

The *Latino(a) Research Review (LRR)* is a refereed interdisciplinary journal focusing on the experiences of the diverse Latino groups in the United States, and those of the populations of Latin America and the Caribbean regions. The journal publishes scholarly articles, research notes, and book reviews. *LRR* pays particular attention to research on (im)migration issues and the transnational hemispheric processes that link US Latinos(as) with their countries of origin.

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Review of Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez,  
***The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature***.  
 New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

## Locating the Latino(a) Literary Canon: The Politics, the Market, and the Music

Trenton Hickman

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With Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz's recent selection as the winner of this year's Pulitzer Prize in Fiction (for his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*), it seems newly important to consider the place of Latino(a) literature in the larger category of American literary study. If we add to such inquiry the growing mass appeal of Latino(a) writers outside the preserve of dedicated university courses on the subject, a discussion feels long overdue about what forces have shaped—and will continue to shape—what has unquestioningly become the de facto "canon" of U.S. Latino(a) literature. Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez take up this task in an ambitious way in their book *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature*, a study that situates its sense of Latino(a) literary canonicity not only in the orbits of academic criticism but in larger arcs of historical, cultural, and economic context. In short, it is a volume that tackles the reasons why those of us who study and write about Latino(a) literature privilege the texts that we do while accounting for market forces beyond the control of any single academic or artistic entity.

In Dalleo and Machado Sáez's view, a "common sense periodization" has emerged in discussions and categorizations of Latino(a) literature by scholars and anthologists that lumps texts into either "Civil Rights" or "post-Sixties" generational camps (2). Dalleo and Machado Sáez note, and rightly so, that scholars tend to highlight writers of the Civil Rights generation in what seems to have become a set of tacitly-expected characteristics: political engagement, a progressive stance on social issues, and the rejection of oppressive economics that give rise to ghettos and the ostensibly separate-but-equal communities that effectively deny Latinos full access to the privileges that other Americans enjoy. Because

of these expected ideological sympathies and affiliations, argue Dalleo and Machado Sáez, scholars often conclude that these Civil Rights-era writers were (or are) uninterested in finding a market for their literary works, eschewing popularity and book sales in order to stay true to their political and artistic principles. Similarly, these same scholars tend to see the “post-Sixties” group of writers as the binary opposite of this earlier literary generation. In these scholars’ thinking, suggest Dalleo and Machado Sáez, the post-Sixties are almost apolitical in their artistic stances and highly interested in establishing publishing markets for their work as well as in currying popularity and acclaim with a wide readership. As Dalleo and Machado Sáez point out, this binary thinking about the corpus of Latino(a) literature leads as often to a misreading of the literature than to useful readings of it, as writers who might be politically-engaged but more subtle in the presentation of their politics find themselves having to awkwardly justify their choices to skeptical critics, and as writers whose work sells too well must finesse with these same critics the reasons why their work can still qualify as literary and political despite the critical embarrassment of their market success. Mixed up in all these dynamics but teased out usefully by Dalleo and Machado Sáez is the problem of “anticolonialism” present in many of these literary works, a political sensibility that has itself become a sort of commodity in the Latino(a) literary marketplace. Does anticolonialism, once it is glorified and fetishized by younger Latino(a) writers seeking to emulate those who are critically-esteemed among their writerly elders, become reified and then sold en masse, not as a way of breaking down the colonialist system but rather as a means of slaking that system’s new thirst for all things multicultural?

In order to escape the traps of what they allege to be the too-reductive paradigms of Latino(a) literary canonization to date, Dalleo and Machado Sáez instead choose to revise the received wisdom of Latino(a) literary canonicity from both ends of its conceptual binary. First, Dalleo and Machado Sáez insist that post-Sixties literature breathes new life into the political tradition of earlier Latino(a) literature by “engaging with the triumphs and defeats of the past” (7), allowing itself to be aware of the history and the historical precedent inherent in earlier Latino(a) literature without unreflectively reiterating it. Likewise, Dalleo and Machado Sáez see the need to “reimagin[e] the possibilities of the popular” (8)—namely, to resist the view that market popularity means the concession of progressivism in favor of a necessarily conservative stance vis-à-vis the issues that face the Latino communities throughout the United States. Employing Nestor García Canclini’s argument that authors and the market negotiate a co-produced identity for their works, Dalleo and Machado

Sáez finally wish to leave their readers with the sense that the spirit of the predominantly anticolonialist writing of the Sixties is still with us (and indeed “haunts” contemporary Latino(a) literature) but that its anticolonialism finds itself made fresh by a contemporary reassessment of that anticolonialism’s past failures and successes, and by newer Latino(a) literature’s accommodations to the literary marketplace.

