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March 20, 2014

Terry Lee Barrett
Kata Productions, LLC
225 Church Street, Suite 1-H
Philadelphia, PA. 19106

Dear Mr. Barrett:

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity of reviewing your "Kata (The Iron Thorn)" film project. With this is my review as requested. By these means, let me also extend my best wishes for its successful completion and as indicated I am absolutely looking forward to seeing it materialize.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carole E. Boyce Davies".

Carole E. Boyce Davies,
Professor of English and Africana Studies

Review of “Kata (The Iron Thorn)”

An original screenplay by Terry Lee Barrett

by

Carole Boyce Davies, Professor of Africana Studies and English, Cornell University

The popular reception of the Oscar-winning “12 Years a Slave” indicates the huge need for stories that fill the voids in the history of the Black experience in the Americas. “Kata (The Iron Thorn)” is precisely one of these -- an engaging story set in the Caribbean which weaves together slavery and piracy; legend and geography; myth and science; the sea and the land, love and intrigue in a wonderfully engaging narrative which holds one’s attention as surprising twists are revealed. Located within the science fiction genre as well, “the iron thorn” is made for the kind of high level technologically-generated special effects available to filmmakers today. Immediately upon reading the screenplay, a variety of filmic possibilities reveal themselves.

According to Franklin Knight in *The Caribbean. The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2012) pirates or buccaneers created a different commerce in relation to settled communities. Often they engaged in plundering and seizing wealth but always they lived outside of the normal frames of the respectable,

occupying that pole of the daring, taking on the high seas with confidence. Still, pirates' gold has become legendary in the Caribbean, still naming rums and landmarks in the contemporary Caribbean. But the relationship of pirates to the enslaved provides another angle of exploration. We get a foretaste of this in Bob Marley's lyrical assertion: "old pirates well they rob I, sold I to the merchant ship." The meaning of piracy to black subjectivity is layered. Still, stories of deep sea diving to retrieve pirates gold lost at sea re-appear with fair frequency. This is one of the tensions that resides at the heart of "Kata" and which this work enters boldly.

The narrative uses the actual history of piracy in the Caribbean as its central organizing metaphor. As a result, there is continuity in this presentation with the genre of Pirates of the Caribbean films. But here is the additional angle to "Pirates" which presents as well the history of African enslavement in the Caribbean. For Kata is an African warrior king who was clear about not accepting subordination. As the story develops, we see him manifesting beyond the myth into an actual presence.

The screenplay makes creative use of other Caribbean mythical characters like "duppies" or Caribbean ghost figures who add as well some of the elements that one gets in zombie filmography. According to Caribbean scholar Sylvia Wynter, Caribbean people indigenized the landscape, populating it with their ghosts and

duppies. We see that indigenizing taking place in “Kata (The Iron Thorn)” with movements of these figures between the sea and the land.

The destruction of an old city called Port Royal, a pirate haven, via a massive earthquake 1692 which has buried a great deal of perhaps ill-gotten wealth (22) is actual Jamaican history. So there is a certain reality to a narrative of piracy set in Jamaica. But here is the difference: Kata Cove, where the Barrett family is from, is the site of the action in which a son must reveal family history of an ancestor with special powers and make that knowledge usable today. And so, in this story, we are provided with the range of disappearances and reappearances, flashbacks which bring the past into the present, witches who can use current technology like cell phone photographs and a still-angry warrior king ancestor who must in the end find reconciliation and peace.

The haunting of Kata Cove provides the advancement of the narrative as it explains a larger historical impetus for the basic story:

So Kata had a beautiful wife and a magic sword? The Pirates wanted the sword and kidnapped his wife and now he haunts the area? ...(38).

Thus, in many ways, “Kata (The Iron Thorn)” is also a contemporary story which provides the experience of a young man who returns to the Caribbean, in real time

into a modern Caribbean with school children, the track star Usain Bolt, festival culture, Jamaican food and celebration. The return to the Caribbean autobiographically includes honoring his anthropologist father's work. And as in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Barrett is simultaneously unearthing a larger wealth. This is a Caribbean migration and return story as well then with a difference this time not only in reclamation of knowledge, but understanding the landscape, the seascape, the culture, its people today. For it is definitely about recovery, and the putting back together of family history; a "re-membering" as Toni Morrison refers to this process. Somebody said recently that people of African descent in the Americas are hardwired to do family recovery given the deliberate separations that Africans in the diaspora have experienced. This is the kind of context which gives us the still iconic "Roots" and provides the ongoing discussion every time a film which reclaims some aspect of the past for good or ill is presented.

