

Elias Miguel Muñoz. *Crazy Love*. (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1989) 167 pp., \$ 8.50 paper.

In a supposed “interview” with *Rolling Stone*, Muñoz’s major character, lead singer-composer Julian Toledo of Julian and the L.A. Scene, sums up Paul Simon’s song “Crazy Love” as “about the love of music, about relationships. . . about family.” Indeed, this book takes the form of a song in which the author is simultaneously the composer and conductor orchestrating the three elements of music, relationship, and family harmonically into the text through the deployment of a dazzling grab bag of modern and postmodern authorial techniques. These include mock-ups of interviews (written) and in video format; songs seemingly printed as appendices to the text; ingenuous epistles to her big brother Julian written by his little sister, which provide relief amidst all the heaviness; as well as random entry into the head sets of a variety of characters. Reminiscent of James Joyce, or the collages of John Dos Passos, but primarily of Oscar Hijuelos’s *The Mambo Kings Sing Songs of Love*, Muñoz’s technique integrates Cuban music as an indigenous element into the work. *Crazy Love*, however, moves beyond *Mambo Kings* in its treatment of the commercialized homogenization to which ethnic music can be reduced when exploited: the chasm between ethnic authenticity and the marketplace of compromise, of sell-out; the pressure to popularize ethnicity into, “You know, meaningless lyrics, catchy melodies, etc.,” as Julian sarcastically puts it.

Simultaneously, Muñoz includes negative as well as positive arguments to each side of the issue. Will Julian Toledo’s ethnic music totally sell out to the American mainstream? Will Erica, the ruthless lead singer and Julian’s “crazy love,” who has now brought the band to trendy success, take over completely? Will Julian break with the band, return to his barrio, his family, and abuela? At the end, all these questions are answered for the reader.

Much as I enjoyed the technically dazzling text and empathize with Muñoz’s pitch for protecting the ethnically authentic in Cuban American music and culture, I am troubled by his objectified, one-dimensional treatment of female characters. Muñoz does attempt one holistic portrait: that of Julian’s little sister Geneia, a typical Hispanic teenager in training for the role of male-oriented wife-mother. But that Geneia, in a letter to her big brother, would describe her first menstruation to him, including intimate crotch details, defies belief.

In fact, *Crazy Love* is only authentic when detailing homoerotic encounters. These provide so strong a contrast to *Mambo Kings’* tireless (and to this reader, tiresome) cataloguing of heterosexual encounters (always from the male point of view, of course) that the two works could be taught as macho bookends in a Chicano studies or multi-ethnic literature course. *Crazy Love* could provide the gay alternative to *Mambo Kings’* relentless heterosexuality. And both could be taught as equally macho and equally involved in integrating Cuban/Cuban American music into literature.

— Phillipa Kafka
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