As the book passes into the case studies of its five chapters, Dalleo and Machado Sáez divide the book into two rough conceptual halves. The first half deals with writers who resist the marketing categories that outsiders would superimpose upon what has been called “ghetto fiction,” including Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero, Abraham Rodríguez, and Ernesto Quiñonez. The second half of the book details the work of Junot Díaz, Angie Cruz, Cristina García, and Julia Alvarez, writers who in Dalleo and Machado Sáez’s estimation “have been more readily labeled as mainstream” (10) and therefore the bearers of at best questionable political critique. Notably, the writers studied in all five chapters derive from what we might call “east-coast” Latino(a) origins, as they are all US Puerto Rican, Cuban-American, or Dominican-American. Dalleo and Machado Sáez see this east-coast Latino(a) orientation—and the fact that all of these writers have important biographical, artistic, and/or thematic connections to New York City in their work—as part of the strategy of their book, partly because the similar anticolonialist experiences of these three east-coast Latino/a groups lend themselves to shared study, and because the close geographical proximity of their communities in the United States has already forged some of the interethnic and pan-ethnic collaborations that Dalleo and Machado Sáez’s book wants to underscore. Thus, *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* is more properly a study of what the book ends up calling an examination of “Latino Caribbean writers” (12) than one that would include Chicano/Mexican-American and other Central American writers as part of the constellation of its “Latino(a)” texts. Given the sprawl of the texts and contexts that Dalleo and Machado Sáez’s study already manages, however, their decision to limit their study in this way is understandable and even desirable as it brings a historical and cultural tightness of focus to its argumentation.

One surprising benefit of *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* lies not only in its views of Latino(a) writers but in its assessment of the critics of Latino(a) literature as well—Ilan Stavans, Juan Flores, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, and Lisa Sánchez González among them. Of these, Ilan Stavans’ *The Hispanic Condition* (1995) and Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (1994) fare

the worst in Dalleo and Machado Sáez's critique, evidencing in their eyes a view of latinidad as something to be consumed by America-at-large rather than affording the Latino(a) the role of being a consumer. Critics are right to be concerned about the role of the political in Latino(a) literature, the *The Latino/a Canon* argues, if Latinos(as) are nothing more than something to be consumed, as evidenced in the food metaphors that Dalleo and Machado Sáez point out throughout Stavans' and Pérez Firmat's work (108). Tracking Juan Flores' work from his *La Carreta Made a U-Turn: Puerto Rican Language and Culture in the United States* (1981) and *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (1993) to his most recent *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (2000) involves in Dalleo and Machado Sáez's hands a journey less troubled by food metaphors and more attuned to the terms upon which Puerto Rican and other Latino(a) literatures should become well-known and studied in the marketplace, but ultimately the authors see both Flores and Lisa Sánchez González's *Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora* (2001) as flawed by their own nostalgias for the political past. But Dalleo and Machado Sáez do praise Flores and Sánchez González for rearticulating the study of Latino(a) literature alongside other popular cultural forms like music. Though it may not entirely solve the dilemma between the politics of Latino(a) literature and its potential market value, Dalleo and Machado Sáez argue that music like the salsa of Rubén Blades, Willie Colón, and Héctor Lavoe offers a model for seeing how political critique is possible in a format that can also be wildly popular; perhaps the politics of critique can co-exist along with something that people want for pleasure's sake as well. It is in this wedding of the politically-critical and the popularly-cultural that Dalleo and Machado Sáez finally plead for a "third space for literature," a conceptual space that registers "the complex theorizations of music's relation to politics and the market in Latino/a studies" and that "position[s] Latino/a literature in a comparable manner" so as to "grapple with the possibilities and limitations of the market" (175).

Especially because of the timeliness of its arguments, but also because of the breadth and depth of its study and argumentation, *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* will be an important text for scholars and students of Latino(a) literature. One can already see how Dalleo and Machado Sáez's book could well occasion a lively discussion of the next steps in the formation and cultivation of a Latino(a) canon for the twenty-first century.

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Reseña de Carlota Caulfield y Darién J. Davis,  
*A Companion to US Latino Literatures*.  
Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2007.

## Sin título

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Toda reseña le debe dar al lector o la lectora una idea precisa y fiel del contenido del libro reseñado. En el caso de *A Companion to US Latino Literatures* se hace aun más necesario cumplir con ese deber, no sólo para llenar los requisitos del género sino para establecer claramente sus logros y fallas. Procedamos, pues, a describir este volumen que nos llega a las manos con la promesa de acompañarnos por las nuevas rutas de las literaturas latinas en los Estados Unidos.

*A Companion to US Latino Literatures* recoge doce estudios sobre diversos aspectos del tema. Pocos—ejemplar entre ellos es el de Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez sobre la literatura chicana—lo ven desde una perspectiva amplia. Algunos—como el de Eva Paulino Bueno sobre Sandra Cisneros—se concentran en una figura en particular. En la mayoría de los trabajos se estudia algún aspecto de esas letras: el ir y venir entre la Isla y los Estados Unidos en la producción de los escritores neoricans (Patricia M. Montilla), el tema afrocubano en el teatro de esa diáspora (Armando González-Pérez) o varias poetas caribeñas (Carlota Caulfield). Otros prestan atención a literaturas de grupos latinos que sólo comienzan a crear un cuerpo literario: escritores centroamericanos (Vincent Spina) o brasileños (Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta) o argentino (Sergio Waisman). Uno está dedicado a la producción de algunos escritores latinoamericanos de ascendencia judía (Lydia M. Gil) y otro, muy fuera de contexto dado que el título que promete tratar sólo la literatura, al cine (Darién J. Davis). Los ensayos van, pues, desde los panorámicos, como el de Coonrod Martínez, a los extremadamente especializados, como el de Bueno. Pero el conjunto, que fluctúa en calidad, no ofrece un amplio panorama de las literaturas latinas que se nos promete desde el título. Éste no es el guía o el acompañante que se anuncia aun antes de abrir las páginas del volumen.