RECOVERING THE US HISPANIC LITERARY HERITAGE

MANHATTAN TROPICS
TRÓPICO EN MANHATTAN

By Guillermo Cotto-Thorner
Edited by J. Bret Maney and Cristina Pérez Jiménez
English translation by J. Bret Maney

Praise for *Manhattan Tropics* / *Trópico en Manhattan*

"Finally available to English-language readers, Guillermo Cotto-Thorner's novel *Trópico en Manhattan* (1951) is a forgotten landmark of U.S. Latinx literature, the first major literary depiction of the Puerto Rican Great Migration, and essential reading for anyone interested in midcentury New York City or in genealogies of translingual and multiethnic writing. Cristina Pérez Jiménez's brilliant introduction reads the novel as a bridge between earlier writings from the Puerto Rican *colonia* and the Nuyorican tradition that would emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, crucially underscoring Cotto-Thorner's insistence on an identity not bounded by geography but rather rooted in shared cultural practices and social histories. This is also a novel about the ironies of social class, about Latinidad and its uneasy relationship to racialization, and about diasporic place-making and creative survival in El Barrio, which Cotto-Thorner reimagines as a garden tucked away in "the hard rock of Manhattan, among hefty stone skyscrapers." J. Bret Maney's elegant translation renders Cotto-Thorner's luminous prose into idiomatic English without muting the insurrectionary force of its Spanglish vernacular, still fresh and indomitable almost 70 years later. In our present moment of neocolonial violence and anti-immigrant backlash, but also intersectional struggle, Cotto-Thorner's novel feels urgent and utterly contemporary, as it reveals both the beauty and the cracks in 'a mosaic encrusted in the bedrock of Manhattan.'"

—Urayoán Noel, *New York University*

"To have this long neglected American classic finally translated into English is truly a gift. Beautifully realized scenes of an American lost in America, adrift in a no man's land between languages and cultures, alive with comic moments and reflective passages, and of course a newly minted Spanish Harlem of 1951. Puerto Ricans are Americans and therefore, the Immigrant novel is the American novel."

—Ernesto Quiñonez, author of *Bodega Dreams*

"Thanks to J. Bret Maney's beautiful and accurate translation of *Trópico en Manhattan* by Guillermo Cotto-Thorner, readers can now enjoy a novel that is central to the mid-twentieth century Puerto Rican diaspora. Cotto-Thorner was a keen observer and listener. He paid careful attention to places and to displaced people, to language, and to gender and social tensions. *Manhattan Tropics* is alive with the linguistic creativity of a migrant community trying to recreate itself. In her splendid introduction, Cristina Pérez Jiménez sets the novel in its historical and political contexts and suggests that it blends fiction and autobiography. This edition is essential reading for those interested in rethinking the intertwined issues of diasporic traditions, empire, and memory."

—Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones, *Princeton University*

MANHATTAN TROPICS
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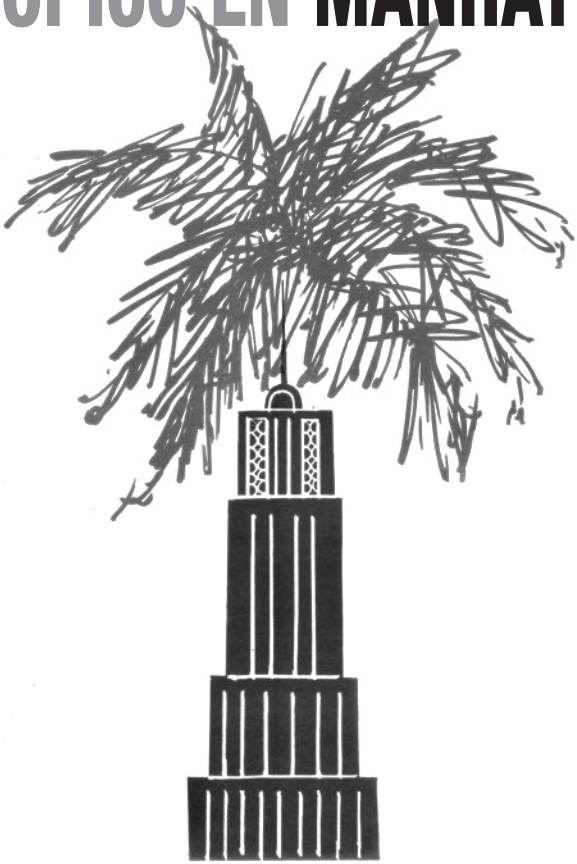

By / Por Guillermo Cotto-Thorner

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MANHATTAN TROPICS / TRÓPICO EN MANHATTAN: INTRODUCTION

In 1951, Alejandro and Joseph Otero's New-York based Spanish American Printing Company, one of the oldest Hispanic printers in the United States, issued Guillermo Cotto-Thorner's first novel, *Trópico en Manhattan*, translated here as *Manhattan Tropics*. Just some months earlier, the thirty-five-year-old Cotto-Thorner had submitted the Spanish-language manuscript as his Master of Arts' thesis for a degree in Spanish at the University of Connecticut-Storrs. The quick conversion from thesis manuscript to printed novel meant that the text was published without major modifications, save one: a change in title from the original *Puro Boricua.*[1] Despite this change, the phrase "*puro boricua*" remains in the published novel as a favored term of self-definition for its New York Puerto Rican characters. Against the idea that Puerto Ricans living off the island somehow cease to be "real" Puerto Ricans, characters in Cotto-Thorner's novel describe themselves as "*puro boricua,*" challenging the traditional insular parameters of Puerto Rican identity. Today, to proclaim oneself Boricua—a native of Borinquen, the indigenous name of Puerto Rico—is a common assertion of cultural pride made by Puerto Ricans who live in the continental United States, but at the time of the novel's publication, at midcentury, it signaled a daring new definition of national and cultural identity, one which is at the heart of *Trópico en Manhattan*. While hardly blind to the pains of migration, the novel displays remarkable foresight in portraying the diaspora as a fertile ground for Puerto Rican culture, and, more broadly, for Latino cultural identity. *Trópico en Manhattan* contributes to a new understanding of identity not bounded by geographic or

political circumscriptions but rather rooted in shared cultural practices and social histories.

