Hurricanes, Magic, Science, and Politics in Cristina García’s *The Agüero Sisters*

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A Él

... 
Vuelan, vuelan en sus alas
nubes y hojas a la par,
y a los cielos las levante,
y a las sumerja en el mar.
¡Pobres nubes! ¡pobres hojas
que no saben dónde van! ... 
Pero siguen el camino
que les traza el huracán.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda

Ciclón

*Ciclón de raza,
Recién llegado a Cuba de las islas Bahamas,
Se creó en Bermudas,
Estuvo en Puerto Rico.
Arrancó de raíz el palo mayor de Jamaica.
Iba a violar a Guadalupe.*
I have asked myself what similarities may exist between 1898 and 1998, and how they relate to Latino U.S. literature and culture. Since we have begun a new century, I am tempted to associate the two dates with current debates surrounding the fin de siècle, or even with Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending*—a need to imagine origins and endings in order to give meaning to our intermediary position and preoccupations. But the ending as closure invokes its binary opposite, a beginning. In the case of 1898, its closing also connotes 1899, but more appropriately the advent of another century, or in Viconian terms, the start of a new cycle.

The end of the nineteenth century brought profound changes to the United States, the Spanish Caribbean, and Spain. While U.S. historians may look to John L. O’Sullivan’s ideas of Manifest Destiny, Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan’s proposition that the United States become a sea power, or to Dr. Albert W. Shaw’s interpretation as the country’s rightful outcome of events, perhaps nature provided another explanation for the change. The Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1895–1898 spans a period of an unusually high number of hurricanes passing through the Caribbean. These natural forces, which contain their own endings and beginnings, create their own destructions, followed by man’s desire to start anew, that is, to bring life back to a previous level of normality. In the period that encompasses the war, the Caribbean received seven hurricanes. One hurricane hit Cuba in October of 1895, two in September of 1896, one in October of 1897, and another one in October of 1898.

**Hurricanes I**

Hurricanes are at the very core of a genealogy of Cuban and Caribbean cultures. In *El huracán*, Fernando Ortiz interprets eight Amerindian objects found in the eastern province of Cuba. He believes that the figures with heads and curved arms, one up and the other down, in a rotation or sigmoid motion, may have been symbols of the hurricane gods Guabancex, Maboya, or Jurakán. Hurricanes are one of the most devastating forces of nature. Strong winds, tidal waves, and furious