
Crossing the Street toward a “Gay” Latin American Quarter

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Anchoring a renewed *postmodernidad/postmoderno* debate in its perpetually problematic application in a Latin American context, Dieter Ingenschay, the editor of *Desde aceras opuestas*, argues that *lo gay* is a phenomenon or notion that remains foreign and first-worldly in a Latin American context. From Lyotard to Habermas to García Canclini, he explores why it is ‘productive’ to think of local cultures as postmodern: “América Latina ha abandonado su posición periférica para desarrollar—en uno de los cambios más decisivos de la historia cultural del pasado siglo [XX]—una nueva discursividad con atrevidos modelos [literarios]” (8). Following Foucault’s notion that the construction of the ‘modern homosexual’ is undoubtedly a lateral phenomenon of Modernity, Ingenschay argues that a postmodern gay/lesbian culture in Latin America would in part be traditionally ‘deviant’ in both its self-awareness and its discursive presence; however, he claims it also evidences a postmodern-postcolonial gay discursiveness that differs from (and can be a new model for) first-world concepts of homosexuality. This collection of seventeen articles has Latin America as its *locus* of inquiry, but is international in its approach, theoretically multifaceted, and ideologically innovative.

José Amícola explores Manuel Puig’s uncredited adaptation of José Donoso’s *El lugar sin límites* (1966) for Arturo Ripstein’s film version, emphasizing how an Argentinean *gay* author took a Chilean work and translated it for the masses in a Mexican dialect of sorts. In so doing, Puig went further than the transnational Cortázar. Through dialogues rather than with narrators, this adaptation brought forth what Donoso ‘veiled’ in his original work, “el mundo despreciado de la marginalidad y de la prostitución;” thus, from this Donosian text surges something that Puig’s entire *œuvre* has always privileged: “la enunciación directa como trampolín a la psicología de los personajes” (25). With an analysis that also includes Puig’s *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) and *Pubis angelical* (1979), Amícola argues that “Puig establece nuevos

parámetros desde donde mirar las diferencias sexuales y [...] la dura lucha por la que atraviesan en cada momento histórico las negociaciones de lo que ahora sabemos es el constructo de la ‘sexualidad’” (32). Puig thus deploys textual strategies that in Latin America, before the appearance of gender as a category of analysis, effectively sought to challenge the very notion.

Birger Angvik argues that the postmodern experience is either born with or alongside the HIV/AIDS world epidemic. Yet, if to some the epidemic is inscribed as “tainted blood = tainted texts” in a postmodern literary tradition, Angvik argues that HIV/AIDS also exceeds categorical reductions to artistic strategies that offer vital monuments against decaying, wasting, dying and vanishing. These texts are also ‘infected’ with life. Given their apparent proliferation during literary renovations and crises in history, Angvik sees many of Reinaldo Arenas’ texts as virtual metaphors for *cachondeo* that destabilize possible coherent, unitary readings and, instead, evidence complex networks with fragmentations as textual phenomena that engage densely biography and *tanatography*. Within a frame of intertextual references such as Severo Sarduy, San Juan de la Cruz, and Servando Teresa de Mier, Angvik sees Arenas’ *Antes que anochezca* (1992) as a ‘*texto maldito*’, infected and/or *tanatographic*, but also as a highly postmodern, *post-mortem* Orphean project: the triumph of a creative, yet complex, text over disease and death.

Problematizing the postmodern condition of a homosexual identity as a paradox of individuality that only accentuates well-established gender dichotomies, Fernando Blanco addresses these ‘*reclamos emancipatorios*,’ using Butler’s notion of a dialectic of exclusion, *vis-à-vis* Pedro Lemebel’s homoerotic chronicles. As perhaps the most notorious Chilean author that indulges in ‘*el goce de la abyección*,’ Blanco asserts that Lemebel, like Donoso, established a clear connection between punishment and immolation of ‘perverse’ sexualities with dictatorial societies. This masculine violence victimizes the bodies that ‘incarnate’ their failed modernity project. To Blanco, once the dictatorial, neoliberal powers assume a new identity as mass-media puppeteers, only authors like Lemebel aspire to a crucial compromise between aesthetics and politics, art and democracy. To a heteronormative Chilean discourse, his *œuvre* is thus a narrative and visual performance of resistance in culturally aware ways that had not been explored/exposed before.

