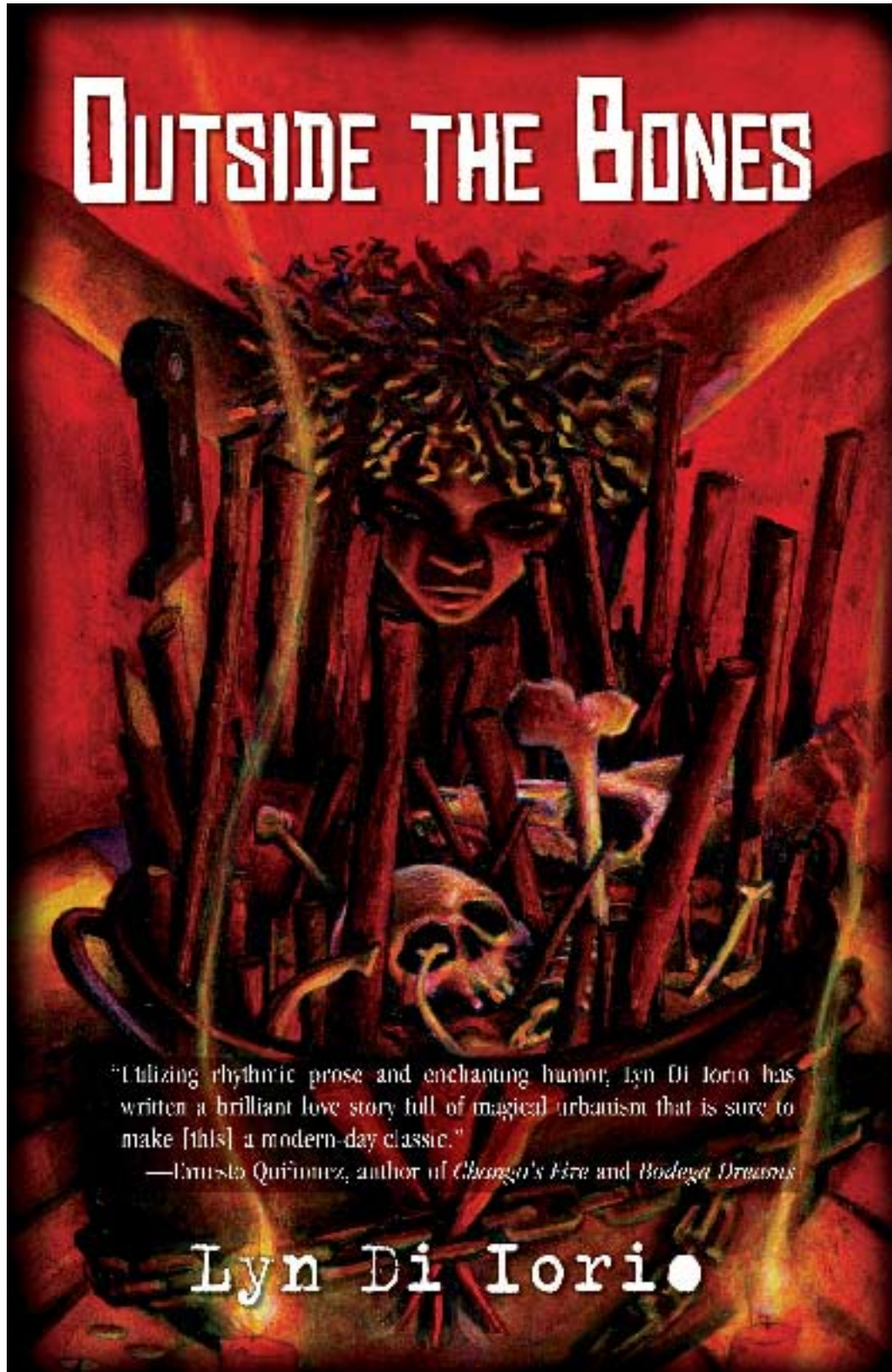


OUTSIDE THE BONES



COVER ART





Lyn Di Iorio

Lyn Di Iorio is a professor at The City College of New York and The Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She grew up in Puerto Rico. Her mother's family members signed the constitution of Puerto Rico. Her father was a half-Italian half-Hungarian Jewish New Yorker. Lyn came to the Mainland to pursue a bachelor's degree at Harvard University, and later acquired a master's degree from Stanford University's Creative Writing Program, and a Ph.D. in English literature from The University of California at Berkeley. She also worked as a journalist and translator while trying—and mostly failing—to live on the wild side.

