

Charting Territories of Love in the Works of Elizabeth Nunez

by

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Abstract

This article will explore the soul space of Nunez’s characters in a setting where love flourishes or is forsaken. This exploration into Nunezian magical realism transverses the cultural, habitual, and ritual traditions of the indigenous and migratory populations of Trinidad and Tobago as they negotiate their lives throughout the diasporic continuum. The question that is begging to be answered is echoed in popular culture by the song, *Where is the Love?* The full range and realm of love will be exemplified through the dramatic unfolding between parent and child; husband and wife; siblings and schoolmates; God and country. Nunez provides answers and possibilities that are not obvious, but can be unpacked in the environmental symbolism of the Caribbean; the ritual space of the pervasive spirituality of Africa; and the acrobatic linguistics that Nunez employs with the English language.

Introduction

The diasporic vision of Elizabeth Nunez is brilliantly displayed in multidimensional narratives in which the ethos of Caribbean humanity is central. The Nunez novel traverses the global trajectory of the transatlantic slave trade from its medieval origins through the various historical periods of colonialism and post-colonialism, postmodernism, and the present information age of technology. Nunez further paints her portrayal of a Caribbean ethos by placing cultural representations of the diverse demographics of the Caribbean alongside the historical markers of the region. Her literary signature in deftly managing the psycho-social as well as the spiritual personality and consciousness of her characters while offering insight into the derivations of African diasporic spirituality is a true gift and a challenge to readers and critics of Caribbean literature.

True to her identity as a Trinidadian woman writer, Nunez offers a robust and complex treatment of Caribbean women and their background, issues, dilemmas, and desires that are specific to their condition in situ and in exile. The reader comes away with an intimate understanding of Caribbean women in both their everyday life and in their soul space as they traverse the nuances of race, gender, and class. For this, Nunez's works are also heralded as important works of Caribbean feminist discourse. However convenient, the classification of Nunez as solely a feminist author is insufficient to characterize the breadth and depth of her thematic treatments and her linguistic dexterity in giving authentic voice to the thoughts and concerns of her male characters.

In Nunez's novels we observe the traditional concerns of women regarding their relationships parents, siblings, husbands and children: their quest for love, and their need for security to nurture and support the family structure. This role extends into participation in their communities in social, cultural, and religious activities. Caribbean women's participation in the work force, at home and abroad, also provides a backdrop for a full portrayal of Caribbean life. However, prosaic this may seem, Elizabeth Nunez uses these ordinary facets of life to construct and conflate a Caribbean way of being and seeing the world from a woman's perspective.

The ancient female philosopher associated with Socrates, Diotima, offers insight into the dynamics of love in Plato's Symposium that closely correlates with the function of love in the Caribbean context of Nunez's works,

"... Love's situation is like this. First of all, he's always poor; far from being sensitive and beautiful, as is commonly supposed, he's tough, with hardened skin, without shoes or home...he always lives in a state of need. In essence in every type of desire for good things or happiness is what constitutes, in all cases 'powerful and treacherous love.'" (Hamilton translation 39-42)

Nunez does the necessary socio-political work that Caribbean feminist scholars are concerned with such as "defining the social relations of gender to refer to a complex system of power played out in the different and often unequal experiences of women and men" (Barriteau 59). Nunez informs us of the Caribbean's political struggles through the "romance-revolution nexus" that permeates the work of many Caribbean female authors who, according to Meehan, "convey the project of self-inscription" (301). Sally, the frustrated poet in *Grace*, represents this project of self-inscription as she risks marriage and motherhood to reach her goal. The quest for power, property, and agency are fully addressed in *When Rocks Dance* as Marina and her mother struggle to attain wealth and status through the traditional routes of marriage and inheritance, only to confront their racial identities and sexual oppression. *Bruised Hibiscus* addresses the objectification of women and their vulnerability to rape and sexual abuse in a justice blind system. Nunez's characters in *Beyond the Limbo Silence* seek education abroad to attain agency in a post-colonial society slowly embracing women's participation in the workforce.