The novel's vivid depiction of Puerto Rican culture in New York was appreciated by Guillermo Cotto-Thorner's contemporaries. Puerto Rican politician and educator Juan B. Huyke read *Trópico en Manhattan* with "singular enthusiasm," and in a glowing review, recommended that all compatriots read it.[2] Praising the author's "gift for creating individualized, living characters" and the novel's "atmosphere of complete authenticity," another reviewer noted *Trópico en Manhattan*'s inaugural importance, given that its theme of "Puerto Rican adjustment to life in metropolitan New York . . . has so far occupied the attention of the sociologist rather than the novelist."[3] Indeed, at the time of its publication, there was no precedent for a novel that illustrated the collective experiences of Puerto Rican migrants in New York in the midst of the ongoing mass migration of Puerto Ricans from the island. The Puerto Rican writer Abelardo Díaz Alfaro lauded *Trópico* for how it "captured the life of the Puerto Rican in New York in a marvelous way." "It is the best I have read about the matter," he affirmed.[4]

Sixteen years after its publication in New York City, the novel's importance as a literary record of the mass migration of Puerto Ricans was officially recognized on the island. Incorporated into Puerto Rico's public-school curriculum as part of a newly designed twelfth- grade literature unit on the Puerto Rican migration to New York City, *Trópico en Manhattan* was taught alongside two now-classic Puerto Rican texts belonging to different literary genres, René Marqués' 1953 play, *La carreta* (*The Oxcart*), and Pedro Juan Soto's 1956 short story collection, *Spiks*. The addition of *Trópico en Manhattan* to the school curriculum led the Puerto Rican Department of Education to commission a local edition of the novel in 1967. The 30,000 hardcover copies printed that year were followed by two smaller print runs in 1969 and 1975. Island readers' access to the novel was, however, short-lived. After a politically-tinged overhaul of the Puerto Rican public-school curriculum eliminated the literary unit on migration, *Trópico en*

Manhattan was dropped from high-school reading lists and, by the end of the decade, was out of print and mostly forgotten.

The relative oblivion into which *Trópico en Manhattan* fell is surprising today, given the novel's literary importance. *Trópico en Manhattan* may justly be considered the first novel to centrally thematize the Puerto Rican mass migration to New York City, and, as such, constitutes a valuable historical and social document as well as a landmark text of Puerto Rican and US Latino literature.[5] Through the focal story of the migration to New York in the late 1940s of the young, middle-class protagonist, Juan Marcos Villalobos, *Trópico en Manhattan* shows Juan Marcos's discovery of the bustling Puerto Rican enclave in East Harlem, known as El Barrio, and his attempts to found and sustain Club Hostos, a social organization whose mission is to promote Hispanic culture in the city. By means of the cultural events sponsored by Club Hostos, Juan Marcos seeks to create a situation in which "the Americans come to respect us for our culture."

This desire to raise the sociopolitical standing of Latinos by showcasing their cultural contributions to the United States continues to this day. Indeed, it is exemplified by projects such as Arte Público Press's Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage series, which now brings *Trópico en Manhattan* to a broader English-speaking readership, supporting the wider recognition of Latinos' rich and deeply rooted cultural heritage within the borders of the United States. Juan Marcos's Club Hostos shows how Hispanic migrants have mobilized to create their own organizations and striven to bring the community together under a shared mantle of cultural pride. But this grassroots unity, as the novel also shows, is fragile, and lofty ideals often shatter under the weight of internal divisions and political differences. *Trópico en Manhattan*'s message about the challenges of creating lasting coalitions and community-based institutions remains as relevant today as at midcentury.

Juan Marcos' tale of arrival and local activism is framed by his broader interactions with members of the New York Hispanic community. His relationship with Antonio and Finí, the working-

class couple with whom he resides, illustrates the comforts, but also the challenges of family life in New York. A hardworking, loving couple with a young child, Antonio and Finí see their relationship rocked when an old foe of Antonio and former suitor of Finí, the ex-convict Lencho, appears in New York City. Juan Marcos also finds himself embroiled in a romantic triangle, courting Miriam Santos, a virtuous Puerto Rican young woman raised in New York, while another man vies for her unrequited affections. Rivalries and romances, old and new, bloom in New York, setting the stage for jealousy, betrayal and even attempted murder. These romantic subplots reveal the seedier aspects of life in El Barrio, where rash actions and misdirected anger are shown to hamper individual and collective advancement. Through Juan Marcos's interactions with friends and enemies, as well as through his encounter with the scores of characters who populate El Barrio, the novel illustrates the trials and joys of Puerto Ricans as they adapt to life in the American metropolis and along the way transform the city. It is a story of individual and collective adjustment, exploring the challenges, as well as the necessity of forging unity in an urban community depicted in all of its kaleidoscopic diversity.

Surveying *Trópico en Manhattan:* Social Dynamics and Language in the Novel

Through its portrait of a heterogeneous Puerto Rican community, *Trópico en Manhattan* illuminates the social dynamics that inflect characters' experiences in New York City. The novel's sociological aims are underlined by its protagonist's profession. A sociologist-by-training, Juan Marcos applies his observational skills to the New York streetscape, providing sharp, incisive commentary on issues of class, race and gender that shape the Spanish-speaking community. In this way, Juan Marcos bears more than a passing resemblance to the social scientists of the period who had begun to publish an increasing number of studies dissecting the purported "problems" of Puerto Rican adjustment

to life in New York at midcentury. As we are informed in the novel, "the New York Puerto Rican colony offered a wide field for the student of social relations." As readers, we are invited to follow Juan Marcos' trajectory through El Barrio and learn along with him about the growing Puerto Rican presence and its social dynamics.

Foremost among these dynamics is the role of social class in molding characters' lives and aspirations, a focus established from the outset of the novel. We first encounter Juan Marcos on his New York-bound flight, seated next to another young Puerto Rican newcomer named Yeyo, but who, unlike him, is penniless and a misfit. From their initial introductions, through which Juan Marcos' polite, formal offer to shake hands is contrasted with Yeyo's casual high-five, their respective behaviors and expectations serve to underline their divergent class backgrounds. Confined in the tight quarters of the flight cabin, heading to the same exciting yet daunting city, and prey to similar fears and anxieties, the two seatmates try to engage in small talk, but it quickly becomes apparent that "they didn't have much in common. The purpose of their trips to the continent, their attitudes toward life and the invisible codes that governed their lives were diametrically opposed." Not even the extraordinary circumstances of migrating together to New York—the narrator of *Trópico en Manhattan* explains that "when traveling, especially when traveling through danger, we forget those emotional or intellectual qualms that are so important to us in daily life"—are sufficient for Juan Marcos and Yeyo to overcome their class differences and find common ground. Beginning with this initial scene, the novel conveys the challenges of forging cross-class solidarities, and establishes the tension between the viewpoint of the middle-class protagonist and the attitudes of some of his working-class compatriots whom he will encounter on the continent.