Lyn first became aware of the Afro-Caribbean religio-magical system of Palo Monte when she visited a Santero's house in Puerto Rico shortly after her father's death. The Santero offered a reading with one of the divining

tools of Santería—a syncretic Cuban religion mixing Yoruba beliefs and Catholicism. Afterwards, on the grassy ground of a stairwell, Lyn saw a black cauldron. She asked the Santero what was in it. He responded “el muerto”—“the dead one.” At that point, Lyn judged it wise not to ask more questions. Later, she learned that the bones and skulls of those who died violent deaths are often housed in cauldrons so that their angry spirits can be manipulated into carrying out the work of the Palero, the master of the cauldron. The idea of a spirit becoming aware of itself took hold of Lyn. She learned that Palo Monte stems from the Bantu-speaking peoples of west central Africa who were taken to Cuba as slaves. It was a common belief system of runaway slaves in the Caribbean bush, and its fieriness helped spur resistance to slavery. Lyn is the first person to publish fiction in English about this little known and fascinating belief system.

At the Graduate Center and CCNY, Lyn teaches Caribbean literature and creative writing, as well as magical realism and Gothic literature. Prior to *Outside the Bones*, Lyn published scholarship on Latino literature, notably a book called *Killing Spanish*, and wrote short stories. Her short story “Queen of Colomer” was shortlisted by Robert Olen Butler for the Pirate's Alley Faulkner short story award, and the first two chapters of the novel received an honorable mention in the 2009 New Millennium Writings Awards Contest.

Lyn is at work on a second novel called *The Sound of Falling Darkness*. It features a heroine with bad, not to say dark, habits. In addition to her mad literary stylings, Lyn is married to Xavier, whose advances she spurned in high school in Puerto Rico only to succumb to them more than twenty years later in New York.



ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *OUTSIDE THE BONES*

“Come meet Fina, the irrepressible, hilarious, tough-talking heroine of Lyn Di Iorio’s delightful first novel, *Outside the Bones*. Written with humor and verve, no small amount of magic and the sassy supernatural, this no-holds barred story will grab you by the lapels and not let you go.”

—Cristina García, author of *The Lady Matador’s Hotel* and *Dreaming in Cuban*

“Utilizing rhythmic prose and enchanting humor, Lyn Di Iorio has written a brilliant love story full of magical urbanism that is sure to make *Outside the Bones* a modern day classic.”

—Ernesto Quiñonez, author of *Bodega Dreams* and *Chango’s Fire*

“Toni Morrison meets Alexander McCall Smith on Manhattan’s Upper West Side in this brilliant tale of ghosting and rescue by Di Iorio’s unlikely heroine. Driven by raw humor, a wonderful eroticism, and a laser ear, the author listens in on Fina’s world and shares observations as powerful as the noise from the cauldron.”

—Catherine E. McKinley, author of *Indigo: In Search of the Color that Seduced the World*

“Fina, the narrator of *Outside the Bones* is both raw and delicate, a particularly entertaining variation of the id writ large. Di Iorio’s observations are potent and poetic. *Outside the Bones* is a moving and entertaining read.”

—Darcey Steinke, author of *Suicide Blonde* and *Easter Everywhere*

“In the entertainingly loud and street-toughened voice of a Nuyorican ‘big girl,’ Lyn Di Iorio’s readers first believe that they’re following the erotic detailing of an older murder mystery, only to find themselves on a journey stretching from Manhattan’s Upper West Side through Central Park to a place in Puerto Rico where river and sea meet, where a body burned and where the bones have yet to find peace. A fresh and original approach to fiction grounded in African-Caribbean spirituality.”

—Marie-Elena John, author of *Unburnable*

“The musical prose in this novel sings like Luis Rafael Sánchez’s classic *Macho Camacho’s Beat*; and the love object here, Chico the promiscuous and gifted musician, also recalls Oscar Hijuelos’ *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love*. This very, very funny novel flashes back at moments to the island, the book’s symbolic ‘Barrio Sal Pa’fuera.’ But it is the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and especially Central Park—where the characters in the book carry out their magical rituals—that comes to life in these pages in a spectacular way, emphasizing that the Upper West Side was in the past, and still is in and out of this novel, an enclave of Puerto Rican and Latino identity.”

—Ernesto Quiñonez, author of *Bodega Dreams* and *Chango’s Fire*

DAILY NEWS

Latina authors explore Santería and other Afro-Caribbean religions

CAROLINA GONZ LEZ, DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

Wednesday, October 12, 2011

After years of stigma, *Santería* and other Afro-Caribbean religions have come out of the literary closet, judging by some new novels.

As Afro-Caribbean culture has become more accepted among Caribbean Latinos and non-Latinos in the past decade or two, a number of books by Latina authors have come out in which the religions and spiritual practices related to *Santería*, *palo monte* and *vod* play an important and positive part.

The latest of these is the just-released novel “Outside the Bones” by Lyn Di Iorio. The book is narrated by Fina, a Nuyorican woman known as the neighborhood

bruja (witch), who does *trabajitos* or *fufús*, practical spells to solve her neighbors’ problems.