The full realm of creative possibilities inherent in the complex cultural and intricate geopolitical realities of the Caribbean make for wonder and full engagement in the text. For example, Nunez affords us the opportunities to reflect on Caribbean dual consciousness through such characters as Emilia in *When Rocks Dance*, who is born in the Caribbean of mixed parentage – an embodiment of Europe and Africa, or the Amerindian, Zuela, in *Bruised Hibiscus*. The racial stratification among an established population of mixed race people, “brown people” brings a racial awareness that is distinctly Caribbean, in comparison to the black and white dialectic of the United States. Though Belinda Edmondson describes this phenomenon in early Caribbean novels, the constructs are also apparent in Nunez’s works, “Caught in a nexus of contradictory visions of black and white women of black, brown, and white men, brown women’s subjectivity was a hall of mirrors reflecting and refracting the gaze of whatever constituency was watching” (60).” The cultural clashes of Caribbean encounters with African American culture as those represented in *Beyond the Limbo Silence* and *Even in Paradise* further provide important distinctions of Caribbean identity.

Spirituality in Nunez’s Works

The most fascinating and disarming aspect of the Nunez oeuvre is that her characters reside in a cosmology of African derived consciousness that seemingly governs and mediates the melodramatic unfolding of events despite the adherence to European customs and Christianity. Of such interest is this infusion of spirituality in Nunez’s novels that I, and others, sought to document the instances in which the spirituality of the characters was significant; and to determine Nunez’s commentary on the efficacy of African derived spirituality in comparison to Christianity. In an article, entitled, *The Route to Spiritual Prowess in the Works of Elizabeth Nunez*, I detailed the myriad spiritual references beginning with the foundational novel, *When Rocks Dance*, in which Marina explores an array of spiritual choices in her life and death struggle -- from the native Amerindian magic to European Catholicism or African Ibo rituals. Similarly, *Bruised Hibiscus* presents the spiritual choices of the transatlantic slave trade: African obeah or rituals to the Divine Mother, the Virgin Mary. In *Beyond the Limbo Silence*, two college students concoct an African style ritual to cope with their emotional pain of campus life at a predominantly white institution (PWI). Myth and spiritual symbolism are also plentiful in such novels as *Discretion* and *Grace*. However, it is important to note that two of Nunez’s novels are adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, *Prospero’s Daughter* and *Even in Paradise* and employ Shakespearean myth with Caribbean sensibility.

Yet, with this discovery of the parallel universes of European and Afro-Caribbean spirituality and how they function to unite, heal and transform the characters and their situations, existing literature on Nunez has missed a step in not acknowledging love as an important spiritual component. In the unfolding of Nunez’s narrative, she exposes the attendant ruptures associated with the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism that persist through the ages beyond postmodernism to the present time.

But, more importantly, her work exposes our tendency to separate love, particularly romantic love, from spirituality and spiritual practice. By romantic love, what is meant is a kind of love described by historian Sara Rzeszutek Haviland: “love that was forged on a hard, unconventional path [where] each brought a commitment to activism to their marriage and part of their compatibility was built around that shared obligation” (279). Haviland was describing the love in the marriage of organizer James Jackson and Esther Cooper Jackson. Through their work in the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC) founded in 1937, the Jacksons met John Oliver Killens, the writing mentor of Elizabeth Nunez (Gilyard 49).

The Persian poet, Khalil Gibran uses the same adjective, hard, in his verse on love,

When love beckons to you, follow him,
Though his ways are hard and steep.
And when his wings enfold you yield to him,
Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you. (The Prophet)

Nunez’s fiction exposes our unhealthy tendency to separate this kind of love “built around that shared obligation” from spiritual practice. It is difficult to separate the bonds of love from the bonds of political commitment in such unions. In *Discretion*, Oufoula’s successful political career impinges upon his marriage to the daughter of his nation’s president, and it is their shared obligation to nation building that keeps them together.

In the works of Nunez, we conclude that indigenous myths and African spirituality and practice are stronger than that of European origin such as Catholicism. Nunez’s characters face the truth of their forgotten origins and ritualistically become one with the ancient traditions of conquered peoples. The powers of indigenous magic and African obeah seem so potent that they offer healing and the reversal of misfortune in *When Rocks Dance* and *Beyond the Limbo Silence*. Whereas, in the case of *Bruised Hibiscus* institutional religions do not provide solutions or protection as the crime of rape happens on the grounds of a hallowed shrine. If this proposition that African spirituality is more powerful than the European, then it would follow that love in untainted regions of Africa would be ideal and idyllic – grounded in spirituality and spiritual practice. Not so.