Trópico en Manhattan thus both celebrates the overwhelmingly working-class character of El Barrio and chastises segments of the lower classes for their individual shortcomings. Whereas Juan Marcos travels to New York by choice, and not by necessity, yearn-

ing to pursue graduate studies and broaden his horizons, the great majority of his compatriots, we are told, arrived in New York "for what were fundamentally economic reasons." The novel poignantly voices the difficulties encountered by these economic migrants as they navigate discrimination, insufficient and overcrowded housing, job shortages and inadequate wages. Contrasted with the wealthy Manhattanites who live downtown, the residents of the uptown barrios survive "in the midst of poverty and hope." In facing these daily hardships, many of Cotto-Thorner's Puerto Rican characters display commendable perseverance, resilience and cultural pride. But others are shown to falter in the face of adversity due to loose morals and weak characters. Overall, the relatively privileged outlook of Juan Marcos, with his convictions about the possibilities for socioeconomic advancement and cultural recognition for Latinos in New York, prevails in the narrative. Filtered through his middle-class viewpoint and values, the novel reproaches many of the choices and vices of the downtrodden who populate El Barrio. It disapproves of their cultural tastes, deriding many popular forms of entertainment as unedifying. Though it depicts the structural conditions that condition migrants' arrival and incorporation into the metropolis, the novel ultimately preaches the middle-class virtues of individual hard work and sobriety of character as determining factors for cultural and economic progress.

The novel's racial politics are also conflictive. Written at a time of widespread racial inequality and enforced segregation, the Puerto Rican characters complain about the discrimination "against Negroes or anyone else who doesn't have an Anglo-Saxon name or white skin." The experiences of overt American racism are contrasted with the purportedly more racially tolerant Puerto Rican island society, in which a lack of discrimination is "the honorable tradition of the country." These idealized statements about Puerto Rican racial views, however, are often undermined by the narrative itself. Light-skinned ruffian Lencho, for instance, boasts about his Spanish European background, vaunting the privileges a light-skinned complexion could endow Puerto Ricans on the

island, while also serving as an example of the fallacy of linking "white" racial stock to good moral character. The references to the popularity among Puerto Ricans of minstrel shows and blackface routines, a comedy dependent upon blatant racist stereotypes, also calls into question the supposed enlightenment of Puerto Rican racial politics. Moreover, the novel is not immune from stoking racist fears, namely by blaming non-Hispanic black Harlemites for some of the social ills that plagued El Barrio. In a telling scene, after a black man robs a store and is chased by the police, a character complains of the negative press the Latino neighborhood will receive "when it's outsiders who come in here to make trouble." These delinquent "outsiders," it is understood, are the non-Hispanic black Americans. This idea of clear-cut social and geographic lines separating "Spanish" and "Black" Harlems is historically imprecise, as is the novel's understanding of Hispanic and black as mutually exclusive categories. Years later, Cotto-Thorner would nod to this fact when he expressed his particular sympathies for black Puerto Ricans who, he said "suffer on two counts"—ethnic and racial—"where other immigrants have only one handicap."[6]

Along with the roles social class and race play in determining migrants' lives, *Trópico en Manhattan* documents the gender-specific trials of migration, experiences and perspectives often neglected in the predominantly male-centered accounts of migration in mid-twentieth-century Puerto Rican literature. Migrant women like Antonio's wife, Finí, find it necessary to seek employment outside the home to supplement the family income. They enter the workforce but are still held responsible for all of the household chores. Finí, for example, works in the gender-segregated garment trades. She commutes daily to a downtown factory, where she works long hours. Nonetheless, she remains fully responsible for all the cooking and housework. The narrator chastises her otherwise affable husband because "Antonio was one of those men who believed that women should do all the household chores since men bring home the bacon. What he hadn't taken into account was that, since women are also breadwinners in the United

States, men must share certain household duties." What's more, women in the novel not only must balance traditional domestic expectations and the demanding toll of modern work; they must also fend off verbal and physical harassment. Finí, in a poignant scene, is shown in a crowded subway warding off unwanted advances while feeling tired from work and guilty for failing to cook a homemade meal. Migrant women, the novel shows, confront these demands while simultaneously adapting to a new social space regimented by different gender and sexual codes. Yet, at the same time that the novel advocates for a more egalitarian organization of the gendered division of domestic and paid labor, it reiterates other gender stereotypes. *Trópico en Manhattan* largely upholds the purportedly "Latin" expectations of chastity and feminine respectability, contrasting, for example, Juan Marcos' demure Puerto Rican girlfriend, Miriam, with the unchaste American young women he works with. Thus, while challenging sexist attitudes about women's place in the domestic realm, the novel also reinforces aspects of traditional sexual morality.

As a work of literature, the novel's documentation of the social dynamics outlined above is strengthened by the author's careful treatment of language. Cotto-Thorner displays a measured handling of both the formal narrative voice and the colloquial utterances of his characters. Incorporating typical Puerto Rican diminutive forms, hypocorisms, popular proverbial sayings, urban slang and the idiomatic expressions and lexicon of the Puerto Rican peasantry, the narrative conveys both the variegated nature of Puerto Rican Spanish and the ways in which language serves as a marker of class, social status, educational attainment and regional origin. Cotto-Thorner's adept and rather humorous handling of such speech is evidenced by the letters Juan Marcos sends home. In correspondence to his family, the tone is warm and conversational, but addressing an academic friend, he becomes pedantic and verbose. Cotto-Thorner's attentiveness to the linguistic registers of El Barrio is on full display in the scene at the end of chapter seven when the narrative pauses to record the

lively, if uncouth, chitchat, gossip and jokes of anonymous neighborhood people.

Here and elsewhere, the novel's most important stylistic feature is its use of code-switching, what non-linguists commonly refer to as "Spanglish." To record the way Puerto Rican migrants spoke in New York in the 1940s means showing the interpenetration of Spanish and English. *Trópico en Manhattan*'s signal literary achievement is to document this bilingualism through what the author calls *neoyorquismos*, English-loan words and calques that have been hispanized. Their presence in the text, mostly in dialogue, along with a glossary of these words in the back matter, reveals the author's intention to faithfully reproduce the distinct linguistic and cultural customs of the Spanish Harlem community. Written at a time when code-switching had not yet gained social, academic or literary recognition, the novel, with its inclusion of *neoyorquismos*, provides an early model for the bilingual aesthetics of future Latino literature. But, much like the literary use of Spanglish code-switching today, the novel's *neoyorquismos* do not only have an aesthetic purpose. Their use conveys the bicultural and bilingual realities of migrants, their daily experiences of cultural and linguistic "in-betweenness." These experiences of living in-between two languages and cultures are present from the very first pages of the novel, when Antonio buys two newspapers, the English-language *News* and the Spanish-language *La Voz*. His knowledge of both languages serves as a marker of his time accrued in the bilingual and bicultural environment of New York. Older and second-generation migrants use code-switching deftly, but newcomers like Juan Marcos are flustered and uncertain of the meaning of the seemingly new language that is being forged. As such, the novel's *neoyorquismos* showcase the shared linguistic practices of a distinctive New York Puerto Rican culture coming into being.