As Fina is initiated in the darker practices of *palo monte*, she gets to know the ghost of a woman who disappeared on a Puerto Rican beach 16 years ago and wants to know who killed her.

“Although it’s often practiced by the same people, *palo* is not the same as *Santería*,” said Di Iorio. “It’s a rough magic that people resort to when they’re desperate.”

continued on back



Di Iorio said her interest in *palo monte* started after she consulted a *santero* in Puerto Rico following her father's death from lung cancer in 1996.

"As I left the reading, I saw this cauldron," she said. "I asked Don Remedios what it was and he said, '*Ese es el muerto, me trae en un patín*.'" ("It's the dead one, he's hassling me," said the priest.)

This was Di Iorio's introduction to a central item in *palo* practice, a *nganga*, a cauldron containing bones and other ritual objects to represent the spirit of someone dead, who is conjured by the *palero* to "work" and achieve the results requested by the supplicant.

"For me, the *nganga* was a very powerful metaphor about searching for your origins," said Di Iorio.

The religion was brought over by Bantu-speaking African slaves and practiced first by runaway slaves in Cuba and then brought to other parts of the Caribbean, said Di Iorio.

First Spanish and then U.S., colonizers suppressed these religions as "primitive" and as a means for slaves to organize revolts; the Catholic Church condemned them as witchcraft. So practitioners often kept their rituals underground, even as every Latino neighborhood boasted a *botánica*, a store selling candles and other supplies for ceremonies.

Di Iorio is a literature and creative writing professor at City College, but her book is not a treatise on Afro-Caribbean religion. Instead, it has aspects of a mystery novel and a gothic ghost story.

She consulted a friend who is a *palero* to get the details right and to avoid trespassing on aspects that are not supposed to be revealed to non-practitioners.

"In the work I teach, I look for novels that have spirituality," said Di Iorio. "I like focusing on areas of reality that people don't always focus on."

To demonstrate the rising popularity of fiction that deals with spirituality, Di Iorio will appear with Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa on a panel titled "Magic & Mysticism in Latino Writing" on Oct. 28 at Hue-Man Bookstore, 2319 Frederick Douglass Blvd., in Harlem. Llanos-Figueroa's novel, "Daughters of the Stone,"

tells the story of five generations of Afro-Puerto Rican women from slavery to the civil rights movement.

Also participating in the panel will be Marta Moreno Vega, founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center and an Afro-Puerto Rican scholar and arts worker who was one of the first to organize exhibits and scholarly discussions on *Santería* and similar religious practices. Her 2004 book "When the Spirits Dance Mambo" discusses her initiation into *santera*/lucum.

"These books are recovering a history that's been erased or denied," said Di Iorio.

Di Iorio also will do a reading of "Outside the Bones" on Oct. 24 at 7 p.m. at Barnes & Noble, Broadway and 82nd St. The event is free, but an RSVP is required at outsidethebones@gmail.com.



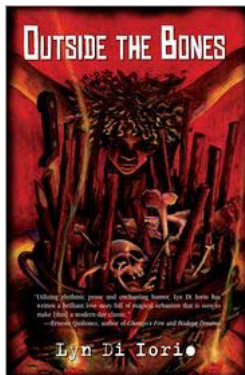
www.outsidethebones.com

Books

Outside the Bones

by Lyn Di Iorio

Arte Publico, September 2011, \$16.95



[Buy at Amazon](#)
[Shop at IndieBooks](#)

Some critics of crime fiction say it's too formulaic. *Outside the Bones* could be offered as proof that it's full of surprises. Lyn Di Iorio's first novel is a weirdly compelling, funny, sexy, and deeply strange tale of a Nuyorican practitioner of *palo monte*, a Caribbean form of magic with African roots.

Fina, who narrates the story in a sassy, earthy voice, has been putting spells on people for some time, but it has been mostly for show. She wants to learn how to really communicate with the spirits, so apprentices herself to Victor, a well-known master of magic. Once he initiates Fina into his dark arts, she begins to interact with the spirits of the dead. She wants to use her new powers to discourage two women who have turned the head of Chico, a musician with whom Fina has fallen in love. But as Fina begins to communicate with the spirits, she connects with a woman who vanished from a Puerto Rican beach 16 years ago and has plans of her own.

Though this unusual story violates most of the classic rules S.S. Van Dine once set for the detective story, it does offer one thing armchair detectives often seek: a window into another culture. Lyn Di Iorio, born in New York but raised in Puerto Rico and a scholar of Latino literature, has taken the crime story to a strange and mysterious new place. Adventurous readers interested in Afro-Caribbean culture will want to follow her there.

—Barbara Fister

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