertas poblaciones de la costa, que observábamos antes de entrar en Nueva York: todas ellas me recordaban las moradas campestres que *veía pintadas en los libros de cuentos franceses...* (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 65, my emphasis)

We arrived, at last, in New York, on January 30. I had two impressions that day that I did not repeat for some time: first, the country homes in certain coastal towns, which we observed before entering New York, all of them reminded me of country homes *I saw painted in books of French stories...* (My translation)

Literature is this precocious adolescent's first filter, one that connects him to his dead and revered mother. His destiny in this new host society will constitute a process of peeling away the literary appearance around the naked personal experience of a boy exposed to the vagaries of America's great immigrant metropole, lending his interpretations the air of a gradual process of deconstruction.

Henríquez Ureña travels with a (pre)text in his mind for how North American society should be, and this clearly colors his first impressions of New York City. In fact, he travels to New York with the vision acquired from José Enrique Rodó's foundational essay *Ariel* (1900), as he candidly admits: "...mis impresiones se atropellaban un poco, y yo las veía todas a través del prejuicio anti-yankee, que el *Ariel* de Rodó había reforzado en mí, gracias a su presagio literario; no fue sino mucho después, al cabo de un año, cuando comencé a penetrar en la verdadera vida americana, y a estimarla en su valer" (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 66).<sup>5</sup> In reality, Henríquez Ureña does not encounter the utilitarian and materialistic society Rodó describes in his essay.<sup>6</sup> The vision of *Ariel* does not endure the shock of experience, as Pedro proceeds through a multitude of cultural and ethnic encounters in New York City.

It is important that Henríquez Ureña was financially equipped, at first, to satisfy his desire for visiting the cultural and artistic zones of the city, which put him far above the vast majority of ethnic immigrants coming to New York:

En Nueva York nos encontramos a varios dominicanos: al expresidente D. Alejandro Woz (sic) y Gil...con el fin de que cuanto antes aprendiéramos el inglés en toda forma mi padre nos buscó una casa de huéspedes en el barrio de la Universidad de Columbia. (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 66)

In New York we encountered other Dominicans: the former President D. Alejandro Woz (sic) y Gil...with the objective that we learnt English as soon as possible, our father found us a guest house in the Columbia University neighborhood. (My translation)

At this point, Henríquez Ureña's reference to an emerging Dominican community of exiled intellectuals at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is one of the earliest mentions of the presence of Dominicans in the United States, a fact that has received little critical attention, perhaps because he does not tell the reader very much about this group in this memoir.

According to Daisy Cocco De Filippis, the Dominican presence in New York at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was certainly not as abundant as it would be decades later after the assassination of Trujillo (2000: 13). In fact, Pedro and his family are representative of that first trickle of Dominican immigrants to the United States, who arrived either as political refugees or political emissaries of the new Dominican government, as was also the case with Pedro Henríquez Ureña's father (Cocco De Filippis 2001: 14). In either case, these first immigrants were of a more prosperous class than would be the case with later migrations, which were more economically triggered. For this reason, the New York street wanderings Henríquez Ureña embarks on will yield a different class level of social observation than that developed by later Dominican and Caribbean writers, narrating their experiences in the United States with a constant reference to the possibility of impoverishment. I am thinking here of Bernardo Vega's memoir, which, even though it recounts immigration experiences to New York in 1916, presents in a clear manner some of the material difficulties faced by Puerto Rican immigrants to New York at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

Henríquez Ureña presents himself as a cultural tourist, who takes a great interest in New York's cultural scene, which is, after all, on a scale he has never experienced before. As such, he relies heavily on the individual sensibility he has cultivated through the arts. That sensibility is tied to the invisible community of

European artists and thinkers, not to any real ethnic community or neighborhood. Casting himself as a *flâneur*, the individualist par excellence, his constant mobility through the city's theatre, museum and musical cultural scene is what merits the most attention in this section of the memoir.