Nunez’s Territories of Love

The novel *Discretion*, in which the riveting story of a love worth dying for is told, has such potential to portray Africa as a source of authentic love and fulfilling marriages. The haunting and dramatic story of the suicide of Oufoula’s mother and her suitor is revelatory, “that love could have such power, that it could lead a man to his finality!” (Nunez 2).

The proper term to describe this act may not be love, but passion. However, in this act we find two people authentically convinced of the truth of their love for one another. The profundity of these suicides, particularly that of Oufoula's mother was an act of resistance against a feudal system, "to use one's body as a metaphor for truth, that was not only not being listened to but dismissed, canceled out, and written out the place where one believed" (Alexander 160).¹ When Oufoula's mother employs magic such that, she walks away in a trance, casts spells so no one in the village would stop her, she follows her suitor to death -- to the place where she believed. Oufoula tells us, that love was not a prerequisite for marriage in his mother's time (1). She did not believe in a life that would not allow her to marry the man she loved. Love is the motivating force and her spirituality is the tool.

The tragedy of this act left a young child, Oufoula, without the love of a mother. It is this loss of love and abandonment that typifies many of Nunez's characters, Zuela and Rosa in *Bruised Hibiscus*; Sally in *Grace*, Emilia in *When Rocks Dance*, etc. Nunez further explores the loss of maternal love in acts of infanticide and cases where the unborn may never come to life. Some are acts of rebellion and resistance of enslaved women who defiantly willed that their offspring would not be born into slavery. This loss of maternal love portends the destructive behaviors and spiritual ruptures in the fulfillment of the protagonists in Nunez's works. It also underscores the thirst of Caribbean people and their diasporic relatives for rootedness and sustenance from their mother country on the continent of Africa.

Love between a mother and child is innate. A mother's love is the first love that a child experiences and the loss of such unconditional love at an early age has deleterious effects on subsequent relationships and leaves the child vulnerable to uncaring attachments. The mishandling of love in ancient Africa in favor of societal arrangements for privilege and power, then is exacerbated in the Caribbean context in which slavery and colonialism endangered all fulfillment of true romantic love. So fundamentally, the Caribbean women in these novels inherited the quest for a love that would fill the emptiness of loss of maternal love and the trauma of abandonment. These situations are a direct result of a hegemonic social structure in which women were seldom loved or valued for their intrinsic qualities. The abusive marriage of Rosa to Cedric in *Bruised Hibiscus*, and the violent atrocities perpetrated against women in that novel are the most glaring examples of a cultural climate in which women are as good as dead if they do not fulfill their proscriptive roles as property. Nunez herself yearned for the verbally expressed love from her mother in her memoir when she wrote "she loved me, yet it took years for those three little words to leave her tongue, 'I love you,'" (Nunez *Not for Everyday Use* 244).

This discussion would be incomplete without mention of the love between friends in these works, which is essential, but not crucial to our understanding of the love relationships in the novels. Nunez has crafted beautiful stories that illustrate the bonds of sisterhood in her works: Rosa and Zuela; Sarah and Courtney.

¹ Though M. Jacqui Alexander's observation refers to a modern-day protest, it is most appropriate to describe the nature and import of Oufoula's mother.

Similarly, the bonds of friendships between men and women as Anna and Paul in *Anna-in Between*; and the friendships between men is also present, particularly in Albert and Emile's friendship in *Boundaries*. Nunez's explorations of friendships also cross gender, race, and class affording us glimpses into the lives of a diverse set of characters. We may gain insight into the unfolding of romance between protagonists through the commentaries of their friends. However, unlike the love and longing for one's parents and the longing for self-knowledge and self-love – the love between friends is not as crucial to the person's individuation, motivation and attitude towards romantic love.

In *Prospero's Daughter* and *Even in Paradise*, Nunez further excavates the original sin of West Africans to trust the Europeans who would enslave them in the contradictory paradise that is the Caribbean. Many literary critics of Caribbean literature, such as such as George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, and Derek Walcott, refer to the iconic figure of Caliban from Shakespeare's *Tempest* to typify the process by which Caliban is enslaved and colonized through language and education – through an act of love and hospitality.

