

At the end of "Trash," form and content merge in revealing ways that serve multiple functions. While the monodramatic structure provides the opportunity for José to retell his story primarily for *himself* to hear (for his own affirmation and sanity), the story itself reaches into the listener's own consciousness as one experiences with José the fear of the unknown that José/Monge-Rafuls share. Will justice and freedom prevail? Can they survive in the world as we know it to be? From a postmodern perspective, the listener might well experience not only a catharsis of Greek tragic proportions but a Beckettian resolve of "nothing to be done" upon hearing José's plight. And yet, when the curtain falls on the bare-chested youth surrounded by bars, he is no longer punching at the air. He knows what is in front of him.

Without intending either to sentimentalize or to grossly misread a final image that is otherwise vividly coded with the stark signs of oppression and victimization (which are intended to reinforce such thematics in the piece as control, displacement, entrapment, and desperation), I suggest that José's words also serve to "free" him

from the beast-like cage that surrounds him on stage. Unlike the primitive, inarticulate Yank in Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, another outsider who finds himself in a not wholly dissimilar circumstance as José's, Monge-Rafuls's character realizes that while one "can't control life," one can still speak meaningfully about that life. That is, there is some value, perhaps even an eventual "power" or authority, in the telling of the story, in the articulation of personal truths—a recognition that José implicitly believes in and acts upon.

While one does not know how José's specific, fictional story evolves beyond his concluding question—and without denying the cultural, political, and personal horrors, or "realities," revealed in José's narrative—one can experience the monodrama on its equally apparent metaphysical level. In the simple act of telling his tale, José enacts a kind of hope in "Trash." In hearing "Trash," the spectator can share not only in that hope, but can come to value the power of hearing/telling one's story. Perhaps it is within such a dynamic that a "future" resides.

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# TRASH

## A Monologue



Illustration: Bismarck Victoria

Pedro R. Monge-Rafuls

For  
those Cubans who escaped  
during the Mariel exodus of 1980.  
Especially to all those I met  
in New York.

I wish to thank Laureano Corces  
and Miguel Falquez-Certain for  
their valuable help.

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"Trash" had a stage reading at Hunter College, MSA Studios, on February 9, 1995 with Tom Starace, directed by the author.

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*The present, day time. No scenery is necessary. Through mime the actor should indicate the presence of any object. He is in direct contact with the audience unless otherwise indicated. JOSE. Latin, mulatto, masculine, muscular. He has a St. Barbara tattoo which is visible to the audience. Barefoot, shirtless. He is boxing, punching the air, then he stops and faces the audience. He speaks English with a Spanish accent and his particular grammatical constructions.*

Hi! I am José...a lot of people call me Joe. I am not Joe, I am José. (*Talks while making boxing motions*) If your name is William and you go to Puerto Rico you wouldn't like people calling you Guillermo. I don't like to be called Joe. (*Stops boxing. Serious*) My real name is Jesús (*pronounced haSUS*). I know some foreigners who wanted to sound American and changed their names to English names. I changed mine because people laugh at me when I tell them my real name...I am Jesus. Yes, that's it...and any time I say "I am Jesus" people laugh. No American is named Jesus. Why? That's a very common name in Latin American countries. (*Pause*) I have another problem with my name. Some people call me Fidel when they find out that I am from Cuba. Isn't that ridiculous? Will you like to be called Bush? (*You may use the current president's name*). Those people think that calling me Fidel is a great joke.

*(Goes to where his sneakers and shirt are. Takes the sneakers. Sits in front of the audience and starts putting his sneakers on while he talks.)*

I'm a *Marielito*. You know, a boat people. Everybody in this country is afraid of Cuban boat people. They say that we kill everybody and rape all the women. You heard a lot of stories about us. Remember the Fourth of July when that crazy man killed those people in the ferry that goes to the Statue of Liberty? And the other one who ran nude through St. Patrick's Cathedral and stabbed an old man? Not all boat people are bad. Castro put a lot of criminals and crazy people in the *flotillas*. They went to jails and mental hospitals and pulled prisoners out and sent them here in the boats, but most of us wanted to be free when we decided to come to this country. I couldn't live in Cuba anymore. Cuba is like a big hell! It's not even easy to go to your girlfriend's house. (*Remembers*) I had a nice girl back there. Nedy; she is beautiful, man. I keep thinking about her after all these years.