Although the novel documents *neoyorquismos* as a dynamic form of language adaptation, the novel also upholds traditional language politics. *Trópico* advocates for the proud retention of "proper" Spanish in the diaspora. Exemplary New York Puerto

Rican characters such as Miriam are praised for preserving their Spanish and for speaking "such good Spanish." Proper English, concurrently, is seen as a prerequisite for socioeconomic advancement in the United States, a necessity for economic mobility and integration into the social fabric of the city. The novel's pro-bilingual stance can be seen as challenging the midcentury monolingual positions of both advocates of assimilationist English-only policies and Puerto Rican nationalists, who deemed the encroaching English language a cultural threat. Cotto-Thorner's more flexible positions towards language use were expressed when he recalled his work with second-generation Puerto Rican youth in New York, many of whom could only speak a rudimentary Spanish peppered with the *neoyorquismos* he vividly employed in his novel. Without diminishing the importance of Spanish-language instruction, Cotto-Thorner defended the use of English as a vehicle to teach the youth about their Puerto Rican cultural heritage. As he put it, "a radical and reactionary 'nationalism' that excommunicates anyone who has no choice but to use English is incompatible with our democratic aspirations."[7] Championing the retention of Spanish along with the acquisition of English, the *neoyorquismos* occupy an intermediate position, forged out of necessity and in the crux of a burgeoning bilingual and bicultural existence. Not shying away from the conflicts and contradictions of uprooted lives and cultures, Cotto-Thorner's *Trópico en Manhattan* records with literary fidelity the polyphony of voices that have defined Puerto Rican life in New York.

Autobiographical and Historical Sources of the Novel

Trópico en Manhattan's detailed portrait of midcentury life in Spanish Harlem bears the mark of its author's personal history. Like the fictional Antonio who reminisces about his arrival in "the San Jacinto, a fine little ship on which the passengers ate well, hardly got seasick at all, and struck up an easy camaraderie with one another," Guillermo Cotto-Thorner and his family arrived in New York City in the San Jacinto steamship on July 21, 1938. His

father, the Reverend Hipólito Cotto-Reyes, a Baptist minister on the predominantly Catholic island of Puerto Rico, had been sent to New York City to direct the congregation of the First Spanish-Speaking Baptist Church of New York on East 116th Street in the heart of El Barrio. His appointment to lead a church in the growing New York Puerto Rican community was in keeping with the Protestant missionary zeal to gain converts among Latinos and continued a precedent established for evangelizing Puerto Ricans after the United States took control of the island in the wake of the 1898 Spanish American War. Guillermo's mother, Belén Thorner, was a Puerto Rican of German descent, whose father had immigrated to the island to work at a German-owned hacienda. In 1916, two years after Hipólito and Belén's marriage, they welcomed their first child, Guillermo, who was to be the eldest of five. Before moving to New York City, the family led an itinerant lifestyle in Puerto Rico, frequently moving across the island in order to adapt to the needs of his ministry. Reverend Cotto-Reyes was an avid reader and writer; he directed and contributed to the monthly publication *Puerto Rico Evangélico*, which, in 1923, had a circulation of more than 5,000.[8] Their house was full of books. Literature, philosophy, theology and politics were often debated at dinner, not unlike the many discussions staged around the family dinner table in *Trópico en Manhattan.*

From an early age, Guillermo Cotto-Thorner shared his father's studious habits and interest in letters. Shortly after his family settled in New York City to lead the new church, Guillermo returned to Puerto Rico to finish his university studies. He had enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico—at the time, a privilege available to few—where he stood out as an intelligent, natural leader and stellar orator. Fluent in both Spanish and English, he was president of the university's philosophy club and traveled to the continental United States to debate other organizations. In 1938, he represented Puerto Rico as part of the student delegation to the Second World Youth Congress at Vassar College, in

Poughkeepsie, New York. Pursuing his passion for writing, he contributed essays to a wide range of local journals and magazines, including the Protestant publication *La Nueva Democracia*. He also founded and presided over the Ateneo Universitario, a university club dedicated to preserving and promoting Puerto Rican culture. Like Juan Marcos' fictional Club Hostos in *Trópico en Manhattan*, Cotto-Thorner's Ateneo Universitario was modelled after the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, Puerto Rico's premier cultural institution. Upon completion of his bachelor's degree in 1939, Cotto-Thorner joined his family stateside and enrolled at the Rochester–Colgate Divinity School in Rochester, New York. There he met Alice Coolidge, whom he married in 1941. He became an ordained Baptist minister the following year. After leading a Hispanic congregation in Wisconsin for a time, Cotto-Thorner and his wife settled in New York City in 1945, where he would often take turns preaching the Sunday sermons to his father's congregation. The church granted him daily intimate contact with Spanish-speaking parishioners and gave him access to the community that he would capture with such zest in *Trópico en Manhattan*.

Like Cotto-Thorner and his wife, the fictional young Juan Marcos moves to New York City in the summer of 1945.[9] The date is significant not only because it mirrors the author's own return to New York, but also and more importantly because it signals the intensification of an unprecedented, massive migration of Puerto Ricans to the continental United States, beginning during the Second World War and increasing throughout the next decade. Puerto Rican migrants who had been trickling to New York City since the turn of the twentieth century came in droves in the postwar years. "The avalanche of immigration was at its height," as the novel's narrator puts it. In the 1940s, approximately 151,000 Puerto Ricans migrated from the island, a flow which increased in magnitude in the following years.[10] During the 1950s, almost half a million Puerto Ricans left the island, a population exodus that came to be known as the Puerto Rican "Great Migration."[11] Such a massive outflow was facilitated by the availability of direct

flights with airfares kept low by government intervention.[12] As the narrator of *Trópico en Manhattan* explains, migrants arrived "by the legions seizing upon low airfares to flock to the metropolis in unstoppable waves." Puerto Ricans became the first great airborne migration in the world.

Among other causes, this massive migration was the result of a series of modernizing reforms taking place on the island. The 1940s signaled the rise to political power of Luis Muñoz Marín and his Popular Democratic Party. In 1949, Muñoz Marín took office as the first democratically-elected Puerto Rican governor and immediately began to push through socioeconomic and political legislation that culminated in the 1952 establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, a new political agreement that granted greater political autonomy to the island but also conceded its status as a US territory. Muñoz Marín's sweeping plan for economic development, known as Operation Bootstrap, sought to rapidly transform Puerto Rico's agrarian society into a modern industrial economy. Emigration, which reduced the island's population while also supplying the United States with a steady source of cheap labor, was an integral part of his planned "modernizing" national agenda.

