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Linguistic Explorations of Gender & Sexuality

Sargasso, a peer-reviewed journal of literature, language, and culture edited at the University of Puerto Rico, publishes critical essays, interviews, book reviews, and some creative works. *Sargasso* particularly welcomes material written by/about the people of the Caribbean region and its multiple diasporas. Unless otherwise specified, essays and critical studies should conform to the style of the *MLA Handbook*. Book reviews should be kept to no more than 1,500 words in length. Snail mail correspondence should include one S.A.S.E. For electronic submission, write to: sargasso@uprrp.edu.

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Guyanese Amerindian asylum seeker she and Stick adopt and name Om, and her student Carol. Part four concludes with Molly and Stick's journey to Guyana in search of Om (whose real name is Apotu) which leads them to Demarara, a rural riverside village where a priest from Coventry Cathedral came to proselytize and was inadvertently killed by Apotu.

The breadth and scope of *Molly* are commendable: invoking the Western European canon and Caribbean myth, the novel draws correlations between Britain's land and class struggles at home and in her colonies through the juxtaposition of characters and loaded cultural symbols, all the while challenging religious supremacy by pitting Judaism, Christianity, and Islam against each other. Dabydeen's reverse diasporic focus sends British Molly to relocate in the Caribbean (in contrast to his own migration from Berbice, Guyana to England at the age of fourteen), and his narrative navigates seamlessly between depictions of Northern England's post-war corrosion and the furtive depths of Guyana's jungles. Dabydeen's thematic impulse challenges imperialism and its permutations – patriarchy, patriotism – through character relationships that urge the reinterpretation of gender, religious and ethnic identifications.

Yet while the novel strives to undermine hierarchies of power, many of its connotations too closely rely on these very structures. Dabydeen's depictions of the abuse inherent in Caribbean conquest by the likes of Raleigh and the subjugation of land and people through European warfare often reinstate traditional dichotomies: because of her father's abuse, Molly becomes an "unholy" Mary, yet another woman caught in the virgin/whore duality. *Molly* concludes that the only hope for renewal lies in the Caribbean, and Molly's final vision is of Stick as a budding tree with a mongrel leaf – born of Islam and Christianity; Arabia and Europe – that will dig roots deep in the Demarara jungle: "A thousand years after I've turned to dust it will bear witness, as a living tree, to the love, to the grief, which stops us now from speaking words which have become needless," (177) a finale that risks overextending the healing potential of Caribbean hybridization.

While Dabydeen's generously swinging stylistic pendulum – at times unintelligibly chaotic (reminiscent of Harris), harshly real (cut like Naipaul), and deeply metaphoric (suggestive as Elliot) – and disjointed patchwork of themes – gender, religion, politics – might benefit from tighter cohesion and a more complex conclusion, their very fusion in itself makes *Molly* unique and deserving of attention. Throughout the novel, Dabydeen's prose beguiles, his thematic intrigues, and his interweaving of seemingly polemic discourses

never fails to make the reader question the interconnectedness of all our varied influences, as disparate as they may seem.

Katherine Miranda
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Dalleo, Raphael and Machado Sáez, Elena (2007). *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 216 pages.

The recent abundance of Latino/a literary anthologies, including the forthcoming publication of *The Norton Anthology of Latino/a Literature* as the maxim sanction of this once marginalized artistic form, has prompted the authors of *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature*, Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez, to question the "commonsense periodization [which] has emerged for Latino/a literature" (2). Steering clear of debates regarding the validity of canon formation and its relation to the ethnicized "other," Dalleo and Machado Sáez focus on the tendency to separate the Latino/a writers of the Civil Rights generation (i.e., Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero, Piri Thomas) and those producing what the authors deem "post-Sixties literature" (i.e., Abraham Rodriguez, Junot Díaz, Angie Cruz). Dalleo and Machado Sáez argue against the assumption that political commitment and market popularity are incompatible, questioning the binary imposed on the "marginalized but politically committed writers of the 1960s and 1970s [and] the market success of the literary professionals from the multicultural post-Sixties era" (2). They propose that some authors of "post-Sixties literature" have creatively rethought this duality to demonstrate that even outside of the ghetto and the parameters of the Civil Rights era, socially conscious Latino/a voices emerge.