Pedro summarizes his first few days in New York as: “En aquellos primeros días me dedicué con ahínco a los teatros...” (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 67) He compiles a large, and probably exaggerated list of all the plays and operas he attends during those first few days in New York. Unlike the New York City of other immigrant accounts of the time, with its tenements, its gaudy and often violent street life, and its constant politics, Henríquez Ureña's city is set out as a harmonious zone of cultural contact where foreign visitors have *carte blanche* to intrude and interact freely. Not being able to speak English does not impede his exploration of the city — indeed, this was part of the reason he had traveled to New York City in the first place.

His contact with the city is solely through the arts at this point, at least according to his memoir. Other contacts he might have made in the neighborhood he resided in recede before the extensive and repetitive descriptions of theatre and opera houses, as if to prove again and again that this is his true community. In fact, we get only a minimum sense of Pedro's neighborhood, casually mentioned while describing his nightly routine: “Asistí al Curso de Elementos de Derecho general, en la Universidad de Nueva York...y también, durante las noches, a cursos de Derecho comercial y público en una escuela nocturna del barrio de Harlem, donde vivíamos” (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 74). But in these lines he fails to describe or show any feeling for his neighborhood in Harlem, which was undergoing a great demographic transformation as the Italian, Jewish and German immigrant groups that formerly lived there began to move to the Lower East Side as African Americans, often fleeing from the Jim Crow south, started moving in, creating the most recognizable African-American neighborhood in New York City. But if this history was happening, it was outside the frame of reference we get in Henríquez Ureña's memoir — to understand what was happening in Harlem, we have to turn to such urban historians as Maffi and Lewis. Surely, even as a *flâneur*, he perceived the great social and cultural changes occurring at street level in his own neighborhood.

Surely, too, these trends must have aroused feelings in him about his own racial identity (as a mulatto man). This would have been just the kind of thing that white Americans would call into question.

Walter Benjamin has extensively analyzed the *flâneur* type in his essays on the Paris of Baudelaire. Motifs from those essays come to mind when reading Henríquez Ureña's New York descriptions. Having himself read Baudelaire and the writers of French modernism — being reminded, in fact, of French short stories upon first encountering New York — Henríquez Ureña was familiar enough with the figure that we can question why certain of the motifs collected by Benjamin seem so oddly missing from his account. For instance, the crowd as Benjamin notes: "Fear, revulsion, and horror were the emotions which the big city crowd aroused in those who first observed it" (174). But the crowds we know were there, from photographs of the Lower East side of the time, and from descriptions by multiple other visitors and inhabitants of New York, have vanished from Pedro Henríquez Ureña's vision. Instead, there is a sense of vacant neighborhoods and theaters, along with minimum active interactions between Pedro and other residents.

Thus, instead of mapping out New York City as a site of personal encounters in which the author makes himself vulnerable to chance, Henríquez Ureña materializes the city in this memoir by way of an accumulation of names of operas, theatres, actors and singers. The development and description of these theatre experiences are left out of the memoir, but instead are elaborated in reviews he prepared for Dominican newspapers and magazines. The presence of the crowd as a constitutive element of the urban space is symbolically replaced by the controlled spaces of theatres and the multitude of elements that configure its presence and function in the city experience are elaborated by Henríquez Ureña. It is also through the discovery of theatres outside his neighborhood that Pedro's mobility takes him into contact with the low-income parts of New York, as when he indicates:

Los teatros baratos (Murray Hill, American, algunos de Brooklyn) solían dar obras clásicas o modernas de importancia, y con frecuencia asistí a sus representaciones... (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 79)

The inexpensive theatres (Murray Hill, American, some in Brooklyn) usually presented classical and modern plays of importance, and I went to them frequently... (My translation)



