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Richard Purcell and Henry Veggian, *Barack Obama's Literary Legacy: Readings of Dreams from My Father* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, £58.00/\$95.00). Pp. 214. ISBN 978 1 1375 0152 3.

Since its publication in 1995, *Dreams from My Father* has been received as a memoir that reveals as much about Barack Obama's political worldview as it does about his understanding of American history and culture. Critical analysis has rarely focussed on the book's literary merits, a deficiency ably addressed by this long-overdue contribution to appreciations of Obama's literary influences and aspirations. Purcell and Veggian recognize that a challenge for the modern reader of *Dreams* is to separate the text from Obama's political career. They suggest in their introduction to this engaging collection that *Dreams* affords an insight into the literary figure Obama might have become had he turned away from politics. The editors argue that, while *Dreams* is an unconventional autobiography, it has lasting value as a piece of literature, and they ask for a recalibration of our understanding of Obama that asserts his place in the African American literary tradition.

Despite drawing on a range of literary theories, the seven chapters that comprise the collection are remarkably cohesive, and especially in the ways they consider the memoir genre. Stephanie Li's deft analysis of how Obama engages with the stories of his father passed down through his family reveals a favouring of "the myth over the man" (42), and that it is the myth of the father that informs the identity that the son chooses for himself. This in turn leads Li to question what she describes as the stability of *Dreams* as memoir. The father figure also features prominently in John Lowney's compelling chapter on Chicago renaissance writer Frank Marshall Davis, whose influence on Obama's identity and development has arguably been marginalized in favour of other writers in the canon of African American literature. Lowney argues that, while Davis's Marxist leanings are obscured through Obama's partial fictionalizations, he functions as a surrogate father who helps Obama negotiate the tensions between pragmatic individualism and radical socialism.

James Fitzmaurice considers Obama to be an "introspective and ambivalent man of letters" (98) whose poetic aspirations were burnished during his time at Occidental College, Los Angeles. Fitzmaurice examines Obama's early writing to infer his literary influences, from W. H. Auden and W. B. Yeats to John Fante, Charles Bukowski and Robert Lowell. Fitzmaurice also separates Obama the author of *Dreams* from the book's Obama character and locates the text as a piece of creative nonfiction. David Borman, however, places *Dreams* in the genre of memoirs produced by authors whose heritage is derived from postcolonial Africa. Borman offers a nuanced comparison of *Dreams* and Aminatta Forna's 2002 memoir *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, and particularly the ways these texts mediate their authors' engagement with Africa through return narratives. Borman argues that, in Kenya and Sierra Leone, Obama and Forna find that the vague, culturally ambiguous Africa of their imaginations coalesces into a creative place that shapes identities and reconciles experiences.

There is an interesting connection here with Lee Konstantinou's discussion of *Dreams*, which considers the book not as an autobiography but as a post-ironic