*(Starts boxing again. Talks while making violent boxing motions, as if in the climax of a match. Wants to forget about his girlfriend. )*

I went to visit Nedy everyday. I ran from work to her house. (*Feels he must explain.*) You see, I worked in

## PEDRO R. MONGE-RAFULS

a store for foreigners. Those who were invited to visit Cuba. Those stores have everything Cubans can dream. They trusted me. I had dreams over there. Nedy and I dreamed together. (*Stops boxing. Remembers*) I wanted to go to finish school and marry Nedy. We will have a house near the beach and twelve children: a dozen. Don't laugh. It's true (*Wakes up.*) Then, something happened that everyone was wishing to happen. The chance to get out of the country and be a free human being. No one was ready when it finally happened: The takeover of the Peruvian Embassy, and there I was. That's how I got to come to this country. People don't understand Castro's ways. They think that he behaves like the Americans, and that's a big mistake. But do you think that one of the White House experts cares for what I have to say? Nooo! Anyway, I'm not going to talk about American foreign policy. It's not my business, man! I'm proud of being a Cuban. (*Pause*) I am also proud of being a *Marielito*. You can see how boat people are doing in Miami and New Jersey. They're doing good. Like my buddy Roberto; you see, we came together to this country. He stayed in Miami and started to work in a mirror factory; he learned the trade and he opened his own business. He's doing good, and now he even has four guys working for him. (*He sits*) D'you know why I speak English well? Because the first

thing I did when I came to this country was to go to school. I had good teachers. My grammar teacher was Desi Arnaz and my American literature teacher was Charo. Do you know them? That's a joke! Let's be serious. Do you know how the Cubans call Fidel? *El caballo*. The horse. We call *caballo* to someone who is the most powerful, the best in everything. *Eh, tú, tú eres un caballo*. It means: Hey, you are a horse. A foreign language is not an easy thing to learn. It hasn't been easy for me. (*Pause*) I came here and didn't understand a thing. If you asked me what my name was, I smiled and said yes and moved my head up and down with a smile on my face. If you asked me where did I live, I smiled and said yes. It was my yes-period of time (*Thinks*). Some people said they didn't believe Castro but they believed we were all criminals as he had said. I was no criminal in Cuba. I haven't been a criminal anywhere. Some people tried to take advantage from us. Not all of course. I remember the first job I got. I had to fix roofs with that sticking tar for two dollars and twenty-five cents per hour. I had to spend almost every penny I made on transportation and didn't have any left to buy food. Smart people, they are! They paid us less money than they were supposed to, by law, and abused us anyway they could. You know is hard to come here from a Communist country. A Communist society is very differ-

ent from the American way of life. Over there, you don't have anything. When we came here, the American government put us in camps; you know, Army camps. Once you got there, you were interrogated to find out whether you were a criminal or not. You had to find a sponsor. Only a sponsor can take us out of the camp. We were desperately looking for sponsors so we could take the last step to freedom. My aunt Felicia, my mother's aunt, sponsored me and took me to her home. She was nice but she died soon. Her son didn't help me and there I was, out in the street, with no trade, nothing. It wasn't easy... We were solicited for sex at the camp. Outside people used to come to see what they could get. You know that we Caribbean people are known to offer big (*discreetly touching his penis*) pleasure. You know what I mean? Women were sponsoring us, helping us out. (*Imitating*) "I help you to make a good life in the U. S. You'll see, we'll be good friends." Well, to tell you the truth, some of us did anything in order to survive. D'you know how we call homosexuals in Cuba and Puerto Rico? We call them *patos*. Ducks. (*Realizes*) I think we love to identify people with animals. In the Dominican Republic they call "tigers" those who you call hustlers. Well, I won't mention any other animal 'cause I'll end up mentioning the whole zoo. Do you think a psychiatrist will be interested in doing a research on this sub-  
ject? (*Transition. Angry at himself*) Humans are animals, man; we're animals but not beasts. There's a difference. Animals don't do what beasts do: horrible things. (*Pause. Starts throwing punches*) The truth is, I wanted to start a new life in this country. I came here very young. I wanted to learn English and go to college. That's why I stayed in New York because I was told that was easier here, but no way. Every door was closed for me. I tried to study but didn't have any income. Then I tried to work but didn't have any experience and didn't speak any English, either. Welfare could've solved my life but welfare is not good. It doesn't let you advance in life. It kills your drive to do positive things. I was forced to live in slums, surrounded by alcohol, drugs, and prostitution. Kids stayed up late at night sipping beer and snorting coke. But I kept my distance. Honest. That's the truth. (*Stops punching. Goes back in time*) That day I went to Nedy's house. We were talking in the front yard, trying to make out when nobody was looking. I loved that woman. Then Roberto came running. (*Back in time. He speaks as if he were ROBERTO and himself*) "Jesús (*pronounced haSUS*). They went nuts; they're letting everybody go, leave Cuba." "What are you talking about?" "Swear to God; some guys barged in the Embassy of Perú and asked for political asylum." "So what?" "Well, Fidel made one of his big-shot speeches and said that every-