In this case the “teatros baratos” are defined by where they are located in New York. In this case, Brooklyn stands out as one of the sites where these types of plays would be staged. The crowd through which Benjamin’s *flâneur* strolls is transmuted in the memoirs to the dandy’s tour of theatres by Henríquez Ureña, his discriminating gaze being the kind of social phenomenon that Benjamin describes as the quintessential attitude of the man of leisure. But Pedro does not, only stand back and gaze in solitude, he is mobile: he explores the *other* theatre world presented in ventures to theatres in Brooklyn. If this is a form of slumming, an anthropological expedition, or a response to genuine curiosity is unclear. Thus, the city experience posted for posterity in Pedro’s memoir is wrapped in the curiously selective reality of a theatre world in which he can, in a sense, protect himself from disobliging encounters while watching their staging, the simulacrum of lived experience. It is as if the figure he presents in his memoirs lives suspended between participating in the lived experiences of the city and his distancing observation of them, always under the controlled experience of the staged environment.

The constant vigilance of having to present himself as the cultured intellectual is an invitation to see the narrative as a countering story to cover up any social difficulties that must have befallen him in the United States in a particularly racially charged period. Whereas Benjamin observes the street as a

dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enameled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to the bourgeois in his salon. The walls are the desk against which he presses his notebooks; newsstands are his libraries and the terraces of cafés are the balconies from which he looks down on his household after his work is done. (Glebbler 54)

For Henríquez Ureña, the streets can never be allowed to encroach too much on his intimate life. I note the theatres, instead, serve as a symbolic dwelling space for Pedro. But it is not solely the act of wandering through the theaters that interests him, for in the end he does participate in the event he observes by writing about it, reviewing it for an audience back home. The moment of vulnerability, of surrender in fantasy is immediately transformed into an act of judgment and intelligence. In order for these

experiences to be real, or at least to be controlled, they require a site of permanence that only the act of writing can sustain. Writing, too, is for an audience in a homeland that is getting ever more distant. The continuation of his theater pieces for the Dominican audience makes him a guide, navigating a semi-fabulous city, a persona that Henríquez Ureña assumes in the Dominican literary magazines *Revista Literaria* and *Oiga Directo*. While in the memoir we get a list of names of plays and actors encountered in the city, in the crónicas written for *Revista Literaria* (under the direction of Enriquez Deschamps) and a couple of years later while still in New York for *Oiga Directo* (under the direction of G. Egea Mier), we necessarily get more detailed accounts of them.

Rather than the stiff distancing of the city that Henríquez Ureña chooses to represent in his first encounter, another persona outside the journalist and boulevardier inhabits the poetry he wrote while in New York City. In these texts, we can discern the pull of two directions. In one sense he adheres to the modernist tendencies of the time when he describes his impressions of autumn in New York on his poems “Flores de otoño” (1901), “Otoñal” (1901) and “Frente a las ‘palisades’ del Hudson” (1903). Other poems such as “Intima” (1903), which he dedicates to his aunt Ramona Ureña, demonstrates a more romantic need to recall a vision of *patria* or homeland symbolically represented through his own Dominican home. “Intima” shows the poetic influence of his mother, and it comes as no surprise that it is maternal aunt Ramona who inspires it, since she is one of the closest familial links he preserves with the Dominican Republic while in the city.

“Intima” is as much a personal account of Henríquez Ureña’s sense of his nomadic condition, as it is a description of his mother and aunt’s nurturing, poetic and patriotic influences upon him. At the center of the poem itself is the image of a fragmented national home held together in the mind of a displaced subjectivity:

Desde el solar nativo,  
 -el nido de los pálidos recuerdos-,  
 la casa palpitante de memorias  
 que viven y se agitan como espectros;  
 me llega tu palabra,  
 henchida de magníficos consuelos,  
 mensajera piadosa del terruño,  
 hasta el extraño techo...(Henríquez Ureña 2000: 33)

