

systems-theoretical imagination of modern society” (8). His deployment of “dialecticism” is even more controversial. Maintaining that dialectical social knowledge “is by no means either intrinsically abstract, technical, or the province of some inscrutable (German) philosophical ‘Other,’” his own conception of the term suggests that it channels “a popular spirit ‘within’ into a more perfect social order ‘without’” (11). Boyer jettisons the triadic structure of Hegelian dialectics in favour of a bipolar approach to an incredibly vast and diffuse subject-matter. His distinction between a positive and a negative dialectics is somewhat removed from the manner in which it was applied by Adorno and the Frankfurt School, introducing instead value judgements which are insufficiently substantiated.

The more analytical chapters 2–4 are less complex. The chapter on the *Bildungsbürger* places Herder and Fichte in their correct environment, somewhat exceptional for Anglo-American critics who far too often relate these philosophers to a protofascist tradition. Unfortunately, the author omits any reference to the German reception of the French Revolution, which would have further strengthened his argument. Too much is made of Blackburn’s definition of nineteenth-century German history as the “long” century; indeed, Boyer expands the period even further by going back to the 1740s and forward towards the end of the Weimar Republic. The important change from a court culture to one based on Germany’s many universities is overlooked and some of the German terminology is blurred: reference to both “Bildungsbürger” and “Gebildeten” may well confuse anyone unfamiliar with the German terms.

The comparison of the political systems of Nazi Germany and the GDR is problematic, despite the fact that it is restricted here to an examination of party structures and the organisation of the media. This third chapter opens with a discussion of “Dialectic of Enlightenment,” distinguishing between a “negative dialectical knowledge in its portrait of a progressive ‘disenchantment of the world’” and “a positive dialectics of intellectual agency” (100), a distinction which oversimplifies the process of dialectical thought and is little more than a fig leaf for the anecdotal observations which fill much of the remainder of this chapter. The sections dealing with Third Reich propaganda and journalistic practices in the GDR are well informed, though the author should have reminded his readers that GDR media policies were “imported” from the Soviet Union and implemented in a period of general Cold War propaganda. Other aspects are, however, irritating: Boyer employs the term *Volk* when referring to GDR society and although this usage seems to be supported by quotations, a differentiation between *Volk* and *Gesellschaft* or between *Volksgemeinschaft* and *sozialistische Gesellschaft* is essential. Given the strict control of all political, social, and economic aspects of GDR life, it is misleading to maintain that “in principle, the *Volk* could thus become the unmediated master of its own dialectical progression” (119). This leads to yet another misconception which – though explained in a different context – should have been resolved: the author

does not explain that the GDR system had its origin in the Marxist-Leninist ideology as developed in the Soviet Union, rather than being rooted in a German tradition (cf. p. 128). The passage on “The Institutionalization of Satire” is most refreshing; it would have benefited from a more conceptual discussion of *Agitprop* and from a comparison with dissident literature.

The chapter on “Eastern Germany after 1989” consists largely of field studies, too reliant on personal anecdotes and insufficiently based on background knowledge of the legacy of GDR journalism and its political culture. Reported conversations in restaurants make for lighter reading, but they do no more than perpetuate cheap stereotypes of “Ossis” and “Wessis.” In general, Boyer’s approach is far too descriptive, lacking in analytical rigour. The last chapter contrasts “German system theorists” Habermas, Luhmann, and Kittler, “who have moved an analytics of System to the center of their paradigms of modern sociality and history” with Berlin *Stammtisch* journalists, “whose lively, open-ended discussions of current affairs . . . provide compelling comparisons and arresting contrasts to the technical rigour of academic theory” (231). The author finds these conversations so compelling that twenty-eight of the forty pages of this chapter are “reserved” for the *Stammtisch*.

In his “Conclusion,” Boyer offers his case studies as examples of how “dialectical tropes and intuitions saturate knowledges” (272), inviting us to read this section “as a reflexive exploration of reflexivity” (273). Readers may not be quite so “saturated” with knowledge when, on the concluding page, they discover that Hegel is referred to as a “theologian” and compared in a bizarre manner to the relatively unknown Miroslav Holub, “a scientist . . . who was driven to poetry” (280). Perhaps the author of this book should decide whether to devote himself entirely to the *Stammtisch*?  
H. J. Hahn

**Cabrera, Lydia:** Afro-Cuban Tales – Cuentos negros de Cuba. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 169 pp. ISBN 0-8032-6438-0. Price: \$ 12.95

This collection of folk tales is the result of ethnographic fieldwork by well-known Cuban ethnographer and author Lydia Cabrera. While records of Cabrera’s work have been published extensively, what makes this particular edition special is that it is the first English translation of Cabrera’s significant contributions to the study of African culture in the Americas. Thus, this volume makes Cabrera accessible to a wider audience than ever before. Lydia Cabrera, it is stated in the introduction, dedicated her entire life’s work to the research and investigation of the black Cuban race, also known as “Afro-Cubans.” Afro-Cubans, like all other Cuban immigrants to the island, had ancestral origins in another country. However, the arrival of Africans and their descendants was, for the most part, as involuntary slave labor to work on Cuban plantations. Because of their low social and class status, African slaves and their descendants were viewed by Whites as not only ignorant and uneducable, but also as lacking any true history and culture of their

own. The marginalization and negative perception of Afro-Cubans is what makes Cabrera's acknowledgment of their rich cultural heritage so important to scholarship.

