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Perhaps by the year 2000 the Navajos—and other Native peoples—will not have to ask that question.

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**María, Espinosa. *Dark Plums*. (Houston, TX: Arte Público, 1995) 221 pp., \$9.95 paper.**

**María, Espinosa. *Longing*. (Houston, TX: Arte Público, 1995) 298 pp., \$9.95 paper.**

Published within the same year, *Dark Plums* and *Longing* both delve into the darker side of the human psyche. Similar in topic, the novels explore the complex relationship between love, sexuality, and power. While *Dark Plums* gives its readers a voyeuristic look into the life of Adrienne, a young, insecure Chilean-American woman who seeks to find herself through various sexual encounters with men and women, *Longing* leads them through the painful psychological recovery of American Jew Rosa and the simultaneous mental breakdown of her Chilean husband, Antonio. In addition, each novel focuses around the female protagonists' struggle for inner strength and confidence. Although *Dark Plums* and *Longing* pursue provocative issues and display María Espinosa's flair for capturing the psychological effects of the erotic, the story lines and language in both novels lack originality and ultimately fail in sustaining the reader's interest.

In *Dark Plums*, nineteen-year-old Adrienne leaves her home in Houston and goes to New York where she immediately embarks upon a number of sexual encounters with strangers. At the root of her reasoning for these indiscriminate acts is the belief that she should offer men what she can and attempt to please them because they will reciprocate with love and acceptance. As the novel progresses, the reader learns that much of Adrienne's inadequate feelings about herself are due to an unhappy relationship with her mother and the death of her father. In essence, through sexual relationships, she hopes to gain the "family" she never had. Eventually, two men become prominent figures in Adrienne's life: Alfredo, a Cuban-American artist who cruelly abuses her and turns her into a prostitute in order to support himself, and Max, an aging Jew whose guilt over letting his family die in the Holocaust because of his own lust propels him to court Adrienne and ultimately marry her, making her an heiress to a small but significant fortune. In addition, Adrienne has an on-again/off-again lesbian relationship with Lucille, a wealthy woman who is dying of breast cancer.

## *Explorations in Sights and Sounds*

Spanning over three years, the novel focuses mostly on the year that Adrienne is forced to prostitute herself for Alfredo. With each chapter, Adrienne falls deeper into despair, at times even wishing one of her clients would kill her. However, the reader has a difficult time sympathizing for Adrienne because most of her actions appear so contrived. For example, Adrienne repeatedly finds Alfredo cheating on her and stealing her money and yet refuses to believe that he might not love her. In fact, she believes he is her "salvation." As her thoughts reveal: "It was as though she were inside a dark tunnel and only he could lead her out. The price was believing in him" (122). Trite comments such as these abound throughout the novel and often interfere with the narrative. The reader is made aware too often that Adrienne's well-being depends on her autonomy from men. The dichotomous roles that the men play, Antonio as her sexual desire and Max as a father figure, along with the other clues Espinosa provides as to Adrienne's state of mind are too obvious. Complete with a weight problem, the haunting memory of an abortion, and an addiction to diet pills, Espinosa inevitably creates a character who reads more like a psychology textbook case than a real woman.

In her second novel, *Longing*, Espinosa is able to overcome some of these characterization problems. Not as heavy-handed as *Dark Plums*, the story traces the relationship between Rosa and Antonio, a couple brought together by an unexpected pregnancy. While it contains some love and passion, the marriage is also a stormy, unhealthy union that brings out the worst in both characters. Rosa is a young woman recovering from a nervous breakdown whose paranoia and desire for stability drive her to behave irrationally and Antonio is an unemployed journalist whose temper and bad luck leave him bitter and abusive. Both of them seek comfort in their sexual union as well as in extramarital affairs. In addition, Espinosa continues to explore sexuality by introducing lesbian, homosexual, and bisexual subplots. Told from a number of different perspectives, *Longing* incorporates the inner thoughts of everyone in Rosa's family, all of whom are dealing with some type of sexual issue.

Like Adrienne, Rosa finds herself completely dependent on a man for support and direction. And like Alfredo's character, aware of her vulnerability, Antonio relentlessly abuses Rosa physically and emotionally in order to feel some sort of control over his own dismal life. Yet, Rosa and Antonio emerge as more believable, compassionate characters because they often display awareness and self-reflections. For example, Rosa realizes early on that she must escape her situation if she is ever to become whole again. Likewise, at times Antonio recognizes that he behaves as he does because his failures fill him with contempt.

However, *Longing* suffers from excessive melodrama. It is not surprising that Rosa is as psychologically damaged as she is when her entire family is so dysfunctional. None of the characters ever appear

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completely sane, and the reader can almost assume that they are not far from their own breakdowns. In addition, Espinosa's reliance on sexual desire as the cause for much of the family's repression eventually becomes tedious.

While Espinosa makes bold attempts to introduce erotic, controversial topics into middle class drama, she is unable to achieve the delicate balance between desire and reality. Also, her flat language and two-dimensional characters too often leave the reader unsatisfied. For better examples of erotic women's writing that also address issues of ethnicity, readers should seek out works by Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Sandra Cisneros, and Ana Castillo.

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**Philip S. Foner and Daniel Rosenberg, eds. *Racism, Dissent, and Asian Americans from 1850 to the Present: A Documentary History.* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993) 311 pp., \$55.00 cloth.**

Numerous historical studies discuss racism against Asian Americans as well as their resistance to racist policies, practices, and thought. While this scholarship correctly stresses the predominance of racism, it contains passing references to non-Asian individuals and organizations who supported better treatment and the rights of Asians. Foner and Rosenberg argue that these small numbers of supporters were dissenters from prevailing anti-Asian racism and that they deserve greater attention because they represent the existence of more than one perspective of Asian Americans.

Foner and Rosenberg's book consists of documents, including excerpts from pamphlets, reports, books, articles, editorials, letters, speeches, lectures, debates, sermons, laws, and testimony before government committees. These are organized into six sections that deal with laws against Chinese and Japanese immigrants and opposition to these laws; statements sympathetic to the Chinese and Japanese by public figures and organizations; demands by clergymen for justice and humane treatment of the Chinese and Japanese; support for the rights and organization of Chinese and Japanese workers by labor leaders; African American views of Chinese immigrants; and the legal rationale for the removal and interment of Japanese Americans, challenges to the latter, and the movement for redress.

The editors have compiled an impressive array of information regarding the varied supporters of Asian Americans and their activities, which range from expressing sympathy to acts of protest and interracial