Caliban: When thou cam'st first,
Thou strod'st me, and made much of me; wouldst give me
Water with berries in't; and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee. (Shakespeare Gutenberg)

Nunez's retelling of the story in *Prospero's Daughter* casts Carlos as the Caliban figure who truly loves Virginia (the Miranda figure) from *The Tempest*. The dilemma of Carlos is that he stayed on the island and withstood the abuse of Dr. Gardner (Prospero) and exhibited what psychologists call the Stockholm syndrome in which the prisoner forms an attachment to the oppressor. Carlos says, "but hate is not possible, without love. Hate is the ashes, the dying embers of love" (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 217).

Eventually, the process of colonization is described thusly, "I had found myself in his music, in his literature, and thought of his art as my art, belonging also to me" (Nunez 118). In so doing, Carlos, loved the colonizer and, through acculturation, believed himself to be one with that culture. Yet, unlike Shakespeare's *Tempest* that seems to vindicate the colonizer Prospero, *Prospero's Daughter* has an ending that vindicates the colonized as the villainous Dr. Gardner dies, Carlos regains his property, and marries Gardner's daughter Virginia. Virginia forces her father to confront the truth of his perversity and ultimately he commits suicide. Though she and Carlos, are happily married, she continues to seek the truth by asking Carlos if he may harbor some resentment towards her for her father's offenses,

He answers that he does not share my father's twisted logic; he does not believe that my father's blood, the color of my father's skin, makes me who I am.
"But we owe you. Father owed you," I say.
"I have what he stole from me. That is all I want," he says. "I have my house."
(309)

It is this primordial need for union with concepts of divinity and the universe that compels us to seek romantic love. Virginia and Carlos first demonstrate the spiritual love between two innocents as they form a bond of friendship as children on the isolated orchid rich island of Chacachacare. Carlos loved Virginia because she affirmed his humanity and those of the enslaved even though her father did not. She loved his poetry, and though of British parents, she spoke as Carlos spoke with a Caribbean accent. The discrimination could not separate them because, essentially, they were raised together. The success of their eventual union was based on their commitment to truth telling. Carlos spoke truth about the oppression of his people and of his own disenfranchisement and Virginia believed him. Virginia tells the inspector that it is not a crime for Carlos to love her, or for her to love Carlos. Virginia was committed to telling the truth that Carlos did not rape her. Carlos was puzzled that before his fatal leap, he begged Virginia's forgiveness and did not feel he owed an apology to Carlos or Ariana. Virginia could no longer keep silent that her father had molested her and their servant Ariana. Their dialogue always pushes through the recognition and resolution of their ethnic differences to achieve spiritual and ethical choices in their relationship.

In Nunez's adaptation of *King Lear, Even in Paradise*, we see a white West Indian father, Mr. Ducksworth, who is obsessed with outward displays of affection from his three daughters whom he raised after the death of his wife. He demands filial respect from his children, especially from his daughter, Corinne, who has defied him by choosing to work with poor Black children while away at college in Jamaica. What is interesting about Mr. Ducksworth's character is that Nunez introduces another form of love beyond the familial and romantic, and that is love for one's country – love for the Caribbean. Though Ducksworth exhibits shameful behavior in terms of racism and classism, he is nonetheless a patriot of his native Trinidad, who, though expatriated to Barbados, observes all the cultural customs of his homeland. Similarly, there are other such Caucasians who, after being born in the Caribbean, cannot extricate themselves from its identity such as Bertha, Sara's stigmatized great grandmother in *Beyond the Limbo Silence*: "though her skin was white, [she] was not white. Who could be pure white on an island that gave birth to Calypso?" (Nunez, *Beyond the Limbo Silence* 5). For Ducksworth and Aunt Bertha, their identity was not strictly defined by skin color.

This notion of Caribbean pride and nationalism spills over into several other exemplifications of love across cultures in Nunez's novels. The problematics between Caribbean and African American couples is a recurring theme beginning with *Beyond the Limbo Silence*, in which Sam and Sara cannot fulfill their love for one another because of many factors including his commitment to activism in the Civil Rights Movement. Their disagreements center on their differences and how he does not see similarities in the experiences of U.S. born-African Americans and Caribbean born immigrants living in the United States. Ultimately, his involvement keeps him away from her as he travels throughout the dangerous sites of protest in Mississippi. Trinidadian born Justin and African American Sally in *Grace* face marital problems that stem, in part, from the tragic lynching of Sally's father during the era of Jim Crow; this affects Sally's capacity to love. In *Discretion*, the African Oufoula admits of his love for the Jamaican born Marguerite, "I would have to accept that I loved a woman through whose veins ran the blood of a people whose cruelty I abhorred" (Nunez *Discretion* 221)

