Elena Machado Sáez

Market Aesthetics: The Purchase of the Past in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction.

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In *Market Aesthetics*, Elena Machado Sáez refines the vision of the literary market's preoccupations that she and Raphael Dalleo presented so beautifully in *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* (2008). There, they argued that market pressures indelibly shape U.S. Latinx literature. Here, Sáez focuses on the Caribbean diaspora, considering the particular tensions of marketability, historical knowledge, and what she calls the ethical imperative placed on contemporary Caribbean authors of historical fiction. Her scope is broad, encompassing Hispanophone, Anglophone, and Francophone islands, with their diasporas in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. However, Sáez's literary analyses masterfully thread the novels together, forging logical connections across the hemisphere and the Atlantic.

The thesis of *Market Aesthetics* is that contemporary Caribbean diasporic writers are caught between an "ethical imperative to write historical counternarratives" (p. 1) and their acute awareness of specific market demands. The works surveyed reflect two chief influences: the decontextualizing impulse of globalization, which erases Antillean history, and a market still in the grip of multiculturalism, which seeks "exotic" yet palatable ethnic narratives for consumption. Tied to island nation-states that straddle hemispheres, and thus enmeshed in transnational social fields, these writers are compelled to write revisionist histories of the Caribbean. However, the market's distaste for overtly political or "didactic" ethnic writing results in a narrative tightrope: the authors are asked to be authentic spokespersons for their culture without falling into pedagogy or political rhetoric.

The book goes on to argue that contemporary Caribbean diasporic authors utilize "market aesthetics" to shape their historical fiction, delineating shared formal and thematic characteristics of the field. One is author-doubling and reader-doubling: novelists including Julia Alvarez, Michelle Cliff, and Marlon James create an author or reader character to problematize the mainstream reader's consumption of Antillean culture, the role of author as native informant, and the impossibility of telling an objective history. Other writers Sáez discusses, such as Andrea Levy and David Chariandy, transform their protagonist from reader-double to writer-double to destabilize readers and make them conscious of historical gaps, demonstrating through narrative form the decontextualizing effects of globalization and the market's pernicious multiculturalist impulses.

Sáez moves from specific formal characteristics to the shared historical legacies of revolution and dictatorship in the Caribbean, examining works that reimagine the troubling of the reader-writer relationship in terms of desire. To be taught, readers require a level of intimacy with the author, to guide them past stereotypes or easy consumption of cultural difference, yet this intimacy can never be total. Ana Menéndez, Dionne Brand, and Monique Rafferty articulate this tension in their recent novels, which adopt the genre of “postcolonial romance,” using narrative conflicts concerning gender and sexuality as a metaphor for this thwarted desire. This “gendering of postcolonial violence” finds its complement in novels by Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz, which present dictatorial modes of narration, limiting the opportunities for nonmasculine or nonheteronormative narrators to achieve authority. These texts take up the inheritance of Caribbean dictatorships, illustrating how a voiced history will inevitably silence other voices of that history. In the conclusion, Sáez suggests that Caribbean diasporic writers are embracing digitalization to explore the limitations of translation, knowledge, and the archive(s).

The undisputed highlight of *Market Aesthetics* is Sáez’s trenchant close readings. Her interpretations make a compelling case for thinking together works that span continents, linguistic heritages, and audiences by demonstrating how their shared formal elements produce meaning. The work is remarkably well researched; Sáez provides a useful overview of contemporary critics and contestations. At times the scope does feel unwieldy, even in Sáez’s capable hands, for example when she must establish the shift from 1960s to post-1960s ideology in three separate contexts—Caribbean, African American, and Latinx communities. Her commanding knowledge of contemporary U.S. Latinx literary production is clear, yet stretching that field to include mid-twentieth-century postcolonial African American and Canadian cultural changes diffuses the argument. That same breadth makes the project hard to situate: it would be difficult to assign this text for a college course, for instance, since syllabi are so often constructed around the when and where of the author rather than pan-national, panhemispheric, and panethnic themes.

Yet perhaps academia needs to adopt a more expansive lens. In the wake of the very pressures that *Market Aesthetics* illustrates—globalization and its concomitant transnational flows and diasporas, the decontextualization of local histories, and the desire for easy consumption of ethnic identities—minority literatures may share more with one another than we can currently recognize when reading within particular national contexts. Sáez’s work will encourage scholars of Caribbean literature in our various relegated areas—Hispanophone, Latinx, African-American, Francophone, and Afro-Canadian,

among others—to look outside of those boundaries. Rethinking the Caribbean diaspora in this way would invigorate the field. Thus, *Market Aesthetics* offers us a step forward.

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