New York City, or “el extraño techo” allows for, I believe, a self-reflection that up to that point Henríquez Ureña had not committed to. The poem takes a confessional tone, which makes it impossible to keep up the air of demi-participation that he assumes in his memoirs. Addressing his aunt, he lets down his guard and in so doing experiences a cathartic moment of self discovery:

En la vida, en la lucha,  
 ¡cuán temprano sentí, lloré cuán presto!  
 ¡cuánto de penas supe!  
 solitario me encuentro,  
 sin patria, sin hogar, sin ilusiones,  
 -todas volaron con volar ligero- (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 33)

In “Intima” we have Henríquez Ureña’s first and most direct exposition of the effects of the flights from home and the deaths he faced as an adolescent, before his exile in the United States. He also addresses his condition as an immigrant in the city, something that was much on his mind in 1903, the date of the poem, when he experienced a sudden worsening of his economic situation due to the vicissitudes of his father’s political career and the overthrow of Jiménez’s presidency in the Dominican Republic. The direct ramifications of these political changes for Pedro manifest themselves at an economical level at first, and I would argue that here we see the traveler, playing with the persona of the dandy, reluctantly change into the working class immigrant. It may be important to note, here, that the change was taken on voluntarily, their father offered to buy Pedro and his brother Max passage home, but they both refused. With the necessity of having to find a job, Pedro and Max start working in the commerce industry where they are finally confronted with a social reality unknown to them and see for the first time:

... la explotación del obrero; la mayoría eran mujeres y niños; los pocos hombres que habían eran casi todos italianos que acudían a mí para hacerse entender; y el promedio de salarios cuatro dólares por semana. (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 82)

... the exploitation of workers; most of whom were women and children; and the few men who were there were almost all Italians who came to me when they needed to be understood; and the average wage of four dollars a week (My translation)

It is important to note that even though Pedro does find a job, it is relatively upscale, in accounting, and allowed him more labor mobility and a better salary than those of the workers under his supervision. This is evidenced by Pedro's ability to continue his wandering through theatre districts with no apparent repercussions on his finances. But his situation is worsened after he is laid off from this job and once again he turns to the image of the theatre wanderer to deflect the pain of the real emotions he must have felt about his situation. In a pattern that structures his memoirs, he flies from the realities of working and living as an exile to the domain of the arts as a psychological refuge. Describing his experiences in the theatres and writing them down on his memoir allows him the power of presenting himself as though he were always in control, at one aesthetic remove from his affective life.

When the political situation worsened in the Dominican Republic for the liberal party of Pedro's family, his father went into exile to Cuba in 1904. This same year, Pedro leaves New York for Cuba, but not without noting for the first time how his neighborhood had changed in those three years:

El barrio en que vivíamos pululaba de dominicanos desterrados, que ahora se aventuraban hasta Nueva York. (Henríquez Ureña 2000: 89)

Our neighborhood was growing with other displaced Dominicans who were starting to make adventurous journey to New York. (My translation)

A fleeting hint about this emerging Dominican community of immigrants is all that is left to the reader.

It would seem that Pedro perceived his departure as a definitive one but the reality is that a return to the United States would again occur in 1914, and this new travel experience would force him to critically face not only the cultural sphere of the United States but also its political relationship with his homeland. In line with his veiled manner of description he does not state the nature of the education New York City provided other than to emphasize its cultural value. If we are to seek a more in-depth description of the nature of this "education" *outside* of the cultural sphere provided by New York City we would need to consult the personal letters exchanged between Henríquez Ureña and his great friend Alfonso Reyes, and one letter in particular written in 1908.

The narrative of Henríquez Ureña's friendship with Alfonso Reyes is part of the story of his wandering. After moving to Cuba in 1904 and residing there for a couple of years, Pedro travels to México in 1906, feeling that Cuba was too narrow a space for his intellectual undertakings. It is at this time he befriends Alfonso Reyes, the Mexican critic and philosopher. Their correspondence, published in three volumes in the 1980s (Henríquez Ureña 1981), covers 40 years of friendship up until Pedro's death in 1946. Separated for long periods, these letters were a continuation of their dialogue, representing the intellectual and spiritual connections that united them across a vast sea of political, cultural and social difficulties.