In her most recent works, *Anna in Between* and *Boundaries*, Nunez explores issues of exile and the complications associated with romantic and professional relationships with African Americans. Seemingly, Nunez is interested in the plight of the African American, with her Caribbean born-characters' willingness to identify with their struggle in the United States. From some Caribbean-born characters, like Paula in *Boundaries*, there is a reticence to validate the success of such unions. In *Boundaries*, Anna is divorced from an African American and displaced at work by an African American. Anna rationalizes that her displacement at work, though unethical, is a way to restore the long denied balance of equality to African Americans. This notion is also supported by her father and her fiancé. The happy ending of this story finds Anna successfully mated with a fellow Trinidadian, similarly divorced from an American, and, also living in exile in New York City.

In chapter six of *Anna-in-Between*, Nunez contemplates the notion that "in America, she is black, and in America the ways of black people have been defined, set in stone." (Nunez, *Anna-in-Between* 75). She further explores the stereotypes Americans have of West Indians and grappling with her identity, concludes that:

She is all of these: African, Amerindian, Asian, European. She is Caribbean and not Caribbean, for she has lived many years in America. She is American and not American, for she has lived many years on her island... in spite of the years she has lived in New York, in spite of the years she has not lived on the island, she has not changed as much as she thinks. (77)

In both *Anna-in Between* and its sequel, *Boundaries*, Anna's parents, both Trinidadians, enjoy the fruits of a long marriage. Though the Sinclairs had to work through many issues in their marriage, it benefitted from the similarity of their cultural backgrounds and their anchored life in Trinidad.

Awareness of self-identity is crucial; for Nunez understands well that the foundation of love and successful relationships is built on the ability of couples to understand one another. In *Grace and Discretion*, the individual identity crises of the protagonists are pivotal to the unfolding of these love stories. Sally, in *Grace*, not only leaves her husband, but commits the unthinkable act of also abandoning her daughter in her strident quest for self-understanding and healing from her broken childhood. Her husband is heart-broken and repeats the childish chant, “Sally does not love me” to come to terms with her departure, first from the intimacy of the bedroom and ultimately from the house. Justin’s love is immature, not authentically for Sally, but to the image and lifestyle of a perfect marriage. Rather than take responsibility for the problems in their marriage he accuses her of having an affair, and when he cannot find the man, even goes so far to insinuate that she may be lesbian.

Sally, is equally confused as she feels personally unfulfilled, and mistakenly equates her fidelity to household chores and child rearing as an assault to her identity. She cries for, “Space for Sally, I want space for Sally” (37). Their marital crisis concerns their inability to relate to each other as individuals, as they once did. They each, also, must deal with the issues of their respective abandonment from their parents; and Justin must confront the pain of exile from Trinidad.

As the couple evolves into greater self-awareness during their separation, they discover that the key to their reconciliation is for Sally, an elementary school teacher, to achieve her lifelong dream of becoming a poet and, in so doing, rediscover her true self through the act of writing. The romantic dialogue between Sally and Justin in *Grace* underscores that self-love is a necessary precursor for a successful union:

“I was so lonely and unhappy,” she said.

“Then I met you and saw my face in you.”

“But, she said, “if we are truthful, we will admit that the first person we ever loved, could ever love, was ourselves, and that we long to see that self we love, not through a mirror, but through our own eyes.” (36)

Sally makes the distinction, not through a mirror, because a reflection is not the same as seeing the self. A reflection is also subject to interpretation and misrepresentation. Sally longs to see herself and insists that she can only do so through Justin’s love.

“When I look at you, it is me I see.” becomes the refrain for the novel, symbolic of the union of self with the spirit of the loved one. Khalil Gibran says that “Love has no other desire but to fulfill itself.”

The superficiality of sex and the activities of courtship do not suffice for the longing for being at one that Sally was desperately seeking – that which is soul and self-affirming, “I fell in love with you because I can love me through you. And I can love me because I see in your eyes how lovable I am” (36). Beyond the cliché in the term “soul mate,” Justin is forced to contemplate the “mysteries of human existence” through love and through grace. Grace is unmerited favor, a spiritual concept that he knows he must embrace if he is to convince Sally to stay. We first encounter the concept of grace when Sally’s mother says that it was grace that freed her from a bad relationship and that Justin was God’s gift of grace to her, “It’s God’s sprinkling of stardust on you, on both of you. His grace. Don’t throw His gift back in His face” (106-107).