In their introduction, "Sellouts? Politics and the Market in Post-Sixties Latino/a Literature," Dalleo and Machado Sáez draw attention to disparate interpretations of the writers of the post-Sixties era, authors who are praised by multiculturalist reviewers and academics for the universality of their themes and apt cultural translations but also condemned by anticolonialists for what they believe to be apolitical writing. Effectively setting the stage

to “rethink the political within the contemporary context” (8), the book’s authors propose a move away from “a potentially pessimistic or backward-looking politics that can only lament the end of an era of possibility” (11). By addressing the validity of this mentality within canon formation and critical analysis, they successfully incite “hope for a renewed political Latino/a literature able to speak confidently in the public sphere” (11).

Dalleo and Machado Sáez hit the ground running as they attempt to debunk the myth of corrupted post-Sixties Latino/a literature with their first chapter, “Periodizing Latino/a Literature through poet Pedro Pietri’s Nuyorican Cityscapes.” Highlighting seminal Civil Rights era post-Sixties literary production in view of the “anticolonial vision that characterizes Latino/a literature of the 1960s and 1970s” (42), Dalleo and Machado Sáez show that facile chronological divisions and limited critical perspectives fail in light of the breadth and depth of acclaimed authors such as Pietri. They read his “El Spanglish National Anthem” (1993) alongside his earlier “Puerto Rican Obituary” (1973), making a compelling argument for “new ways of deploying a postcolonial or post-Civil Rights lens in order to analyze the relationship of commodity culture to Latino/a identity and artistic practices” (18). In addition, they evaluate “El Spanglish National Anthem” and relate it to other instrumental texts, such as the Young Lord’s Party’s “13 Point Program and Platform” and Jesús Colón’s *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches*. Their analysis “makes clear how the more recent poem both renews the anticolonial project and at the same time breaks away from it to suggest new alliances and possibilities” (42). The latter stand out as prospects that Dalleo and Machado Sáez consider no less politically charged or meritorious.

In both the second and third chapters, respectively titled “Mercado Dreams: The End(s) of Sixties Nostalgia in Contemporary Ghetto Fiction” and “Movin’ On Up and Out: Lowercase Latino/a Realism in the Work of Junot Díaz and Angie Cruz,” the authors explore how contemporary writers such as Abraham Rodríguez, Ernesto Quiñonez, Junot Díaz, and Angie Cruz deploy a ghetto aesthetic (one commonly attributed to writers of the Civil Rights era) in order to “highlight and debunk various levels of false consciousness” (45). Undermining ghetto fiction’s position “as the privileged bearer of the anticolonial worldview” (42), Dalleo and Machado Sáez argue that just as the canonization of ghetto fiction, “rather than overturning mainstream sensibilities [. . .] may reinforce power structures depending on how it is read and processed” (54), contemporary writers with market

popularity can also “provide a political vision—one that reconsiders the boundaries of Latino/a cultural production and community” (72). Further dispelling stubborn distinctions between the Civil Rights era and the post-Sixties, residents and immigrants, and lowercase and uppercase Latino/a literature, Dalleo and Machado Sáez illustrate that through the study of texts such as *Bodega Dreams*, *Spidertown*, *Drown*, and *Soledad* it is the “inability to see the past through any lens other than nostalgia” (65), not merely the pitfalls of the market, “that must be overcome for the true realization of Latino/a identity” (65).

The fourth chapter, “Latino/a Identity and Consumer Citizenship in Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*” turns away from the discussion of ghetto fiction and the Civil Rights era in order to illustrate the equally detrimental post-Sixties interpretation of “the market as constitutive of Latino/a identity” (107). Denouncing critics such as Ilan Stavans and Gustavo Pérez Firmat for oversimplifying the process of cultural identification and “glossing over sites of struggle and violence that engender such hybridity” (110), Dalleo and Machado Sáez contextualize post-Sixties texts such as *Dreaming in Cuban* within a complex global marketplace that Latinos/as inhabit as both consumer and consumed. Encouraged by the work of Néstor García Canclini and Arlene Dávila, the authors highlight a socially conscious voice among contemporary writers, one that rejects the valorization of both the ghetto and the hyphen and “allows for the imagining of a post-Sixties future for Latino/a identity” (131).

