

called “organic disorder . . . a sort of half-disciplined chaos” (*Israel Potter*, 114).

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**Market Aesthetics: The Purchase of the Past in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction.** By Elena Machado Sáez. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015. x + 249 pages.

Demonstrating the incisiveness and concision that sustains her work, Elena Machado Sáez relies on a double meaning in her title to encapsulate the tension between publishing markets and the writer’s commitment to the work of historical fiction. “Purchase” here refers, of course, to the consumer’s presumption that buying diasporic fiction allows the reader access to a culture heretofore unknown to her. Purchase also signifies in a different way, though: as a kind of claim-making of the past on this very fiction. Writing historical fiction about the Caribbean or its diaspora, according to this book, engages the Caribbean past in order to reflect on the conditions of the diasporic present of the authors and the characters with which they populate their novels. This double meaning introduces the main claim of Machado Sáez’s book, that Caribbean diasporic fiction composed in recent decades engages with “market aesthetics,” a method by which “fiction understands its materiality as a commodity or form of capital circulating in a global market, where the goals of the writers are both facilitated by and in tension with the market demands placed upon diasporic fiction” (1). Throughout the book, she argues that interactions between student-teacher pairs and characters who function as doubles for either the author or the reader collectively launch a meta-critique of the publishing market that demands palatable ethnic fictions that “translate their cultures for effortless and uncomplicated market consumption” (2).

Diasporic Caribbean writers—those who identify as Caribbean but often live elsewhere for some, if not all, of their lives—choose historical fiction to engage two imperatives. The first is the ethical imperative of historical revision. Machado Sáez foregrounds the ways that Caribbean diasporic fiction seeks to revise the received (Western) versions of the Caribbean past in order to reveal alternate and silenced histories. However, Edouard Glissant’s

concept of forced poetics, or the self-consciously challenging relationship between the language used by an author and its effects on the world that she or he describes, introduces a key element of ambivalence in this historical revisionist project. Even though Caribbean diasporic historical fiction seeks to act as a corrective to a dominant western view of the region, it remains aware of its complicity with the language and knowledge systems of the very ideology and historical perspective it seeks to subvert. The second imperative that Machado Sáez traces in her book is what she terms the postcolonial imperative, which mourns the political shortcomings of the present in the context of anti-colonial failures and dictatorships. Her major intervention in drawing these imperatives together in the terrain marked by reader, writer, and publisher desire is to argue that Caribbean diasporic writers allegorize queer sexuality to represent the vexed and unresolved relationships that obtain between these agents and the subject matter of the novels in question. Her major intervention in drawing these imperatives together is to argue that Caribbean diasporic writers allegorize queer sexuality to represent the intersections of reader, writer, and publisher desire as nonnormative. In other words, Machado Sáez reads these market relationships as queered by the Caribbean diasporic writers who are engaged in them. By tracing the effects of both of these imperatives, and drawing out their ambivalences in the novels discussed in her monograph, Machado Sáez succeeds in offering a powerful counterpoint to other genre and mode-focused studies in postcolonial fiction, such as David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (2004) and Joseph Slaughter's *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law* (2007).

*Market Aesthetics* models a pitch perfect method of engaging author intentionality through a robust close reading of the form and content of her chosen novels. She does this by pairing them carefully with critical and literary critical responses to those and previous novels by the authors, as well as drawing on author interviews and essays in which they explore their struggles with being creative artists and being pressured to authentically represent a national culture. Through her focus on the pedagogical mode of these novels, she reveals how authors are using the genre of historical fiction to frame the problematic relationship they maintain with the publishing market and the readerly expectations that the market engenders and supports. She argues that texts "seduce readers into an impossible intimacy" (27), challenging

and ultimately refusing the reader's desire to consume understandable, authentic, and authoritative historical facts in the guise of fiction. Through her careful reading of the gender and sexuality politics in the novels, she points out the moments in each text where the author troubles the notion that his or her fiction is a singular rescuing of the authoritative history of the Caribbean. This ethical imperative—to resist the lure of authenticity and singular authority—is encoded, according to Machado Sáez, in “sexuality as the site of (in)visibility, the open secret of Caribbean history” (40). Drawing on Rosamond King's concept of “*el secreto abierto*” or the open secret of sexuality within the Caribbean” (40), Machado Sáez argues that “the mandate of *el secreto abierto* entails a tension between knowing and not knowing that speaks to the delicate balance that the historical novel strives to maintain with its ethical imperative: educating the audience about Caribbean history but resisting the readerly impulses to access and categorize Caribbean interiority” (41).

*Market Aesthetics* has a considerable theoretical groundwork to establish, moving as it does between critiques of multiculturalism and the decontextualizing nature of globalization, postcolonial theorizations of genre and historiography, and studies in the ethics of reading. Both the introduction and first chapter perform these tasks admirably. While there is a clear need to take time in setting up the broad and interconnecting strands between these theoretical lines of thought, there are moments of repetition, leading the reader to wonder if a longer introduction would not have sufficed as a more expedient entry into the subsequent chapters. What follows are four chapters and an epigraph that take on eleven novels by Anglophone, Hispanophone, and Francophone Caribbean diasporic writers. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on historical revisionist imperatives of postcolonial historical fiction, beginning with the pedagogical impulses of Andrea Levy and David Chariandy to contextualize the history of the Caribbean as central to the history of the Americas. Chapter 3 features novels by Michelle Cliff, Julia Alvarez, and Marlon James, who focus on particular historical figures to fill in a revealed gap in historical knowledge that, in turn, informs our and the characters' understanding of contemporary diaspora. Chapters 4 and 5 attend to particular contexts through which to facilitate the relationship between the diasporic present and the past. Chapter 4 focuses on anticolonial revolutionary leaders of mythical status—Ché Guevara and Eric Williams—in the fiction of Ana Menéndez, Dionne Brand, and Monique Roffey,



