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James, Conrad Michael. *Filial Crisis and Erotic Politics in Black Cuban Literature: Daughters, Sons, and Lovers*. Woodbridge, Tamesis, 2019. (189 pp).

Conrad Michael James's book, *Filial Crisis and Erotic Politics in Black Cuban Literature: Daughters, Sons, and Lovers*, evaluates the literary productions of the generation of Afro-Cuban writers who came of age during the Cuban Revolution. Interdisciplinary in nature, the book engages existing literary scholarship within multiple fields, including African Diaspora Studies, Cuban Studies, and Gender and Sexuality Studies. Through his analysis of the feminist and queer articulations of desire within this generation's writing, James exposes the ways in which these five Afro-Cuban writers and intellectuals challenge homogenous conceptions of *cubanidad* through their incorporation of themes such as family, desire, and sexuality.

The book opens with a well-developed introduction that provides an overview of the representations of race and sexuality in Cuban literature. The following five chapters are devoted to an in-depth analysis of the works of Nicolás Guillén, Excilia Saldaña, Inés María Martiatu, Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy, respectively. James ends his study with a concise afterword that reflects upon the



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representation of Afro-Cuban subjectivities within popular Cuban culture. The book closes with an extensive bibliography and a carefully crafted index.

In the first chapter, James contributes to the very robust body of existing scholarship on Nicolás Guillén by exploring the exploitative representations of the Black female body within Guillén's poetry. James poignantly illustrates how the Afro-Cuban woman is reduced to a muse or trope to restore Guillén's interpretation of Black male selfhood in oft-anthologized poems like "Negro bembón" and "Mulata." James writes, "The Black muse becomes one of Guillén's sources of reconstituting the Black male psyche and an opportunity thereby to construct a new androcentric Black nation" (29). Throughout his analysis of several poems in *Motivos de son* and *Sóngoro cosongo*, James demonstrates how Guillén's depiction of the Afro-Cuban woman presents a masculinist vision of cultural resistance and ultimately preserves the patriarchal discourse of the Revolution.

The book's second chapter focuses on Excilia Saldaña and her 1991 poetry collection, *Mi nombre: antielegía familiar*. Described by James as a "woman-centered psychodrama" (49), *Mi nombre* interweaves narratives of the poet speaker's individual story with several key moments in Cuba's social and political history. According to



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James, Saldaña plays with African-centered cultural memories to reclaim African aspects of Cuban identity. For example, James argues Saldaña uses the anaphoric structure of the guaguancó, a variant of the rumba, to communicate a message of liberation. For James, *Mi nombre* attempts to recuperate the social and cultural histories of marginalized groups who have been misrepresented in official narratives of *cubanidad*.

Perhaps one of the most developed chapters in the book is chapter three. Here, James evaluates Inés María Martiatu's short story, "El senador," which concerns Cuba's first Black senator, Martín Morúa Delgado. Prior to his literary analysis, James offers a detailed historical context with extensive grounding in the gender and racial politics of the early twentieth century. According to James, Martiatu blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, thereby using her writing as an act of vengeance. Moreover, James claims Martiatu politicizes the erotic to disrupt institutionalized discrimination against women. As James argues, Martiatu (re)imagines history to avenge sexist wrongs and envision feminist futures.

In the fourth chapter, James evaluates two plays written by Eugenio Hernández Espinosa – *María Antonia* (1964) and *Alto riesgo* (1996). James claims these two plays not



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only reveal the race and class hierarchies within the island country, but also expose the rigid gender roles that Cuban socio-cultural structures promote. In his analysis of these two plays, James evaluates the precarity of masculinity and draws interesting parallels between Hernández Espinosa and Nicolás Guillén. The final chapter of the book focuses on Pedro Pérez Sarduy's 2001 novel, *Las criadas de la Habana*. Here, James studies the conceptions of Blackness within both Cuba and the Cuban diaspora. His analysis pays particular attention to the economic and emotional crises that affect the experience of motherhood and familial separation.

James concludes with a reflection on the internationally acclaimed Cuban film, *Fresa y chocolate* (1993). He argues this film encapsulates the homogenization of Black masculinity in major Cuban works; the writers of his study, however, reject these stereotypical representations and establish their own voices within the discourse of the nation in the mid to late twentieth century.

While the book provides a necessary critical analysis, there are some flaws worth pointing out. First, James frequently refers to concepts such as "erotic politics" and "the politics of intimacy," yet they are only vaguely defined in the book's introduction. A deeper examination and discussion of James's principal theoretical framework would



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enhance his original analysis of the primary sources. Furthermore, there are some typographical and citation errors that the editors at Tamesis would do well to revise for future printings of the book. Lastly, James cites a number of primary and secondary sources in the original Spanish, but does not offer English translations. Although one can expect that the primary audience of this book is bilingual, English translations would expand James's readership beyond the field of Cuban Studies.

In sum, Conrad Michael James's book, *Filial Crisis and Erotic Politics in Black Cuban Literature: Daughters, Sons, and Lovers* is a welcome addition to the existing scholarship on twentieth-century Afro-Cuban literature. Ideally, James's study will invite new readings of Afro-Cuban literature in the classroom and beyond.

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