It is that history which is re-navigated here. We get an insight into Jamaican warriors who became the maroons; a context for Kata who refused enslavement. The intersection of science fiction and history is one of the desirable features of this narrative which allows this story to be told in clever ways as young Barrett learns his history. The flashbacks between 1655 and the present allow us to see slavers and

pirate ships operating in similar historical time. Contemporary research ships from Pennsylvania reveal modern pirates are operating with similar intent but also provide an opportunity and setting for some of the action to be realized. These cumulatively provide the climactic action in the film's conclusion.

Eventually we are provided a close up view of the character of Kata which fulfills a number of functions but also makes him usable creatively in the future. Thus is provided the crossover between science fiction and history that the author intends.

I am impressed with the possibilities for dynamic acting for black actresses as revealed for example in characters such as Lady Crawlene the witch. Yes, one can definitely see a Grace Jones in the role as is indicated on the wish list of potential actors. Lady Crawlene definitely wants power too and works hard to get access to the wealth. She is not so much an evil character as one who has enough power to do ill and if only she could get some more power...but we are never sure how such an ending would have resolved itself. Imani the central character's love interest is a progressive partner who is able to self-actualize, liberate herself from difficult situations and maintain a political consciousness through a beautiful and desirable persona. The script writing pays definite attention then to dearth of positive roles for

black women and one can see several actresses competing to play the role of Imani Sharp.

A variety of audience possibilities are envisaged with “Kata (The Iron Thorn)” applicable to different viewing communities. There is an obvious transferal to the young adult audience in the Harry Potter genre of films. There is a large Caribbean and African international viewing public awaiting this kind of film. But as with *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and a variety of action film we are presented with an opportunity for impact on an even larger audiences.

My recent work on *Caribbean Spaces* (2013) has described the internationalizing of Caribbean culture with entertainers like Rihanna moving into mainstream representations in a variety of media. It seems to me that we are right at the cusp of advancing Caribbean literary and filmic material with appeal to larger communities in much the same way as a Bob Marley had a similar appeal to an international community.

“Kata (The Iron Thorn)” presents filmic innovation which will provide the kind of far-reaching impact that is desired. I support its advancement through the various stages and am anxious for it to become a reality.

Reviewer's Bio

Carole Boyce Davies is Professor of Africana Studies and English at Cornell University. Her most recent book is *Caribbean Spaces. Escape Routes from Twilight Zones* (University of Illinois Press, 2013) shortlisted for the OCM- BOCAS literary prize, 2014. She is also the author of the prize-winning *Left of Karl Marx. The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Duke University Press, 2008) and *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (Routledge, 1994) which is considered a theoretical base for many studies in the field of black feminist literary theory and the writing of migration. In addition to over a hundred scholarly articles, Dr. Boyce Davies has also published the following critical editions: *Ngambika. Studies of Women in African Literature* (Africa World Press, 1986); *Out of the Kumbia. Caribbean Women and Literature* (Africa World Press, 1990); a two-volume collection of critical and creative writing entitled *Moving Beyond Boundaries* (New York University Press, 1995): *International Dimensions of Black Women's Writing* (volume 1), and *Black Women's Diasporas* (volume 2). She is co-editor with Ali Mazrui and Isidore Okpewho of *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* (Indiana University Press, 1999) and *Decolonizing the Academy. African Diaspora Studies* (Africa World Press, 2003). She is general editor of the 3-volume *The Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora* (Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2008). She recently published a collection of the writings of Claudia Jones titled *Beyond Containment: Claudia Jones: Autobiographical Reflections and Essays* (Banbury: Ayebia, 2012). From Trinidad and Tobago, she earned an M.A. in African Studies from Howard and Ph.D. in African Literature, from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Her next project is on women and political leadership in the African Diaspora.