Leopoldo Brizuela discloses the importance of “*La larga cabellera negra*,” a short story by Manuel Mujica Láinez, as, not only an early strategically ambiguous gay text in Argentina, but also an accomplished manifestation of dissidence against the great postulates of modernity. Comparing Mujica Láinez’s fantastic short story with Poe’s and Quiroga’s tales, Brizuela also posits that “*La larga cabellera negra*” also reveals autobiographical, homosexual content. The protagonist as a writer watching someone as he writes,

and the description of this non-gendered, silent participant, might well define, Brizuela believes, a codified gay discourse. Especially when considering other characters in the author's *œuvre*, such as *Bomarzo* (1962) and *El Unicornio* (1965), and his recurring 'táctica del borramiento' of gender, Brizuela poses that Mujica Láinez is similar to Oscar Wilde in how both created an interaction between fiction and reality, defining a homosexual identity that is also political and postmodern.

Brad Epps posits that representations of homosexuality continue to be forbidden, perverse, extravagant, dangerous, or deviant, yet present interesting degrees of deviance in a Latin American cultural context. With the image of the *vampiro/a* as employed by Luis Zapata in his homosexually charged fiction, and cultural critic Gloria Anzaldúa in her construction of a *mestiza* identity, Epps sees in her *vampiresca* idea of "[estar] chupando la sangre de la vida para darle de comer a la pluma" a militant, Lesbian *mestiza*, and a literary creator (89). Whereas Foucault engages a homosexual self as "writing to have no face," to Epps, Anzaldúa's *vampiresque* act of a "writing sucked out of life" is a project of not just *nombrar*, but *arrostrar*, the vibrant ambiguity of a *mestiza* self. In Zapata's *El vampiro de la Colonia Roma* (1979), Epps identifies in Adonis (a male hustler in Mexico City), a roguish *vampiro* anti-hero whose picaresque 'pedigree' is a postmodern, perverse homosexual identity. Thus, "Anzaldúa and [Zapata's] Adonis [...] express, within their similarity, similar concerns. [Both struggle] with assimilation, (in)visibility, relationality, and the joy and pain of difference" (113).

David William Foster studies how Jaime Manrique (as "latinoamericano y [...] escritor posmoderno en los Estados Unidos") uses "*maricón*" as means of constructing "una tradición latina gay [...] de héroes culturales gays fuertes y ejemplares" in *Eminent Maricones* (1999) (120). He comes to see it as an enmeshed configuration of gay/queer that seeks to give the pejorative term a new meaning, given that language can be and is constantly *resematizado*. Puig, Arenas and García Lorca—the *maricones* in Manrique's work—"achieved true eminence by the courageous audacity of their examples" and thus redeem the term. The correspondence between patriarchal languages and signs, Foster asserts, means that the categorization of *maricón* is unstable *a priori*, and so to claim the term as his own (much like the militant gay activists' stance of owning the term *queer* in the U.S.), reflects Manrique's awareness of the power of naming—whether with *othered* epithets—what/who in the end can be perceived as proper/proprietor. The question then is who calls whom a *maricón*, and for what perceived gain is the homosexual to be identified as such—and the role that literature plays for Manrique in the process.

According to Víctor Fowler, because they are removed from mainstream Latin American literature, a few Cuban authors and their "literatura alrededor

del homoerotismo” have gone virtually unnoticed (140). Such is the case of narrator Laureano Vásquez (*Pasarela*, 1997), and two poets: Nelson Simón (*A la sombra de los muchachos en flor*, 2001) and Antón Arrufat (*Ejercicios para hacer la esterilidad virtud*, 1997). The latter was also author of the poem that inspired Ingenschay’s title. It is as texts of resistance that Fowler identifies Arrufat’s poems in which male bodies engage one another in what are traditionally considered perverse and sterile ways, but the poetic text becomes precisely an exercise to turn virtuous the procreative sterility that is homosexuality. This is also the case with Nelson Simon’s poetry, for whom also ‘*otra acera*’ suggests as much as ‘the fire that devours’ with explicitly male-oriented desire. Fowler thus argues that such literary creation of a homosexual subjectivity has been flourishing—yet gone virtually unnoticed outside the Island—for over a decade now.

Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola concentrates on what he calls a “series of betrayals” by Argentinean and Spanish publishers in the 60s upon Puig’s work (notably Seix Barral, the *boom* Spanish giant and his eventual publisher), given his *queer postmodernism*, that was incomprehensible to them at that time. He argues that this was particularly the case with Puig’s opera prima, *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (1968). The constant rejection of then-current critics and publishers is attributed by Herrero-Olaizola to “el carácter heterogéneo y marginal” of Puig’s screen-divas-prone work—and no less to his *queer* persona—that effectively separated him from normative Latin American boom authors such as Cortázar and Borges (153). Herrero-Olaizola identifies Puig’s novel as a postmodern, queer, non-normative text with ‘betrayal’ ruling its textual and contextual *being*, making it a fascinating study of life betraying art—and vice versa.

Within a postcolonial theoretical frame, Dieter Ingenschay explores how much AIDS helped to readdress the relationship between citizenship and homosexuality on the literary Latin American front. When considering the fact that the Western experience of AIDS became closely associated to—if not synonymous with—male homosexuality, Ingenschay points to the role that an ultra-conservative, homophobic, US-based media played in the creation of an AIDS culture. Preceding Butler’s revolutionary notion of ‘gender trouble,’ Donoso’s *El lugar sin límites* is to Ingenschay a key text of Latin American *gay literature*, as well as an early, subversive anti-Colonial model of sexual hybridity through La Manuela. Sarduy’s *Colibrí* (1984) is likewise Latin America’s first AIDS novel, given its allegoric, Brueghelian plague scene, as is *Pájaros de la playa* (1993) a Neobaroque AIDS text *vis-à-vis* the wake of the pandemic’s artistic appropriation by Kushner’s *Angels in America* (1992). Ingenschay studies the ways in which AIDS has evolved in local literatures (from Arenas to Lemebel), in order to sustain the subjectivity of what is

labeled as the most abject of beings: “un latino maricón con SIDA” (178). He concludes that AIDS has elicited—if not forced—answers of their own from Latin American queer subjects.

Jörg Köbke engages a global approach to José Lezama Lima’s *œuvre*—literary magazines contributions, poetry, essays, and novels—to pose the author’s perennial subversion to traditional identities, defined by gender and/or race, by producing a hybrid written space where signs privilege and point to (but do not *identify*) a homosexual desire. According to Köbke, this is the case with the multiple signs that both apprehend and destroy the phallus as a central referent (given its Lacanian arguable primacy as a cultural symbol) in *Muerte de Narciso* (1937). In Lezama Lima’s essays, likewise, Köbke identifies the creation of a Latin American “third space” or “hybrid culture” (as suggested by Bhabha) that challenges Western patriarchal (and therefore *foundational*) notions of sexual hierarchies and language’s role in establishing symbolic order. For Köbke, this process is even more complex in Lezama Lima, as exemplified by the symbolic re-creation of foundational myths in *Paradiso* (1966), through a “doble impulso de signos y deseos [y] signo[s] en los juegos de palabras” that make the (male) anus a site where phallus-centered homo/hetero/sexual divisions and identities *vanish* (190).

Antonio Marquet argues that Mexican painter Carlos Márquez’s inter-referential contact between word and image invokes subversive, provocative postmodern visions of words in/as art, and art with/through words, thus creating a re-vision of culture and mass media. Examples such as “Lamer/La mer” (to lick/the sea) become an articulation of hearing, sight, smell and taste in a billboard fashion. The series “Aguas de colonia” (*eaux de cologne* or “barrio waters”) plays similarly with a conjured paradox of art, image, and smells. What could be a historic juxtaposition-as-repositioning of iconic cultural images such as Marilyn, Frida, Botticelli’s Venus and Millet’s *glaneurs*, all result in what Marquet defines as Márquez’s humorous iconoclast spirit and his all-too-literal ‘*poner en tela de juicio*’, history, art and modern advertising *vis-à-vis* the word. This vision also permeates Márquez’s work with gay themes and subjects, which Marquet expounds with the painter’s *sensorial* recreations of gay icons such as St. Sebastian and Ganymede to represent male beauty, sensuality and narcissism.

Following Lyotard’s notions of delegitimization, Elena M. Martínez studies Cristina Peri Rossi’s work as “piedra angular de la literatura latinoamericana posmoderna,” engaging the novel *El amor es una droga dura* (1999) as a self-reflexive metanarrative (minding Hutcheon) that generates a politics of gender interpellation (209). For Martínez, this novel’s structure and characters agree with Luce Irigaray’s concept of specularization, narratives as ‘*specula*’ that reflect discourses of art and eroticism. Emphasizing Peri Rossi’s

practice of focusing on a male character's perspective/voice, Martínez argues that this text also redresses gender allocation and identity representation differently from other women writers with a *decentered* male subject at the center of the narration. Moreover, through androgynous, bisexual and lesbian characters, Peri Rossi's novel also examines constructions of feminine/masculine subjectivity and erotic desire as basis for sexual identities that are "ilusorias, provisorias y determinadas por el deseo, el cual siempre es cambiante y caprichoso" in what Martínez sees as a thoroughly postmodern act of textual/sexual destabilization of a heterosexual, male-centered hegemony (221).

