

The Initials of the Earth



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出版者:Duke Univ Pr

出版时间:2006-10

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780822338291

Many critics consider "The Initials of the Earth" to be the quintessential novel of the Cuban Revolution and the finest work by the Cuban writer and filmmaker Jesus Diaz. Born in Havana in 1941, Diaz was a witness to the Revolution and ardent supporter of it until the last decade of his life. In 1992 he took up residence as an exile in Berlin and later in Madrid, where he died in 2002. This is the first of his books to be translated into English. Originally written in the 1970s, then rewritten and published simultaneously in Havana and Madrid in 1987, "The Initials of the Earth" spans the tumultuous years from the 1950s until the 1970s, encompassing the Revolution and its immediate aftermath. The novel opens as the protagonist, Carlos Perez Cifredo, sits down to fill out a questionnaire for readmission to the Cuban Communist Party. It closes with Carlos standing before a panel of Party members charged with assessing his merit as an 'exemplary worker'. The chapters between relate Carlos' experiences of the pre- and post-revolutionary era. His family is torn apart as some members reject the Revolution and flee the country while others, including Carlos, choose to stay. He witnesses key events including the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban missile crisis, and the economically disastrous sugar harvest of 1970. Throughout the novel, Diaz vividly renders Cuban culture through humour, slogans, and slang; Afro-Cuban religion; and references to popular music, movies, and comics. This edition of "The Initials of the Earth" includes a bibliography and filmography of Diaz's works and a timeline of the major events of the Cuban revolutionary period. In his epilogue, the Cuban writer Ambrosio Fornet reflects on Diaz's surprising 1992 renunciation of the Revolution, their decades-long friendship, and the novel's reception, structure, and place within Cuban literary history.

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目录:

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