



Dance Dance Revolution

Cathy Park Hong

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"The Guide" is a former South Korean dissident and tour guide who speaks a fluid fabricated language; "the Historian" interviews the Guide and annotates the commentaries. Cathy Park Hong's passionate and artful poem sequence weaves an ultimately revitalizing dialogue on shared experience in a globalized world, using language as subversion and disguise.

Dance Dance Revolution Details

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From Reader Review Dance Dance Revolution for online ebook

Keun Young (Jennifer) says

In her anthology Dance Dance Revolution, Cathy Park Hong examines Korean historical events and the fictitious “Desert” from a critical outlook. Through the use of an imaginary creole language and the rejection of capitalism, the author speaks as a narrator, the Guide, and the Historian both explicitly and implicitly detailing her personal, communist view towards the class warfare dialectic, multiculturalism, and “imperialism” that should raise questions amongst readers.

The poetry consists of a creole English that is intertwined with Korean, Spanish, French, Latin, Greek, Hawaiian, and a few others. Through the use of such technique, the poet allows herself to establish a multicultural and racially diverse environment in the Desert throughout her collection of poems. In the poem “5. Toasts in the Grove of Proposals”, for example, the first stanza reads:

“Lo, brandied man en rabbinical cape,
dab rosy musk en goy’s gossamy nape,
y brassy Brahmin papoosed in sari’s saffron sheet
swoon bine faire Waspian en ‘im wingtip feet,
les’ toast to bountiful gene pool,
to intramarried couple breedim beige population!” (pg. 92)

Indeed, at first glance, the language seems to provoke a musical rhythm that can entertain a reader. However, such use of language can confuse the reader in such a way that it interrupts the flow of the poem. Specifically, it invites the reader to question as to why the poet used a pidgin language that ironically seems to interrupt and disorient the focus of the poem when the poem is supposed to highlight the racial unity derived from marriage between people from diverse backgrounds. Likewise, another poem “Almanac” says:

“we will tar you with birds
succor soon yassir a fleet of skiffs
zigzag paths look here to sylvan arroyo” (pg. 75)

Here, along with no punctuation at all, the creole language embodies a strong sense of hysteria, almost recklessly listing what one would normally take a quick glance at as he or she passes by late at night in Desert. Through this voice, the poet thus perplexes the reader to an extent that the latter should prefer a language so hysterical. Thus, this creole language an aspect of the author’s failed attempt to build an appropriate setting for the poetry.

The Guide is also politically provocative in a rather outdated way. In her narrative, she sympathises with communism and confronts with the contemporary society by showing a strong dislike towards capitalism and an even stronger one towards pre-WW2 Japanese imperialism and post-WW2 American neo-imperialism. Firstly, in the poem “New Town” - a narrative that is to be regarded as a poem but is seemingly a paragraphic passage with full sentences - the poet shows a critique of capitalism in a city that is socially and distinctly opposite to Desert:

“Population
Grows each time Desert officials exile natives to New Town: a guide, a hotel maid, a street

vendor who sells off-season fruit, and engineer of bombs.” (pg. 80)

Here, the poet implies that more and more are exiled from Desert to work in menial jobs. By describing other parts of the New Town society including architecture, borders, language, and landmark, the Guide personally criticises capitalism and the way such socioeconomic structure consistently moves the underprivileged out of where they originally belonged to simply due to their failure to adapt or keep up with the economic conditions. Although this can be regarded as a fresh, perhaps even mind-blowing, perspective towards contemporary society, it can be seen as being a bit too much given that capitalism is found in most societies and that the communism lost the Cold War, for good reason.

Furthermore, the narrator goes on to criticise the personal acts of her grandfather and father because they politically supported other countries, her grandfather supporting Japan for his personal benefit and the father supporting America for potentially a variety of reasons including an objection to communism. In the poem “The Lineage of Yes-Men” epitomises such idea:

“Me grandfadder sole Makkoli wine to Hapanese colonists
din he guidem to insurrectas
(...)
Din mine fadder sole Makkoli -- he a ‘Merikken GI chihuahua.
Some populii tink GIs heroes wit dim strafing “Pinko chink”
but eh! Those Jeess like regula pirates, search for booty y pillage...” (pg. 43)

Along with the constant creole language, the poet uses such derogatory diction as “chihuahua” (meaning “lackey”) or metaphor - including colour symbolism -, an example of which is “pinko chink”, referring to the communist Chinese. Through such harsh language, the Guide expresses her antipathy towards her grandfather and father for being “yes-men” for the imperialistic-looking America and Japan despite the fact that she once served as an informer for the capitalistic Desert. Simply put, not only does she disrespect actions committed by others with a dissimilar perspective of the world, but she also (again) confuses the reader with her political stance.