Though an admitted “apostate,” Justin realizes that he cannot be responsible for Sally’s happiness, but he prays for grace. At that moment, he comes to understand that the moment of their marital crisis coincided with her anniversary of her father’s death. He received the grace of understanding Sally’s subconscious anxieties and could bring it to her attention. In that moment of grace, he truly became the person through whom she could see herself, and heal. He demonstrates his commitment to Sally when he understands her notion of seeing herself through him by stating that, “I want to know you, Sally...Unburden yourself of those memories in your poetry. Write so we can know you...” (243). And per Virginia Woolf’s dictate to give voice to women writers in, “A Room of One’s Own,” Justin gives up his library for Sally to have the space she needs to write.

The poetics of love expressed in this dialogue is echoed in *Discretion* in the descriptive critical review of Marguerite’s artwork, “...An artist who sees into the souls of men.” Oufoula concedes that Marguerite had indeed seen into his soul and that is why he fell in love with her. In this statement, he illustrates the difference between the fidelity to his marriage and his love for Marguerite. Though African tradition would allow for such arrangements, Marguerite refuses to be a mistress, but concedes that her love for Oufoula is so real that “You [Oufoula] are the first and the last man that I will ever love” (Nunez *Discretion* 268). Nunez informs us, “that the question I had been pursuing was larger than the complexities of adultery. It was the lesson contained in Genesis: We cannot have the Apple *and* the Garden. We must choose” (Nunez “Truth in Fiction” 502). Oufoula chose rightly as both traditional African society and even the more liberal conventions of today would advise. The Apple of Marguerite’s love, though forbidden fruit, did provide him with the self-knowledge that he was seeking and assuaged the “nagging feeling of incompleteness, the feeling of wanting more, needing more...” (*Discretion* 37). Eric Fromm says that to understand love, we must understand human existence and that “...Man is life being aware of self; he has awareness of himself, of his fellow man, of his past, and of the possibilities of his future...The deepest need of man is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness” (Fromm 8-9).

At first Marguerite was a fantasy, and though their relationship became a reality of true love, it could not be sustained because it was based on lies. Oufoula says that loving Marguerite was not the sin of eating the Apple. He was punished for his ingratitude and hubris for challenging God and venturing out of The Garden (116).

After the onset of their affair, tragedy strikes, and Oufoula's pregnant wife is in an accident. The loss of his unborn child causes him to reflect, the sin he committed was "looking into the face of God and challenging him. Because he was ungrateful" (114). However, throughout the novel, Oufoula and his wife Nerida, remain together and continue to have children. Though his wife suspects his affair, she maintains a calm home life, and quietly engineers his reassignment away from New York.

Unlike many tropes of female victimization, Marguerite was not a needy woman. She was independent, absorbed and fulfilled in her career as an artist. Her life did not revolve around domesticity, child-rearing, and pleasing a man. Marguerite's life, unlike Oufoula was free from compromise. Through the truth inherent in art she had integrity; Oufoula's career as a diplomat involved compromise and deception. Through Marguerite, Oufoula became emboldened, because, though he was successful, he did not chart his own course. He followed the trajectory of his powerful father-in-law. Oufoula learns a great deal from loving Marguerite and gains insight through showing affection. He learns how to show love, "For women, love is shown through sacrifice, the tiny small inconveniences they willingly put upon themselves for the sake of our happiness: the food they cook for us, the clothes they wash for us" (212-213). Perhaps the most profound lesson Oufoula learned from Marguerite was spiritual: "She would teach me that life was complex: The Serpent never leaves the Garden. Or the Apple. Each choice we make contains its antithesis – something we hate, detest. Something that chafes at our smug view of ourselves" (221).

Marguerite is not intrusive and exhibits patience in dealing with the issues of their love affair. Marguerite seems to rely on their spiritual connection rather than phone calls while they are apart. Oufoula is tormented when they are not together. During their time together, she opens his minds to books and issues of Africa and the effects of colonization. She admits that her work and her commitment is to dealing with women's pain. She also discusses her views about keeping marriages and families intact. She does not find the African practice of polygamy troubling for those who grew up in that system. But the thought of being Oufoula's mistress is troubling and prompts her to finally end the affair.