It may seem odd that we get a clearer vision of Henríquez Ureña's personality through the letters he exchanges with Reyes than in the memoir from which one would normally expect some narration of personal experience. But the task of remembering in the memoirs, obviously, came too close to matters that Henríquez Ureña did not want to make public — those facts of the external life — while in his letters, Henríquez Ureña can present a less guarded and more intimate style of writing. Henríquez Ureña certainly does not bore his friend with the frozen obsession with the fine arts that act as the structuring principle in the official version of his first visit to the United States. Instead, Reyes is given a more open and critical impression of the society and culture, with a frankness that was altogether missing from the memoir.

In the 1908 letter sent to Reyes, Henríquez Ureña responds to Reyes's inquiry regarding a possible visit to New York City; his response could not be more direct and it shows how the New York City experience affected him:

En cuanto a mí, no tengo nada nuevo que aprenderle a Nueva York. Desde luego, podría aprender mucho en bibliotecas, conferencias, teatros, etc. lo que no es precisamente neoyorquino... Ya le dije a Max: todavía fuera a Europa... ¡pero Nueva York! Volver a aquel trabajo duro de diez horas y a los pequeños golpes de antipatía contra quienes, como yo, llevan en su tipo físico la declaración de pertenecer a pueblos y razas extraños e 'inferiores'... (Henríquez Ureña 1981: 74-75)

As for me, I have nothing new to learn from New York. I of course could learn a lot from libraries, conferences, theatres, etc, and that does not pertain solely to New York...I already told Max: I would rather go to Europe...But New York! To return to its ten-hour hard labor and the small hits of antipathy against those who like me, physically carry the declaration of being part of 'inferior' and lesser races and countries... (My translation)

These lines are indicative of the kind of street level experience that Henríquez Ureña could have put into his memoir. His usage of “raza” to denote a phenotypic description of ethnicity is perhaps partly nurtured by the fact that he is producing these letters amidst the political and cultural scene lived in México in 1906, when the foundations of the Porfirian culture, with its orientation to Europe, were crumbling. His arrival to México placed him in the midst of discussions of cultural and racial *mestizaje* that were themes of Mexico’s cultural renewal, sponsored in a great part by the Ateneo de la Juventud formed in 1909, of which Henríquez Ureña was a member. We could assume that his new conception of *raza* reflects on his own racial and ethnic difficulties in the United States, but more importantly demonstrate the early manifestations of a racial and ethnic consciousness within his intellectual formation. The image he presents of himself on the letter to Reyes contrasts drastically with the image of the theatre wanderer he portrays throughout his *memoir*.

Throughout this paper I have been concerned with three registers of expression in Henríquez Ureña’s work. One is his memoir; one is his poetry; and one is his private correspondence. Using these registers against each other, as well as what we know of the social fact of political, race and ethnic relations in early twentieth century America, I have followed the thread of possible silences and omissions as well as distortions and self presentations during Henríquez Ureña’s first visit to the United States. As a Dominican man, trailing a mythical lineage and extremely privileged upbringing in the Dominican Republic, his encounter with the United States was, in part, prefigured by his racial and ethnic consciousness, and, in part, became a source of shock for him, on which he chose not to dwell even when writing his memoirs of that era in his life. But as we have seen, Henríquez Ureña’s class, racial and ethnic self-perception was still affected by the society he encounters in New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century. And thus, Henríquez Ureña’s writing functions within a process of learning and maneuvering of his lived experiences of class and nationality in the Dominican Republic, while also facing different social contexts that focused on issues he had not experienced up to that point, such as race.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See more on this point in Colombi (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Alfredo Roggiano was the first to publish fragments of the memoir in 1961 in *Pedro Henríquez Ureña en los Estados Unidos*. After acquiring permission from Pedro Henríquez Ureña's widow, Isabel Lombardo Toledano de Henríquez Ureña, to reproduce a selection of this memoir, Roggiano filled out the context by including supplementary material from his most important writings, which document his three visits to the United States.