Trópico en Manhattan not only provides an inaugural literary portrait of the Puerto Rican "Great Migration" but also situates this midcentury population outflow in relation to earlier waves of Puerto Rican migration to the continental United States. Early Puerto Rican migrants had helped construct identifiable Hispanic settlements, or *colonias*, in New York since at least the late nineteenth century. In the novel, Antonio and Finí are members of the migratory wave just prior to the mass migration. Their arrival in New York ten years before Juan Marcos puts them in the heart of the previous stage of Puerto Rican migration, which commenced in 1917 when the Jones Act granted US citizenship to all Puerto Ricans. Between the first and second world wars, the Puerto Rican community grew in size from roughly 1,600 to 135,000 people.[13]

Whereas midcentury migrants like Juan Marcos arrived on fast commercial flights, earlier migrants like Antonio and Finí

traveled by steamships like the San Jacinto, a trip that lasted between four and seven days and often made stops in other Caribbean or southern US ports. Demographically, this earlier migration had an overwhelmingly working-class profile. Like Antonio, men often labored in low-paying service-industry jobs, or as cigar, construction and factory workers, whereas women like Finí labored in the garment industry or as domestics. For this reason, it is significant that the novel begins not with Juan Marcos, but with Antonio. As a representative of an earlier wave of migrants, Antonio is able to support those who follow, hosting Juan Marcos and later helping his former enemy, Lencho, find a job. By staging the differences between those termed "veterans" of the community and the newcomers, Cotto-Thorner displays an early and commendable recognition of the often overlooked contributions of pioneer migrants who laid the groundwork for New York's Latino communities.

Upon his return to New York City in 1945, Guillermo Cotto-Thorner contributed to these established community structures and, like his protagonist Juan Marcos, helped to launch new initiatives to combat prejudice against Puerto Ricans and other Latinos by showcasing their cultural achievements. During 1946 and 1947, Cotto-Thorner wrote promotional materials and raised funds in the community to found the Casa de Puerto Rico, a community center dedicated to providing social services and sponsoring cultural events for New York Latinos. A likely inspiration for Juan Marco's Club Hostos, Cotto-Thorner's real-life Casa de Puerto Rico aimed to organize "Hispanic" cultural events that would benefit the diverse Spanish-speaking conglomerate in the city. Among its cultural initiatives, the Casa de Puerto Rico sponsored an art exhibition of Puerto Rican painters in the lauded ACA Gallery, similar to the fictional exhibition of Puerto Rican art sponsored by the Club Hostos.[14] In its founding documents and cultural program, the Casa de Puerto Rico strongly echoes Juan Marcos's belief that "just as we have to fight for economic gains, it's our duty to fight to increase our cultural prestige in the eyes of the American people." Both Juan Marcos and Cotto-

Thorner saw cultural advancement of New York Puerto Ricans going hand-in-hand with economic progress.

Consistent with its cultural function, the Casa de Puerto Rico sought to create apolitical alliances with existing labor organizations and social clubs. Foremost among these was the International Workers Order's Spanish chapter, the Cervantes Fraternal Society, which, led by communist community organizer Jesús Colón, was a prominent sponsor. Integrating the promotion of Spanish-language culture with the socioeconomic militancy of labor lodges, the Casa de Puerto Rico, like the fictional Club Hostos, attempted to bring together Puerto Ricans and other Hispanics of various political persuasions and class interests in one place, serving Spanish-speakers regardless of race, age, political affiliation or religious creed. This mission was evinced by its ideologically diverse leadership. Guillermo Cotto-Thorner was the executive director and his father, Hipólito, served as interim president, but the organization's board of directors included communists, liberal politicians and middle-class professionals.

In the novel, the Club Hostos tries to pursue a similar strategy of forging unity among its diverse membership by recruiting a politically heterogeneous leadership. When Juan Marcos considers possible candidates to assume the presidency of the club, three ideologically distinct names are brought up. First, there is the liberal doctor who, despite having studied in the United States, married an Anglo-American woman and espoused pro-statehood views for the island, is a proud and socially engaged member of the New York Latino community. This character is likely based on the real-life physician José Negrón Cesteros, a graduate of Howard University College of Medicine who distinguished himself through leadership and civic participation in the Latino community and who was a sponsor of the Casa de Puerto Rico. The second person under consideration was ideologically "the exact opposite of the doctor." Jesús Castro—a thinly-veiled stand-in for Jesús Colón, who was a member of the Board of Directors of the Casa de Puerto Rico—is described in the novel as "a labor leader and man of principle and integrity." Intelligent, well-informed, honest, efficient,

Castro is a close friend of Juan Marcos, despite being "steeped in Marxist philosophy." Lastly, the third candidate for the presidency is a young Protestant minister who can be read as Cotto-Thorner's own literary alter ego. A "well-educated, brilliant young man who had the misfortune of being too liberal and progressive for his time," this character exhibits a progressive faith and politics that are at odds with the Church establishment. Discussing the club and its future in a "Latin" restaurant aptly named "El Tropical," the three candidates raise a toast to solidarity: "As brothers and sisters, we share the joys of hope, and also, as brothers and sisters, we must be united whenever destiny has a trap in store for us." Yet Cotto-Thorner knew that this optimistic vision of fraternity and ethnic unity was fragile. In the novel, Juan Marcos is unable to keep political wrangling out of club activities. Instigated by the communist members, mayhem ensues, fracturing the Club Hostos along ideological lines and leading to the club's disintegration.

Whether similar tensions led to the failure of the real-life Casa de Puerto Rico is not clear, but Cotto-Thorner certainly experienced firsthand the political complexities of creating coalitions with the progressives and communists he fictionalized in *Trópico en Manhattan*. Besides his work for the Casa de Puerto Rico, during the late 1940s, Cotto-Thorner was active in the Frente Unido Popular, presided over by the militant Puerto Rican poet Clemente Soto Vélez, which advocated for the social, political and cultural rights of Hispanics in New York. He co-led, with communist Jesús Colón, the Latin-American Committee of Civic Action, another organization that sponsored cultural events, including a banquet in honor of Cuban communist writer Juan Marinello.[15] Cotto-Thorner was also active in New York's Spanish-language progressive press, contributing to newspapers with ties to the radical left, such as *Pueblos Hispanos* (1943–44) and *Liberación* (1946–49). His dedication to improving the lot of New York Puerto Ricans was indicated in a friendly letter his former colleague Jesús Colón sent him in 1948 after Cotto-Thorner had left New York City temporarily to pursue graduate studies and was in the process of drafting *Trópico en Manhattan*: "We always await

your return to the bosom of the community, and your re-immersion in the civic activities of the colony. Our colony needs you and expects much from you."[16] These "civic activities" to which Cotto-Thorner had so vigorously contributed throughout much of the late 1940s gave him direct experience of the challenges of creating broad coalitions and reconciling calls for aggressive political action with cultural endeavors championed by more politically moderate, middle-class leaders. The issue was important enough to him that he made it a key subplot of his novel.