Though Oufoula has chosen the Garden – his life with Nerida and their children – he remains tormented about his love for Marguerite and the fact that they will never be together again. His life in the Garden is blessed with the comforts of a good home, a strong marriage, and beautiful children. It is interesting that Nunez introduces the complexities associated with the first couple to have ever loved; the couple from whom we have inherited original sin and the earthly punishment of exile from the Garden.

All of humanity is exiled from the Garden, the place where all needs are met. Hence, divine love is the longing of an exiled people. The people of the Caribbean characterized in Nunez's novels are in exile – born into exile from their African homeland or expatriated from Europe or Asia. There are those who are in exile in America and Canada who came seeking education and professional opportunities. George Lamming describes the plight of the exiled:

For it is that mutual experience of separation from their original ground which makes both master and slave colonial. To be colonial is to be in a state of exile. And the exile is always colonial by circumstances: a man colonized by his incestuous love of a past whose glory is not worth our total human suicide. (229)

The issue here, in the works of Nunez, goes beyond the exile of the physical body from its original home, is the exile of the spirit from its soul – the exile of the heart.

Diotima, the ancient Greek female philosopher, characterizes love as the spirit of exile:

“Love's situation is like this. First, he's always poor; far from being sensitive and beautiful, as is commonly supposed, he's tough, with hardened skin, without shoes or home...he always lives in a state of need. In essence in every type of desire for good things or happiness is what constitutes, in all cases 'powerful and treacherous love.'” (Hamilton translation 39-42)

Oufoula's mother took her soul away from the village and went into exile so she could free her spirit. Her abandonment of Oufoula caused his eventual exile to missionary schools and European academies in preparation for a diplomatic career in which he was hardly at home. The love that he gave to Marguerite was from a heart in exile. Therefore, his life could only be restored through his return to Africa and the Edenic home he made with Nerida.

In the novel, *Grace*, Justin's exile from his parents and his home in Trinidad is so traumatic that he must suppress its memory. So not only is his soul in exile, his memory is also. Without the attachment to his soul and his memory, he cannot fully give love to Sally. Sally, too, has shut down the seat of her pain, the heart-broken when her father was lynched.

The brutal dismemberment of white women in *Bruised Hibiscus* is symbolic of the rage of a repressed memory, separated from – in exile – from the truth of epochs of sexual abuse perpetrated by the European ruling class upon its slaves, servants, and laborers. The society depicted in this work is literally and figuratively dismembered and lacks cohesiveness among its multi-racial demographic.

Women are sexual objects or status symbols and are not genuinely loved. As such, the men in the novel are controlling, vigilant, and suspicious that their women are not faithful to them. The European and mixed-race women, though born in the Caribbean, are exiles on the island and vulnerable to abuse. Virginia in *Prospero's Daughter* is sent into exile for her protection against the perceived threat of Caliban's rape. Yet, she represents the intact soul. The resolution that Nunez prescribes in her works is a return from exile to the source, the seat of the soul.

Diotima further explains that love is neither mortal nor immortal it is a mediating spirit between Divinity and the gods that mediates between wisdom and ignorance; beauty and ugliness. The Caribbean construct as a paradise is a great template upon which Nunez can offer a philosophical rendering of love first catalyzed by desire. The personification of the Caribbean is like love, neither mortal nor immortal. It is a great mediator between humankind and the divine realm. The Caribbean is an object of desire for conquerors, explorers, pirates and slave traders who came out of a psychological need to make themselves immortal; out of a utilitarian desire for commodities and the like. Upon arrival and sight of the islands, they beheld beauty and the Caribbean became the object of their desire. We do not know what made these explorers, slave traders, and their colonizing descendants incapable of falling in love with the Caribbean, but we do know that they received love and hospitality from the aboriginal inhabitants of this region. We learn of the dangerous and treacherous love of the original inhabitants, the Calibans, represented by Carlos in *Prospero's Daughter*. Void and incapable of love, they raped and enslaved her population, and created colonial systems based on this proposition such that human interactions were defective of love. *When Rocks Dance* depicts the love neurosis of the European planter class in which marriage was based on a preoccupation with property acquisition and inheritance. As the phenomenon of Asian and African deployment to the Caribbean occurred, the ignorance of racial hatred was layered upon loveless traditions of marriage. Robbed of identity and the unconditional love of their mother country, the enslaved and later the colonized themselves perpetuated the perversity of abandonment and separation from their children. As discussed earlier, Nunez thoroughly explores this travesty as she situates the love-seeking journeys of her characters throughout the African diaspora, who must also confront differences between and among the bloodlines of the transatlantic diaspora. In the post-colonial context as the Caribbean became commodified with tourism as the source of economic development and pleasure, our love for the true Caribbean is supplanted by a need for a sterile, packaged vacation where the sand is swept and the beach is contained.