Nicolás Rosa posits that Néstor Perlongher completed an extermination of Latin American poetic language that began with Vallejo, Girondo, and Campos. As "poesía ensayo," Rosa argues that Perlongher made sexuality a 'battlefield of politics' in Argentina; moreover, unlike U.S. queer politics that generate a strategy of change, Perlongher's literature was a full-fledge 'destruction machinery' of laws, language, and conventional logic, with desire as a point of departure/fracture. Using notions like segmentation, writing, language, style, bodies, sex, and disease, Rosa analyzes Perlongher's work as "[l]a lengua del cuerpo [que] es también el cuerpo como lengua que sume, babea, lame, muerde despojada del sentido, puro significante amorfo, un verdadero atentado contra la poesía rimada y ritmada" ; thus, she suggests that Perlongher's work be seen as an 'anatomical fiction of the political body' that destabilizes and rewrites the relationship fiction-politics *vis-à-vis* the dynamics of laws and bodies (235).

For Francisco Soto, Reinaldo Arenas' prolific *œuvre* abounds in "issues that challenge and resist normative gender identities as well as society's heterosexual hegemony", in a postmodern style that resists totalization while embracing uncertainty and contradiction and "problematizing society's homosexual panic" (246). As more than a parody of Lorca's *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1936), Soto explores the ways in which "El cometa Halley" undermines the original play's tragic dimension with camp and hyperbole, in order to inscribe a "parodic queer performance" in which sexual repressions are overcome by the Alba sisters—who have escaped to Cuba, and eventually turn their home into a brothel. In so doing, Soto argues that Arenas once more effectively undermined and overturned patriarchal values (251).

Peter Teltscher explores the ways in which Osvaldo Lamborghini's *Tadeys* (1994) represents 'a conglomerate of carnivalesque *re-writing* that at once destroys (in keeping with Lamborghini's own rules of "*literatura de la destrucción*") Argentinean masculinity constructs, and creates a '*pijaresca*' text that problematizes a national history. Teltscher asserts that *Tadeys* is a "manifesto without an explicit program" in that "ningún otro texto argentino encierr[a] tal cantidad de encuentros sexuales hombre-hombre;" yet, as a whole, the

text effectively challenges and subverts every possible type of *identity politics* through its perverse, relentless and even pornographic *inversion* of national, historic standards of masculinity (259).

Carmen Tisnado analyzes the increasing textual presence of lesbianism in Peruvian and other South American countries, as demonstrated by four short stories by the Chilean Alejandra Basualto (“Mujeres grandes”), and the Peruvians Leyla Bartet (“El muñeco chino”), Doris Moromisato (“La misteriosa metáfora de tu cuerpo”), and Mariella Sala (“Cielo”). From the gaze in Basualto’s text, to the unspeakability of lesbian desire in Moromisato’s, to the “closeted lesbianism” in Sala’s, to the lesbianism-as-deviance in Bartet’s, Tisnado argues that in all four “lesbianism is, to an extent, outed as topic,” yet also is “the reenactment of the incessant production of the closet”—after Butler’s notion of *outing*. All four, however, remain texts of local visibility that can provoke further rewritings (277-8).

Finally, María Ángeles Toda Iglesia examines the ways in which modern U.S. authors, who doubly-identify as “lesbianas chicanas,” attempt to textualize their identity. Identifying as Chicana and/or lesbian, Toda Iglesia asserts, has meant historical pressure by a “discurso masculinista de la Raza” that fought race and social class, but not gender discrimination, as well as the “white feminism” that authors like Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga contested at different times (286). *Toda Iglesia* analyzes the production of several authors (including Sandra Cisneros, Denise Chávez, Emma Pérez, and Ana Castillo) by dividing it into three categories, women’s, chicana *and* lesbian literature, which not only challenge notions of inferiority in their triple marginality, they also resist a cultural relativism in their textual subjectivities.