I am using the edition of Pedro Henríquez Ureña's memoir that was published in 1989 in Argentina, and I am consulting, in addition, a subsequent 2000 edition published in México that includes other material released previously by Roggiano, such as another *Diario* (recounting Henríquez Ureña's displacement from Cuba to México between the years 1909-1911) and his *Notas de viaje a Cuba* (describing his journey back to Cuba from México in 1911).

The first three parts of the memoir intersect accounts of Henríquez Ureña's childhood in Santo Domingo with descriptions of his first stay in the United States. The fourth and last part deals with his stay in Mexico from 1906 to 1909. On August 5, 1909, he began the *Diario* included in the 2000 edition. I focus entirely on the parts in the memoir related to the United States, an aspect of his life that has thus far received little critical attention.

<sup>3</sup> All translations from Spanish are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>4</sup> Ulises Heureaux, commonly known in the Dominican Republic as Lili, governed the island from 1887-1899. There is very little information available about his family; even so it is well known that he was born in Puerto Plata in 1845 to immigrant parents. His father is rumored to have been a Haitian immigrant and his mother immigrated to the Dominican Republic from one of the Minor Antilles. Heureaux's rule was marked by bankruptcy and the brutal suppression of his opponents. He was assassinated in 1899, leaving the island sinking under his debts and vulnerable to foreign invasions.

<sup>5</sup> *Ariel*, published in 1900, reflected some of the common beliefs of the time amongst a select group of Latin American intellectuals pondering on the political and social atmosphere of Latin America after the Spanish-American war. The prevalent notion was that Latin American societies were at risk of falling prey to North American imperial powers, a leading thematic in Rodó's essay. Pedro Henríquez Ureña, who had first encountered Rodó's essay through the tertulias organized by Leonor Feltz, became so engrossed with the ideas proposed in it that he retains its vision of North America as a social reality. But in Henríquez Ureña's first publication, *Ensayos críticos* (1905), while he shows his fidelity to *Ariel* by exalting some of the views expressed by Rodó, he also criticized Rodó's rigid view of North

American society by highlighting the cultural values of the United States (which he had experienced first hand at this point).

<sup>6</sup> According to Rodó in his essay, the greatest threat posed by the Northern nation upon Latin America was the utilitarian spirit it offered disguised as civilization. In this equation, Calibán is representative of the utilitarian North American spirit, characterized by its obsession with material gains and specialized skills (utilitarian democracy). In the other hand, Rodó defends the spiritual, more European root he perceives as an inherent feature of the Latin American national character. In this fashion Rodó wages a battle in defense for Latin America's spiritual values that can only be reached by a selected few, as opposed to the leveling utilitarian democracy denoted by Calibán.

<sup>7</sup> Bernardo Vega is a good counterpart to Henríquez Ureña, since Vega did not belong to an elite policy-making class, as he makes clear in his memoir, *Memorias de Bernardo Vega*. Vega was a working class Puerto Rican immigrant who recorded his personal life experiences as a witness to the real struggle of these first Caribbean immigrants. Vega, in contrast to Henríquez Ureña, is conscious of the difficulties faced by Caribbean immigrants transitioning from the former Spanish colonial sphere into the North American society. Pedro Henríquez Ureña's impressions and reactions are just the opposite. He is so thoroughly a member of the Dominican elite that considered the Republic their creation that he carries that elite frame of reference, that sense of privilege, into his interpretation of the New York of 1901. It is typical, then, that though he finds a growing Dominican community, he gives it only a brief mention.