The poet’s pidgin English and communist perspective, from one point of view, seem unique and fresh as they attempt to blend with the use of somewhat musical techniques to evoke a vision of the Desert as a structurally chaotic society. However, the combination of the language, setting, and ideology ultimately lack credibility and coherence. In addition, the use of the narrator as a political martyr conveniently hides the intolerant nature of communism and is a potential indicator of the author’s own political intolerance. Such intolerance comes out especially in her treatment of the narrator’s father and grandfather whose political beliefs clearly differed from her own. Although Dance Dance Revolution is recommended for those with desire for an alternative view of the world, it is not recommended for those who are satisfied with the mainstream political viewpoints available in contemporary society.

feux d'artifice says

man, cathy hong park is so much smarter than me.

i want to get my hands on an audio version of this book, every time i read a verse, i would think to myself, this practically begss to be read aloud.

i finished this poetry collection with the distinct sense that i did not even understand a quarter of all the things cathy hong park was going for, but was an excellent read all the same

Jane says

I found this book of lyric poems comprising a speculative, sf-ish narrative-slash-political commentary extremely inventive, fun, and interesting. There are two speakers. The poems are spoken by "the Guide," a woman originally from Korea and now working (as a guide) at a kind of Las Vegas like site in a desert somewhere in Africa, who speaks in an invented creole that the author says includes elements of 300 languages and that I imagine every reader will understand some parts of better than others (not only in the compilation of languages, pidgins, and forms of English, but in the allusions and double entendres), as well as some sections / poems in a less bricolaged idiom reflecting "translation" and/or memory. The other speaker, the "Historian" who has gathered the material, uses a more familiar form of English, but her/his pronouncements are increasingly challenging to make sense of as the book goes on. I am certain that in the future, if literary studies haven't collapsed altogether, someone will do an annotated edition that will help the reader out, but it's really fun to just read it bare and discover for yourself what you will take away. It's also dealing with really Deep Stuff (tm) having to do with migration, globalization, ecological-political-economic catastrophe, and how all of these intersect with various literary and linguistic traditions. In other words, the author does amazing and highly original work with an incredibly ambitious concept. It's fairly short and, despite the language, far more accessible than a lot of poetry I like, and would make a good read for a wider audience than is usual for interesting poetry. You'll have to check another reviewer (or the blurbs) for more on the characters/plot/setting/themes, but I recommend this.

Ash Connell says

Interesting concept; poor execution.

Will says

Park Hong's collection is innovative and interesting but challenging! She invents her own dialect for her characters that when you put the time in is rewarding and brilliant but I had a hard time putting the work in. I should have read this collection in the winter when throwing myself at a book of poetry would distract me from the gray malaise that hangs in the Minnesota sky but I didn't and felt that I didn't enjoy this collection as much as I could have. It is highly acclaimed and I understand why but I wish I had read it in a class or with a friend to better understand all the moving parts/been committed in spending serious time with the book. Cathy Park Hong is a brilliant author and her poetry always leaves me thinking and interrogating. However, I enjoyed Engine Empire more than this work. A+ title.

Paul says

Difficult poetry, but stimulating and endlessly inventive.

Rigoberto Gonzalez says

“In the Desert, the language is an amalgam of some three hundred languages and dialects imported into this city, a rapidly evolving lingua franca,” so scribbles the Historian of Cathy Park Hong’s second book of poems *Dance Dance Revolution*, an unusual journey into a post-apocalyptic landscape that grows more and more familiar with each visit to a different site.

To translate and facilitate the tour, the Historian enlists the help of a Guide, a speaker of this Desert Creole who proudly proclaims her authority as a navigator:

O tempora, o mores! I usta move
around like Inuit lookim for sea pelt...now
I’mma double migrant. Ceded from Koryo, ceded from
‘Merikka, ceded y ceded until now I seizem
dis sizable Mouthpiece role...now les’ drive to interior.

Virgil-like, the Guide spins her poetry and politics into revelations of global conflict, racial tensions, economic instabilities caused by terrorism, corruption and internal uprisings—devastations that resulted in a “dead scald world full o rust puddles, grim service men, / y ffurious mekkinations.” And though a second world has been built to conceal the broken one, its attraction exists only at surface level. The damaged psyche seeps through very easily via the stories of the “guides who ache for their own/ guides / who mourn / who lead / men from human rinds of discontent.” Here, law is “the sin of choice.”