Cotto-Thorner's Protestant Faith and the Role of Religion

Guillermo Cotto-Thorner's political and cultural activism was distinctively anchored in his liberal Protestant convictions and the Christian anti-fascist thought of his time. During the 1930s and 1940s, liberal Protestants like Cotto-Thorner and his father joined forces with ideologically diverse groups, including communists, liberals and centrists to help galvanize U.S. popular sentiments against fascism. A cause at the frontlines of these anti-fascist coalitions was the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that strongly manifested itself in the United States along religious lines. Whereas the Roman Catholic hierarchy tended to support Franco's pro-clerical, fascist uprising, Protestant clergy overwhelmingly favored the Spanish Republican government, participating in some of the most important organizations providing aid and support to the embattled Spanish Republic.[17] Cotto-Thorner's activism in progressive Hispanic circles in New York was tied to his Protestant anti-fascism and opposition to Franco, causes which undergirded many of the Hispanic organizations and endeavors he contributed to. This marriage of religious faith and anti-fascism is shown in "Entre Nosotros" and "Púlpito Progresita," the regular columns he wrote for the newspaper *Liberación*, which, not coincidentally, was originally founded as a "*Semanario de lucha por la República española*."[18] Championing the worldwide cause of democracy against fascism, Cotto-Thorner believed that meaningful religious work must go

hand-in-hand with social engagement of issues at home and abroad.

The intersections of Cotto-Thorner's theological views with the politics of his era are laid out not only in his newspaper columns, but also in his other published works. While residing in New York, he published two religious texts, one a collection of sermons entitled *Camino de Victoria* (1945), a reference to the victory of Allied forces against fascism during the Second World War, and the other a pamphlet, *Conspiración Romana Contra la Democracia* (1948), which also employs contemporary political language to condemn Catholicism.[19] In these works, he articulates a progressive, vigorously anti-fascist and anti-Catholic form of religious thought, which insists above all on the imperative of liberal social democratic values, including freedom of religion and the separation of Church and State. Cotto-Thorner also chastises unbridled capitalism and materialism, stresses the civic duty to help the poor and denounces imperialism, defending Puerto Rico's right to political self-determination. His politically engaged view of religion finds its most explicit expression in his second and only other novel, *Gambeta* (1971), which narrates the tensions between Protestant proselytization in Puerto Rico and the island's struggles for sovereignty.

Cotto-Thorner's progressive religion seemingly brought him into conflict with more conservative religious leaders. While approvingly described as "one of our most liberal preachers" by the leadership of the International Workers Order's Cervantes Fraternal Society, Cotto-Thorner and his progressive sermons were not appreciated by all.[20] Indeed, like the young Protestant minister who was a candidate for the presidency of the Club Hostos and who was forced to leave the pulpit and teach philosophy at local universities because of his liberal views, Cotto-Thorner was unable to find a parish of his own to minister to and was forced to support his family for many years by teaching Spanish language and culture courses at the college level. In an interview from 1957, he reflects, "I had been away from the ministry 10 years . . . but only in a sense. Wherever my university

teaching assignments took me, I preached when the opportunity arose. I never really left the church."[21] In 1960, Cotto-Thorner returned to the pulpit to lead the Primera Iglesia Española in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. He remained there until 1967, when he and his family moved to Washington DC, where he resumed work as a Spanish-language teacher until retirement.

In *Trópico en Manhattan*, Cotto-Thorner subtly but persistently dramatized his Christian faith, demonstrating how he indeed preached whenever "the opportunity arose." Scenes like the one where Antonio and Juan Marcos mistake each other for intruders in a dark room become metaphors for the soul's blindness when lacking faith in God, while Lencho, sitting in jail, is inspired to reform his life when he hears the parable of a young orator, the words of which are actually taken verbatim from one of Cotto-Thorner's own published sermons.[22] Questions of morality, corruption and the possibility of redemption become driving forces that shape characters' aspirations and behaviors. The novel draws a fairly consistent line between the "good" characters, such as Antonio, Finí and Juan Marcos, who are hardworking, virtuous and enterprising, and the "bad" characters, such as Yeyo and Lencho, who are weak-willed and sinful. The characters' fates in New York are seemingly predetermined by their moral fiber, a view articulated by the oft-repeated belief that "over here, a person is valued for who he is." In this way, the novel has a didactic religious function, warning readers about the vices of jealousy, sloth and lust, and counseling instead the Protestant virtues of hard work, entrepreneurship and frugality. Fiction served as a vehicle to convey his religious convictions.

Trópico en Manhattan's Position in the Puerto Rican and Latino Literary Traditions

Drawing on the author's personal experience as a migrant to New York, *Trópico en Manhattan* is part of a broader set of texts, including the memoirs of Bernardo Vega (*Memories of Bernardo*

Vega), Joaquín Colón's memoir (*Pioneros puertorriqueños en Nueva York*), the sketches of Jesús Colón (*A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*, *The Way It Was and Other Writings* and *Lo que el pueblo me dice: Crónicas de la colonia puertorriqueña en Nueva York*) and the fictionalized autobiography of Pedro Juan Labarthe (*The Son of Two Nations*) that document the lives and cultural activities of Puerto Ricans in New York during the first half of the twentieth century. All of these works written by so-called "pioneros," Puerto Ricans who migrated to New York between the late nineteenth-century and the end of the Second World War, have clear pedagogical aims. They instruct readers about the early period of twentieth-century migration and seek to instill a collective sense of ethnic and national cultural worth. Rereading them today, they are a testament to the longstanding cultural agency of Latinos in New York City.

In addition to its affiliations with these early works, *Trópico en Manhattan* has ties with the insular Puerto Rican literature about the midcentury migration. Starting in the 1950s, a new generation of writers from the island, often grouped under the umbrella term "Generación del 50," began to address the experiences of Puerto Ricans living in New York City. Works such as René Marqués' *La carreta* (1953) and Pedro Juan Soto's *Spiks* (1956)—the texts that were taught alongside *Trópico en Mahattan* in the island's public school system—as well as José Luis González's *Paisa* (1950), examine how Puerto Ricans adapted (or failed to adapt) to New York City in the wake of mass migration. But in these emotionally-wrenching narratives, Puerto Rican migrants are generally demoralized and psychologically dislocated by American urban life so that migration appears primarily as a story of cultural abdication, loss and trauma, often tinged by anti-Yankee sentiments. *Trópico en Manhattan*, by contrast, while generationally and thematically aligned with these works, presents a more optimistic, even-handed treatment of Puerto Rican life in New York City. It recognizes the challenges and tribulations of migrant life but also celebrates the persistence and adaptations of traditional island customs and cultures, even embracing certain values associated with

Anglo-American culture. Thus, while many island-based literary portraits depict Puerto Rican life in New York as a process of socio-cultural and spiritual decay, Cotto-Thorner shows how the tropics can adapt and flourish in Manhattan.