considering the ways in which the coupling of historiography with masculinity and national identity is undermined by modes of private writing, such as letters and diaries, and the romance genre. The final chapter turns to the relationship between postcolonial dictatorships and the diaspora. Here, Machado Sáez argues against the common formulation of the diaspora as open and heterogeneous and instead draws on the cognates in dictation/narration and dictator to suggest that diasporic writers stage their troubled complicity with the dictatorships their acts of migration meant to physically escape. Machado Sáez concludes her book with a brief epilogue considering the effects that digital paratexts, both reader- and author-generated, can have on the continued focus on the postcolonial and ethical imperatives of diasporic historical fiction. The breadth of this study—eleven novels featuring a variety of stylistic choices and historical contexts—produces positive and negative effects: attending to such a wide variety of texts makes its claim more robust for demonstrating the far-ranging applicability of its claims, but it also creates—at least in this reader—a sense of foreshortened engagement, particularly with the six novels that are addressed in the book's middle and shortest chapters.

Machado Sáez addresses the ethical and postcolonial imperatives that structure her claim by returning to three main topics: market aesthetics, pedagogy, and queer metaphors and narratives. She regularly focuses on the opening of each novel, attending to any paratextual matter that appears before the narrative begins and highlights the ways that many of them, in spite of their clear linkages to historical fiction, seem to start in a decontextualized way, historically speaking. The interpretations of these openings are particularly strong features of the work. Also, the reader can almost see Machado Sáez teaching these very texts in this way—beginning at the beginning—even while she analyzes the pedagogical techniques that structure the relationships between key characters in the novels. In more than one instance, Machado Sáez identifies an aspirational but as yet unreachable reader of the text through a character who appears in the novel and tends to be illiterate. She makes this point powerfully in her reading of Chariandy's *Soucouyant* (2007) and Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé* (2000). The consistency of this hermeneutical strategy is complemented by the various ways she assesses each author's response to market aesthetics. For example, she argues that Alvarez and Menéndez respond to negative reviews of their previous novels through character. In this way, Machado Sáez cleverly illustrates

how these authors take on their critics in their later works. For other authors like Cliff, James, Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Díaz, she turns to their self-reflective writing in essays and interviews to locate their responses to market aesthetics that they then use historical fiction to process. A key feature of many of her interpretations is the queer reading she offers of family relationships, friendships, and mentorships, which, she argues, points out the ethical impossibilities of intimacy and allegorically reflects the challenges posed by the clash of reader and writer desire on the terrain of historical fiction set in the Caribbean and its diasporas. This is a powerful and fascinating argument, but it is met with uneven success in its execution. In some cases, such as the reading of Brand's *In Another Place Not Here* (1996), or in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), the queer narrative is flawlessly linked with the challenges to market aesthetics and the pedagogical imperatives of the text. In others, though, there is a much less convincing link made, such as in Levy's *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999) or Roffey's *White Woman on a Green Bicycle* (2009). On the other hand, the latter two novels supply Machado Sáez with wonderful opportunities to examine how race signifies in complex ways across both novels, which balances out the awkward or missing linkages to the queer element of her overarching argument.

In a book that deals openly in the relationship between the creative and political visions of writers and the market pressures that drive them to publish narratives packaged in particular ways, it seems unfair to criticize a scholar for responding to market pressures in academic publishing, but Machado Sáez's abilities to consistently and persuasively address and develop the multiple strands of her argument are challenged by the compact size of her study. The breadth of her claim illustrates her desire to write a study that traces "market aesthetics" that are truly reflective of market trends rather than a few related examples. However, the slimness of this volume also reveals her responsiveness to the trends in scholarly publishing—at the journal and monograph levels—to strive for shorter texts. Machado Sáez seems to be demonstrating that even scholarly monographs navigate a market aesthetics all their own—by drawing on eleven distinct novels in her book, her argument expands far beyond the physical slightness of the volume.

*Market Aesthetics* serves as a brilliant addition to the already strong New World Studies series published by University of Virginia Press. It will be of interest to scholars working on multiple

fronts, from the ethics of reading to critiques of pedagogy, to the relationship between globalization and postcoloniality, to the relationship between narrative genres and postcoloniality, to queer studies. Perhaps even more importantly, the book could serve as an invaluable text on the pedagogical challenges that the teacher-scholar of global, postcolonial, multiethnic, and multicultural literature regularly encounters. The brevity of the argument on each text and the clarity with which that argument is developed makes the book ideal for reading in chapters or even smaller segments for undergraduate audiences learning to familiarize themselves with the discourse of academic writing.

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**Tragic Modernities.** By Miriam Leonard. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. xiii + 204.

In this deeply learned, thoughtful, and often lucid account of the intellectual background to modernity, Miriam Leonard argues that the idea of “the tragic” has profoundly influenced our understanding of revolution, metaphysics, history, gender, and subjectivity. Each of these topics receives a chapter, and their interconnections spill over in mutually informing ways. An introduction lays the groundwork (to which I will return), and an epilogue suggests the continued resonance of tragic-infused thought on our contemporary world.

Although acknowledging the notorious elasticity of “modernity” (3–4), Leonard refuses to define it, except to date it after the French Revolution (14–15, 161). One wonders about less dramatic eruptions shaping the modern condition, such as European colonial expansion, the industrial revolution, mass urbanization, the rise of science and technology, the theory of evolution. Nevertheless, Leonard focuses on an impressive list of intellectual modernists: Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schelling, Friedrich Hölderlin, G. W. F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Carl Schmitt. The only non-Germans to play a significant role in Leonard’s study are Raymond Williams, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Jacques Lacan, and George Steiner, although

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