The Guide weaves the history of the troubled city with her own participation as a revolutionary (“to fightim me yesman lineage”), which compels the Historian to write down her own strained father-daughter relationship set in a more safeguarded, but no less alienating, childhood. She too must come to terms with superimposing truth over deception, reality over memory, and language over language.

By the conclusion of the tour, from the karaoke lounge of the St. Petersburg Hotel to the New Town detention center (a cursory glance “lest ye covet a forkin sinus punch on ye gob”) to the Grove of Proposals where one can toast “to bountiful gene pool, / to intramarry couple breedim beige population,” the Historian (like the reader) has become attuned to the din of Desert Creole and to the spin of “stingy” history. By then, the Historian’s personal connection to the Guide has been disclosed and indeed, the reader can identify with the irony and layered meanings in the Guide’s final statement: “If de world is our disco ball, might I have dim dance.”

As a vision of the present Babel channeled through a futuristic one, Hong succeeds with stunning inventiveness. *Dance Dance Revolution* is a forthright critique of U.S. meddling (and fumbling) in world affairs, and is unafraid to take a heavy step into the lightly tread arena of American political poetry. This cutting-edge book is a warning to the complacent populations, as well as a “guide” to survival in the apocalypse the world is experiencing at the moment:

You can be the best talker but no point if you can’t
speak the other man’s tongue. You can’t chisel, con, plead,
seduce, beg for your life, you can’t do anything, because you
know not their language. So learn them all.

Nuha says

Hong's poetry tests the boundaries of English, of poetry itself when she plays with this pidgin English. In the tension between the Historian and the Guide she teases us, asking us to think critically about what is kept and what is left behind in history, the lives that are extinguished between history's paper-thin pages.

Holly Maxwell says

Cathy Park Hong's unique dialect makes this book feel out of this world. I was so struck when I first listened to a reading she did of a selections of these poems. Hearing her read from the books brings everything to life, and I my appreciation for her work grew. The poems were challenging to read through because of the speakers dialect, but it was well worth the time.

Brett Dupré says

From the aether, Berryman shakes his head in disbelief, wondering, "How'd she do that?"

Ching-In says

Juan Felipe Herrera asked us to introduce a really exciting poet we were inspired by these days to our poetry workshop.

I chose Cathy Park Hong because of this book & here is what I wrote:

The poet who has completely altered my consciousness this year is Cathy Park Hong, whose *Dance Dance Revolution* won the 2006 Barnard Women Poets Prize chosen by Adrienne Rich. Hong creates her own dialect (a desert language compiled from an amalgamation of 300 tongues), landscape, geography, history -- a poetic sequence in a way that takes my breath away. I find her work exciting -- I think it breaks new ground & pushes aesthetically towards a border poetics that is political & engages what's going on in the world today, but not in a rhetorical way. Her work is challenging to the reader, but in a way I find transformative. She has DUENDE in buckets!

Katherine says

Super inventive; incredibly playful with use of language. Should reread.

Norb Aikin says

Read a lot of good recommendations about this, but I couldn't get into it. I know it's supposed to be part of its draw, but the language/dialect was really distracting for me. Wouldn't rule out giving it another chance down the road when I have less going on at the time, but I'll have to remember to give myself more time and space to digest it.

Ysa says

Cathy Park Hong is a true artist of language. Here she has constructed a pidgin out of numerous major world languages, and wielded it masterfully in the voices of her characters to speak about revolution, corruption and the landscape of the future. Definitely read these poems aloud to fully enjoy the sounds of each line. This book, especially the poem "Orphic Day," reminded me of the time a professor had us memorize the first 16 lines of the Canterbury Tales: you can still follow the feel of the plot, though not precisely, while being drawn into the beauty of language. That's not to say the plot is secondary here, however. Although I wish I could connect the plot points more closely, the story told by this series of poems holds up to the best works of speculative fictional literature. As long as you read the introduction, you will probably be amazed at how well you can follow along given the fact that about half of the words are in a number of non-English languages. Lastly, I loved the way this book destabilizes Western imperialist and classist notions of "elevated" writing, as well as providing a setting and characters who inhabit the Global South. I probably won't shut up about this book around my friends for a while.

Kristen Gunther says

This might be the most ambitious poem-project I've ever heard of and/or read, and it totally works. Also, I read this right around the first time I went to Vegas, so it all made perfect sense.