one who wanted to leave is free to go. He said Cubans are happy with his government, so he said he knows no one is leaving." "And then what happened?" (*Back to the present*) There were more than 8,000 people inside the embassy in less than three hours. I ran out with Roberto. Nedy was so nervous because she was afraid and she didn't want to come. "Don't go," she says, but no way. I had to go because that was the only chance I had to get out of Cuba. It was hard inside the embassy; women, children, everybody was there and we couldn't move. Thank God they let us go! It isn't easy to leave the country where you were born. I had to leave my mother, and Nedy. If you're against something you try to earn your rights. Being alone out here doesn't excuse you for being bad. Here, I went to school.

(*Very frustrated*) But for one year only. Race relations and life for a minority person have gone from bad to worse in the last years. It's not easy. That's when I pray. Yeaah. I pray. I was born to a good family. My family taught me to respect God and religion. I get so confused when I find out bad people in the church. (*Pointing to his tattoo of St. Barbara*) She's my mother in Heaven. I have faith. I ask her for help, for guidance. I ask her what to do when I don't know what else to do. She has given me good advices. Suddenly I started to realize that I had to go to Miami and talk to my buddy Roberto. That he would give me a

job and help me to put my life together; I thought that maybe I can get a visa for Nedy through the American Red Cross and bring her here and marry her.

*(From now on, he will forget the audience. He talks to himself. He acts accordingly. Sometimes, as if in a trance.)*

I went to Brooklyn to see my friend Carlos. I wanted to say goodbye to him. We had a couple of beers, we talked about friends, girls. You know. We had a good time. I told him that I was leaving. It was late and it's not good to be out in the street. I don't want problems, that's not what I'm looking for. I had a gun I had bought for my own protection, but only because you need one in a city like New York. If it's O.K. for drug dealers, it must be O.K. for me. So I was waiting for the bus that takes me to the subway station. The bus stop is on a deserted dark street. A van passed by me but I didn't pay any attention until it passed by a second time. A man was looking straight at me. I immediately knew what he was looking for. To have a good time with a young, black guy. It wasn't the first time. He was white in his late forties, and fat. It didn't bother me but I wasn't interested. He went around the corner and came back again. He stopped the van in front of me and asked me: "Is this Brooklyn?" What a stupid way to start a conversation. "Yes," I said, "but I don't know anything else about the

neighborhood." He insisted. God, why did he think he had the right to insist? Didn't he see I wasn't interested? He got off the van and came to me. And here he is, standing next to me. He smiled at me and I smiled right back but moved away from him. He was wearing this white shirt with no collar and black pants. He said: "I like you." "Thank you very much but I am waiting for the bus." "Oh, I can give you a ride anywhere you like. To my apartment for a drink. It's not that late. I have porno movies." Who told him I liked porno movies? But I understood and I was nice. "Thank you but I'm going home." "Are you Puerto Rican?" "No." "You're not? Where are you from then?" "Cuba." "Oh, Cubans are good people. Very handsome men," and then he started talking to me and he keeps talking and talking. He didn't leave me alone. He offered me fifty bucks if I let him give me a blow job. I didn't want to do it. It's true that I had done that for money when I first was alone after my aunt died, but not anymore. I am afraid of AIDS. Besides I quit after I did it for a while because that's not my preference. (*As if in a trance*) And the man kept insisting and the bus didn't come and he offered me sixty dollars. I remembered I didn't have enough money to get by the first days in Miami. (*He gave up his internal struggle*) So I went inside the van as he wanted me to. (*Pause. It looks like*