In 1930, she began ethnographic fieldwork with a visit to the home of a priestess in the Afro-Cuban religion where she was initiated into the lifestyle and culture of Afro-Cubans. Ironically, Cabrera herself was from a prominent White Cuban family. The introduction notes that she was introduced early on to the arts and, although she began her early career as a painter, she turned increasingly to writing, which became a central element of her ethnographic style. The introduction notes that Cabrera maintained "close relationships" with Afro-Cubans, but does not give any precise explanation of how these relationships were formed or maintained. It is certain, however, that Cabrera's involvement with the Afro-Cuban community, particularly her own initiation into the religion, lends itself to a very intimate practice of participant-observation in her work, which intimacy is reflected in this collection of folktales.

Throughout each of the stories, there is a rich use of language, vivid imagery, and a lively descriptive style. This delightfully lush style of presentation helps to minimize any problems with translation. At times, the stories seem to lose chronological sequence, instead becoming entranced with the rhythms of language and song, losing the thread of a story, and then backtracking to pick it up again in a casual, conversational manner. However, it is important to remember that these stories are part of an oral tradition. Their conversion to written text, however, does not detract from their charm. In a surreal manner, the reader is introduced to the seemingly impossible brought to life: Talking animals, animated objects, and the practice of magic exist side by side with the Afro-Cuban work-a-day world. Daughters of peasants marry kings, simple men become gods, and gods walk and talk among human beings. The lines between fact and fantasy are blurred. Embedded in the magic and fantasy, however, is a wonderful glimpse into the worldview of Afro-Cuban culture. There seems to be a belief that through magic, what is not real can be made manifest, the unseen can be seen, and the unthinkable can happen, thus allowing human beings to manipulate their world and change their reality.

These tales were first translated from Spanish into French and, now, with this volume, into English. Making the difficulty of translation even more challenging, the tales often use a Creolized language that is a mixture of Spanish and African languages, as well as the Cuban dialect. The problems inherent in the mixture of so many languages are addressed with the extensive use of footnotes. While at times distracting, the footnotes are necessary components of what makes this collection not only entertaining, but also a work of scholarship. They explain the language and vocabulary, situate the story geographically, provide a context within which to understand the actions of the characters, explain cultural practices, and provide translations. The translators do an excellent job of pointing out possible errors and differences between different versions of the translated stories. For example,

certain parts of the stories that appear in the Spanish text do not appear in the French translations and vice versa. The language used in these stories is also important to the study of Afro-Cuban culture. The stories often skip back and forth between various languages and dialects, beginning in Cuban Spanish, jumping to a Creole dialect, and then reverting to a slave dialect. Through the use of language, we see the dual identity of the Afro-Cuban population as both Cuban *and* African, moving about between both worlds at will, while possibly belonging fully to neither one. In fact, it is clear from the use of language that these two identities are inextricable intertwined. Some of the tales in this book are based on traditional Afro-Cuban stories. Black Cuban women told Lydia Cabrera stories they believed to be African, filtered of course, through their own imperfect memories. In others, Cabrera mixes various versions and elements together. Finally, some of them are entirely her own creation, as she internalized the Afro-Cuban worldview and reprocessed it through her own imagination.

Allowing Afro-Cubans to tell their own stories would seem to relieve the ethnographer of many problems with interpretation through observation alone. However, Cabrera went much further than simply collecting these tales. By becoming close to the community, she brings an intimacy that might not have been otherwise possible. Her rather unorthodox approach to ethnography might well be contested by some scholars. However, when we consider Cabrera's life and work in detail, it is possible to see how this became an effective part of her own ethnographer's toolkit.

Through Cabrera's work, scholars are also reminded that ethnography cannot be truly performed without any input from the ethnographer and it is certainly evident that the value system of the ethnographer will emerge at some point in how they tell the story. In the "Introduction to the Spanish Edition," Fernando Ortiz, another famous Cuban ethnographer with whom Cabrera studied, reminds us that these stories result from a combination of Afro-Cuban folklore and the translation of the White ethnographer. One of Cabrera's strengths is that she does not only recognize this, but she embraces it, using her own creative skills to expand upon her research.

These stories can be utilized in a variety of academic disciplines, including history, literature, anthropology, or linguistics, among others. This author recommends them for use in any classroom in which an instructor can appreciate the ability of folktales and mythology as a useful tool in studying the worldview of a particular community. Like her contemporary, Zora Neale Hurston, an African-American collector of folklore, Lydia Cabrera does not fit the standard definition of a formally educated anthropologist, as there is no evidence that she received any advanced degrees in anthropology. Nonetheless, "Afro-Cuban Tales" is a rich contribution to the recording of Afro-Cuban culture through written transcription of oral storytelling. This English translation now allows even more readers to step into the world Cabrera herself experienced.

Daphne Washington