The effacing of St. John, Virgin Islands by the well-meaning preservationists of the United States Department of the Interior exemplifies the perverse love for the island that spoils its terrain and disenfranchises its citizens:

However, nobody bothered to tell [the inhabitants] about the new rule book they would have to follow as householders in the National Park. For generations, these natives had been freely setting fish traps and seines, cutting down trees ...using the land as they wanted to (O'Neill 140).

Thus, citizens of these islands are exiled from their own bits of paradise. Tourists are more at home as the Virgin Islands becomes their playground. Throughout the Caribbean, islanders are estranged from their birthright of land and the productivity of the land. The characterization of pleasure islands dominates as more bars, clubs, and hotel developments encroach on once pristine beaches. This is the fear that Mr. Duckworth faced as his daughters threatened to exile him from his beachfront property so that they could build condominium development for tourists.

The longing for love and the anxiety of being separate and alone, in exile, even among Black people, is poignantly illustrated as political realities and ethnic and cultural differences separate couples in *Discretion*, *Beyond the Limbo Silence* and *Anna-in-Between*. We are hopeful as we see the postcolonial and postmodern triumphs of characters like those in Grace who fight for self-awareness and do not lose love. This is true for Carlos and Virginia in *Prospero's Daughter*. It is also true for Émile and Corinne in *Even in Paradise*.

Nunez is thorough in the philosophical grounding on the nature of love such that her novels are not only plausible, but revelatory of human nature in the distinctive dynamics of the Caribbean context where desires of beauty are evocative and the exoticism promises pleasure. Yet, did the new inhabitants and waves of immigrants to these islands ever truly know the Caribbean and will these waves of tourists ever come to truly know the Caribbean such that they see themselves in her glistening, clear waters? The late Sir Derek Walcott's poetry reflects upon the various exiled groups who have come to the islands in the Caribbean sea. There is intertextual understanding in the works of Elizabeth Nunez and in Walcott's verse, "You will love again the stranger who was yourself/Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart /to itself, to the stranger who has loved you."

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Elizabeth Nunez currently works at the Office of Dentistry, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Elizabeth does research in Dental Health and Epidemiology. Her most recent publication is 'Fluoride effectiveness in high caries risk and medically complex Veterans'.
Background The Global Burden of Disease Study showed there was a 34.5% increase in years lived with disability due to dental caries from 1990 to 2010. With the aging of 76 million baby boomers, dental caries will continue to pose a significant challenge for Elizabeth Nunez in her memoir Not For Everyday Use says that in her fiction she strives to show how "in the Caribbean the fit was perfect between African and Amerindian spiritual retentions and Catholic mysticism" (127). Despite being raised in Trinidad and "taught in school to love all things British," Nunez wants her fiction to inspire "a new respect for my African past, for the beliefs of my ancestors denigrated by the British colonial masters" (119, 127). A special issue of the College Language Association (CLA) Journal is being proposed on the fiction of Elizabeth Nunez. Nunez is the award-winning author of Not For Everyday Use and is with the Office of Dentistry, Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office, Washington, DC. Gretchen Gibson is also with the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care System of the Ozarks, Fayetteville, AR. Judith A. Jones is with the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital, Bedford, MA, and the Boston University Henry M. Goldman School of Dental Medicine, Boston, MA. [Chagas disease in the rural area of Metropolitan Region (Santiago) and V Region (Aconcagua), Chile]. Authors: Myriam Lorca Fernanda Soto Paulo Soto Graciela Padilla Elizabeth Nunez Juan Rojas Maithe Horta Mirta Bustamante Julio Atencio Syamal Raychaudhuri.