*it happened a hundred years ago*) He insisted I had to be completely naked. (*Instinctively he goes for the T-shirt and puts it on*) I didn't want to at first but I remember how he insisted when he got me in the van and at first I only had one idea on my mind: I wanted to get done with it and leave. I was naked now and he started to touch me all over. I could feel all the big pleasure he was having while touching my balls. He started blowing. He knew how to give a head, let me tell you. I felt guilty at the beginning because I had promised myself I was never going to do this again and there I was, feeling a lot of pleasure. And I came! He enjoyed that. He rubbed my dick around his face, still licking it. He really loved to feel the sperm on his face. I said: "It's over. Take me to the train station. Pay me," and I pushed him away. Gently. That's when he asked me for more. "Come on, man. I'm not a machine." He insisted for more and I said to myself, This man is too much. Too vicious. He said: "I am going to pay you sixty dollars. I have the right to ask you. Latins are so proud. I'm paying you." "Look man," I said, "that wasn't the deal. Pay me and go." "Why should I pay you so much for something you also enjoyed." Of course I liked it, how else was I going to get a hard-on. That's not the point. And I started pulling my pants up. I already had my T-shirt on and he struggled, trying to take

my pants off. He tore my T-shirt up. I pushed him away but he insisted again. That's when he felt my gun. He started screaming. I pulled it out of my pocket because I thought it was a good idea to scare him, get my money and keep him away from me. But he kept screaming trying to take the gun from me. We struggled and I shot him. (*Lights go down abruptly*) A second shot hit him on the leg. He held his hands to his face, blinking his ice-blue eyes as if a helmet strap had frozen his expression. Frightened and humbled. He didn't want to die. But he knew he would. He cried. Sure, we both cried. He wanted to say something, but no words came. (*Desperately*) I don't want to talk about that right now...it's too painful. I can't do it...I can't begin to understand.... (*Pause*) I am not willing to make any explanation of why he...me? fired.

(*Thick bars coming from nowhere surround him. He is in jail.*)

This is something you read on the papers, but you never think it can happen to you. It was on the paper the next day. He was a priest. (*Amazed*) He didn't pray when he knew those were his last minutes in life. He didn't even mention God. How can he die like that?

CURTAIN

Bismarck Victoria, illustrator, multimedia artist, lives and works in New York since 1976. He has participated in multiple exhibitions, in the U.S. and abroad.

How can a priest look for sex? I'm sure God weeps when he sees what happened to me. Who will believe a *Marielito*? He ruined my dreams. My lawyer told me to stop lying for my own good. He said that he can't make a good defense because I gave the police a false name. He said I was probably lying about my name because I didn't want them to find out about my crimes in the past. Who will believe that was something missing to fulfill his nights? The papers said he had a twenty-year career as a good priest. That his parishioners loved him because of his exemplary life. At the funeral Mass the bishop said, "This attack is something you would only expect from beasts, not from humans." That's a horrible thing to say. Am I a beast? How can I ask Nedy to understand? We think we can control our destiny... and then something like this happens, death comes, pain and suffering come. And then we know in a flash...that we can't control our lives. (*His eyes swell with tears*) I am very far from my country. I got nervous, I pulled the gun, and he started to push me around. I told him I had a gun and he grabbed my hand and the gun went off. Boom. Boom. What am I going to do now?

## OLLANTAY Press

*El ojo-cara del profesor.* Short stories by Peruvian Carlos Johnson, 1983. Sold out.

*Hispanic Immigrant Writers and the Identity Question*, bilingual foreword by Pedro R. Monge-Rafuls and bilingual introduction by Dr. Silvio Torres-Saillant. The volume contains presentations by four writers from different backgrounds who through their literary work analyze the influence of immigration on the Latin American literature of New York. The writers are: Puerto Rican poet Alfredo Villanueva; Puerto Rican poet and short-story writer Marithelma Costa; Dominican poet Franklin Gutiérrez; and Guatemalan poet and translator David Unger. The presentations by the writers are followed by a conversation with the audience. 81 pages.

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