The oeuvre of Julia Alvarez studied in the fifth chapter, “Writing in a Minor Key: Postcolonial and Post-Civil Rights Histories in the Novels of Julia Alvarez,” is Dalleo and Machado Sáez’s example of commercially successful and politically committed writing. Their focus on the author’s ability to negotiate a political past directly and “think through the role of the contemporary writer in relation to politics and the market” (133) designates the apex of the text and completes the project of positioning contemporary Latino/a literature outside the dichotomies imposed by canon formation and critical enterprise. Through this literary critique, the authors validate their claim that “contemporary Latino/a literature is one of the postcolonial and U.S. ethnic literatures responding to a change from a modernist, anticolonial form of literature to a postmodern, postcolonial one” (134-35).

In their conclusion, “New Directions: The Post-Sixties Miami Imaginary,” Dalleo and Machado Sáez move away from the New York-based Latino/a tradition that has been the focus of the text and turn their attention

towards Miami in order to discuss the Cuban-American community's struggles against the post-Sixties stigma of selling out politically. Although this particular topic may have been better developed as a separate chapter, the authors offer a compelling discussion. They present examples from Nilo Cruz, Chantel Acevedo, and Ana Menéndez, showing how these writers "challenge the current for-or-against political dichotomy" (163) at the crux of this text. Finally, having examined the misinterpretations of post-Sixties literature, highlighted the nostalgia of the Civil Rights era, and studied the works of Julia Alvarez, Dalleo and Machado Sáez effectively promote an innovative way of understanding political consciousness and the market, thereby giving due credit to a new generation of writers. They urge readers to reevaluate some of the simplistic ideologies circulating within Latino/a scholarship, pointing out "Latino/a literature is entering a critical phase of consolidation [...] and encountering its own form of canon wars" (175). A text worthy of exploring, *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* serves as a welcome invitation to join the authors in exploring this "third space of literature" (175).

Margarita Castromán Soto

Frank, Dana. *Bananeras: Women Transforming the Banana Unions of Latin America* (2005). Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 137 pages.

In the ingenious cover design of this book, the ubiquitous Chiquita Banana logo is appropriated for the women workers in the banana industry. The image of the exotic dancer wearing fruit on her head is substituted with one of a modern woman with her fist in the air. This sets the tone for what follows and hints at the purpose of this short but substantial book. With highly accessible language and style *Bananeras* is a contribution to both the academic literature on the social and labor history of Latin America and the very social movements it portrays. As Dana Frank declares matter-of-factly, she plays a double role in this story, researcher and activist. In tune with this double aim, the book is published by South End Press, a non-profit,

collectively-run publisher committed to radical social change. South End's translation of the book into Spanish will allow it to reach a wider audience and fulfill its goal to advance the labor cause.

Frank focuses on the struggles of "banana women" or *bananeras*, as they call themselves, and how they have created a place for themselves in the banana unions of Central America and transform them in the process. Her research analyzes the history of the biggest banana union in Honduras, where a window opened for democratization of the union, allowing the women to climb up the ladder of the organization's hierarchy. This story is inevitably entwined with the process of transnationalization of the banana industry and the unions' efforts to follow suit in their battle to meet the new challenges posed by globalized capitalism. Frank's work is based on the review of a wide range of union documents, interviews with leaders and members of banana unions, and the author's participant observation in union meetings and workshops, all of which is carefully referenced in the endnotes.

In terms of its organization, *Bananeras* is comprised of six chapters, plus an introduction and a conclusion, endnotes, an index, and a page with Internet links to further information where one can find updates on contemporary labor movements. Its 137 pages are also interspersed with photographs of banana union leaders and rank-and-file women from all over Latin America.

The first chapter, 'The Work that Enslaves Us,' describes the dreadful working conditions within the packing plants of the banana industry, where most women are employed. This chapter also discusses the global banana economy and the restructuring it has recently suffered in its ceaseless search for cheap (non-unionized) labor. The next three chapters narrate the story of banana unions, while focusing on women's struggle for inclusion within them. These three chapters go from the local, to the national, to the global level; that is, from the Union of Workers of the Tela Railroad Company (SITRATERCO), to the Coalition of Honduran Banana and Agroindustrial Unions (COSIBAH), to the Coalition of Latin American Banana Unions (COLSIBA). In Chapter Five, 'The War at Home,' Frank turns to the personal side of gender politics and looks at those obstacles to women's unionization which lurk around their personal relationships. Chapter Six, 'Global Allies,' catalogs the whole array of international support which has made banana union's work possible and been instrumental in shaping its gender politics.

Work in the packing plant of the banana plantations is an all too familiar scene for those who have studied industrial agriculture anywhere else: in the