At the same time that Cotto-Thorner's novel sees the continental United States as a possible permanent home for migratory Puerto Ricans, it also takes stock of the growing difficulties created by the mass migration. The novel's trenchant observation of the deteriorating conditions faced by migrants prefigures some of the dominant themes of Puerto Rican literature written in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, known as "Nuyorican" literature. Cataloguing crowded and dangerous living conditions, estranged families and the death of children in a house fire, *Trópico en Manhattan* can be seen to augur "the broken English dreams"—to cite the title of a well-known "Nuyorican" work—of a generation of migrants who had arrived in the city searching for better opportunities but who instead found themselves on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, facing vicious prejudice, institutional exclusion and a saturated labor market, conditions which would worsen with the flight of factory-based industries from New York by the mid-1960s. Cotto-Thorner's staging of these bleak, deteriorating conditions, along with his reproduction of the speech of the streets through the embrace of *neoyorquismos*, makes his novel a literary forbear of the Nuyorican tradition. Yet, unlike the dashed dreams of the Nuyorican generation, Cotto-Thorner's novel optimistically holds on to a middle-class perspective and the prospects of upward social mobility for those who embrace the values of hard work and education. Leaving partly intact the promises made by the mythology of the American Dream, *Trópico en Manhattan* continues to preach the gospel of meritocracy and success amid growing disorder and poverty.

Distinctly positioned among the "Pioneros," "Generación del 50" and "Nuyorican" literary traditions, *Trópico en Manhattan* is a hitherto-overlooked foundational text of Latino literature whose recovery and translation in this series will bring it to a wider audi-

ence. Written in Spanish by a middle-class author who spent his formative years in Puerto Rico, but penned and published in New York by an active member of the Spanish Harlem community, the novel provides an inaugural literary account of the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to New York that is also an ideological bridge between island and diasporic views. Ultimately, the novel presents a picture of the migrants' incorporation into the United States that is not predicated on assimilation, but instead on taking civic pride in ethnic difference. Just as the New York Puerto Rican characters continue to identify themselves as "*puro boricua*," affirming unbreakable bonds with their Caribbean homeland, they also organize and work toward the creation of a permanent Latino presence in New York City, demanding equal rights and cultural respect and transforming the sociopolitical fabric of the city and nation.

In this way, *Trópico en Manhattan* can be seen as adopting a multicultural discourse that consciously shies away from the melting pot ideology. Symbolized by the image of a mosaic, which would become a celebrated trope of ethnic pluralism in the US imaginary, the novel's multicultural discourse concludes that "just as with a mosaic, there is a diversity of colors, and designs, and hues, so are we: divided, but also united. Believe me, we are part of a mosaic encrusted in the bedrock of Manhattan." This mosaic metaphor reaffirms the cultural unity of Puerto Ricans even in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Club Hostos and of the many rivalries between compatriots. At the same time, this aestheticizing metaphor, drawn from the world of art and culture, risks concealing forms of political and economic exploitation. Although not addressing these inequities faced by midcentury Hispanic migrants, Cotto-Thorner's closing image of the mosaic is nonetheless a triumphant celebration of difference and diversity, as well as permanence and belonging.

At the end of the novel, the permanent Hispanic presence in New York is underscored by Juan Marcos's engagement to his girlfriend, Miriam. She, more than any other character in the novel, is presented as the ideal new Latino subject. Having lived in New

York since she was two years old and grown up there, she is fluent in English and at home in the American metropolis. She has, nonetheless, proudly retained her Spanish language and Puerto Rican cultural ways. Even her physical beauty is described as embodying a graceful combination of island and continental traits: "part of her was Latin and part of her belonged to the mainland." In marrying Miriam, and choosing to keep working and studying in New York City rather than returning to the island, as initially planned, Juan Marcos is optimistically embracing a seemingly permanent future in the United States. Miriam and Juan Marcos can thus be seen as a foundational Nuyorican couple destined to go on tropicalizing Manhattan.[23] More than sixty years after the publication of *Trópico en Manhattan*, we can proudly confirm that the novel's daring thesis of a Latinized New York has proven true.

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Endnotes

[1]Cotto-Thorner, Guillermo. "Puro Borica: A Novel in Spanish." M.A. Thesis. University of Connecticut, 1950.

[2]Huyke, Juan B. "Trópico en Manhattan." *El Mundo* (San Juan, Puerto Rico) 28 June 1952, 6.

[3]Mead, Robert G. "Books in Spanish (Book Review)." *Books Abroad* 27.1 (1953), 71.

[4]Díaz Alfaro, Aberlardo. "Sobre 'Trópico en Manhattan.'" *Ecos* (New York, NY) 19 Oct. 1952, 3.

[5]Puerto Rican authors have written valuable novels about the experiences of migrants in New York which antedate *Trópico en Manhattan*. Among them, we can highlight Juan Aboy Benítez's *Su primer amor* (1900), Pedro Caballero's *Paca Antillana* (1931), Pedro Labarthe's *The Son of Two Nations* (1931) and José de Diego Padró's modernist *En Babia* (1940). However, *Trópico en Manhattan* is the first novel to organize its plot around the Puerto Rican mass migration and go beyond capturing individual impressions to attempt to depict the Puerto Rican collectivity of New York in its entirety.

[6]Costa, Richard. "People Worth Knowing." *Observer-Dispatch* (Utica, New York) 25 Aug. 1957, 6D.

[7]Translation mine. Original: "Ese 'nacionalismo' radical y reaccionario de excomulgar a todos los que usan el inglés por necesidad está fuera de lugar en nuestras aspiraciones democráticas." Cotto Thorner, Guillermo. "Entre Nosotros." *Liberación* (New York, NY) 31 Jul 1946, 3.

[8]See Silva Gotay, Samuel. *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico* (San Juan, PR: Editorial UPR, 1997), 224.

[9]Juan Marcos' date of arrival is never explicitly stated in the novel. However, a scene at the beginning of the narrative allows us to determine the year. While Antonio awaits Juan Marcos's flight, he chats with a fellow Puerto Rican who explains that he is picking up two children who "just lost their parents in the Lares fire." He is almost certainly referring to the fire that occurred on February 2, 1945, which directly impacted more than 2,000 people and destroyed almost half of the urban center of Lares. If the children "just lost" their parents, the novel's setting must take place shortly after this date.

[10]See "Puerto Rican Emigration. Why the 1950s?": http://lcw. lehman.edu/lehman/depts/latinampuertorican/latinoweb/PuertoRico/1950s.htm

[11]See Ayala, César. "The Decline of the Plantation Economy and the Puerto Rican Migration of the 1950s." *Latino Studies Journal* 7.1 (1996): 61-9. Also available at: http://lcw.lehman.edu/lehman/depts/latinampuertorican/latinoweb/PuertoRico/ayalamigration.pdf.

[12]See Ayala, César and Rafael Bernabé. *Puerto Rico in the American Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2007), 194.

[13]See Matos Rodríguez, Félix and Pedro Juan Hernández, Félix. *Pioneros: Puerto Ricans in New York City, 1896-1948* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2001), 9.

[14]For records of the "Casa de Puerto Rico," see Box 15, Folder 6, The Jesús Colón Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. Courtesy Benigno Giboyeaux. See also Cotto-Thorner, Guillermo. "Se organiza la Casa de Puerto Rico en Nueva York." *Liberación* (New York, NY) 30 Nov 1946, 9.

[15]The banquet was held on 12 April 1946 at union Local 65's New York headquarters Tom Mooney Hall, a well-known bastion of radical activities. See Marinello, Juan. "Letter to Jesús Colón and Guillermo Cotto-Thorner," 02 March 1945, Box 3, Folder 3, The Jesús Colón Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. Courtesy Benigno Giboyeaux.

[16]Translation Mine. Original: "siempre esperamos que tu regreses a nuestro seno y te envuelvas en las actividades cívicas de la colonia. La colonia te

necesita y espera mucho de ti." Letter dated 8 July 1948. Box 7; Folder 3. The Jesús Colón Papers, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY. Courtesy Benigno Giboyeaux.

[17]Notable among these organizations was The American Friends of Spanish Democracy, chaired by a bishop, which published a pamphlet titled "The Persecution of Protestants in Fascist Spain." The coverage of the Spanish Civil War in the pages of *The Christian Century*, one of the most influential Protestant publications in the United States at the time, also evidences the widespread support for the Spanish Republic among Protestant ranks.

[18]It is significant to note that a socialist-inflected Christianity was not foreign to the pages of these Hispanic progressive newspapers. *Pueblos Hispanos*, for instance, had published in installments the Spanish-language translation of *Soviet Power*, authored by the English priest Hewlett Johnson, an avowed Christian Marxist and anti-fascist agitator widely known as "The Red Dean of Canterbury."

[19]The opening sentence of *Camino de Victoria* (New York, 1945) directly addresses the contemporary sociopolitical context: "Victoria es la palabra del día. Es el símbolo internacional de los pueblos que luchan contra el monstruo totalitario" (11). *Conspiración Romana Contra la Democracia* (El Paso, TX: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 1948) concludes by affirming that "el catolicismo, en vez de ser sencillamente una religión, es un sistema político. . . . La arrogancia de católica-romana de creerse 'suma perfección' en materia de fe, es índice de la estructura totalitaria, exclusivista y nazi fascista que la sostiene" (13).

[20]See "The Hispanic American Section from January 1940 to January 1944," page 3, Box 9, Folder 8, International Workers Order (IWO) Records #5276. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documen-tation and Archives, Cornell University Library.

[21]Costa, Richard H. "People Worth Knowing." *The Observer-Dispatch* (Utica, NY) 25 Aug. 1957, 6D.

[22]The quoted sermon is entitled "Ante las curvas de la vida." It preaches the importance of confronting hardships and challenges with determination and resourcefulness so they can be overcome. See Cotto-Thorner, Guillermo. *Camino de Victoria* (New York, 1945), 119.

[23]This idea is also suggested by Nicolás Kanellos in his reading of *Trópico en Manhattan*. Analyzing the novel's depiction of New York City "as an ideal garden," he asks: "can we extend the metaphor to a Garden of Eden in which the characters Juan Marcos and Miriam Santos are the foundational couple?" See Kanellos, Nicolás. *Hispanic Immigrant Literature: El Sueño del Retorno* (Austin, TX: UT Press), 91.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

As the first Puerto Rican novel to record in detail the massive, postwar migration of Puerto Ricans to New York City, *Manhattan Tropics* ranks as one of the foundational texts of Hispanic, or Latino, literature. In translating this novel into English, almost seventy years after it was first published, I have sought to retain Cotto-Thorner's lexicon of mid-twentieth century New York. This lexicon includes many nearly forgotten words and expressions, such as "Automat" and the "Third Avenue El" that refer to now vanished features of the urban landscape. It also includes some fusty usages and quaint flourishes of style. To preserve the novel's linguistic texture, I have outfitted *Manhattan Tropics* with an English similarly moored in the middle of Manhattan's twentieth century, where, for example, travelers may still carry a "valise" or chat with their neighbors in the "parlor."

A significant aspect of the novel's midcentury style—one which requires some comment here as it posed a translation challenge—is the creative deployment of what the author calls "*Neoyorquismos*." Cotto-Thorner's *Neoyorquismos*, or "New Yorkisms," refer to the abundance of Spanish neologisms that pepper the speech of his characters. Derived from the Hispanicization of common English words, the *Neoyorquismos* offer an early example of what we would today call literary code-switching, or classify under the flexible, if often unfairly pejorative term, "Spanglish." Examples from the novel include "*frisar*," from the English "to freeze," a word Puerto Rican migrants certainly had more cause to utter in New York than in the Caribbean, and "*escrachao*," from the English "scratched."

Cotto-Thorner italicized these *Neoyorquismos* when they appear in the novel and included a glossary of them in the back

matter. In my translation, I have followed the same practice. I value the *Neoyorquismos* because they show how the Spanish of Puerto Rican migrants was evolving as it came into contact with English in New York City. In addition, Cotto-Thorner's use of *Neoyorquismos*—at a time when such literary code-switching practices were deemed of little literary value—anticipates the bilingual aesthetics of the Nuyorican literary movement of the 1970s and the artful code-switching of so much contemporary Latino literature.

In keeping with the novel's commitment to linguistic hybridity, I have also resisted domesticating translations of words like *piragua* into "snow cone." For the same reason that English-language writers like Hemingway have never felt obligated to translate French words such as *café crème* or *chantilly*, assuming instead that educated readers ought to be familiar with them, I believe it is important for classic Spanish Caribbean cultural products, commodities and practices to assert their right to exist within an English text.

In this way I hope the linguistic richness of Cotto-Thorner's *Trópico en Manhattan* survives in *Manhattan Tropics*. As one of the first works to do so in a long line of Latino literature, Cotto-Thorner's 1951 novel admirably chips away at monolingualism's textual fiefdom, capturing the rapid-fire code-switching and melding of Spanish and English we continue to hear on the buses, subways and streets of Nueva York, as well as across the country in the soundscape of U.S. life.

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