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Interpellation, Inversion, Identification: The Making of Sexual Diversity in Latin American Literature, 1895-1938

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for Hernán

The period from the 1860s to the 1930s is widely considered decisive for how sexuality was defined: new words emerged (“homosexual” in 1867, “heterosexual” a quarter of a century later), a new sexual science developed, and out of it came psychoanalysis, the homosexual subject emerged to public view (particularly after the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895), and literary texts began to represent this new subject. Most crucially, these years saw the change from a religious and moral framework (an emphasis on “sodomy,” for instance) to a medical and scientific one. Work on these topics has been intense. In this paper I would like to discuss a few Latin American literary texts in the four decades from 1895 to 1938, which show these paradigm shifts. The texts I will discuss—Adolfo Caminha’s *Bom Crioulo* (1895), Rafael Arévalo Martínez’s “El hombre que parecía un caballo” (1914), José González Castillo’s *Los invertidos* (1914), Augusto D’Halmar’s *La pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* (1924), Ofelia Rodríguez

Acosta's *La vida manda* (1929), Alfonso Hernández Catá's *El ángel de Sodoma* (1929) and Carlos Montenegro's *Hombres sin mujer* (1938)—are fascinating for the ways in which they show the emergence of a new subject, and for the subjectivity that is created in the works. While it is often difficult to speak about authorial intention, certainly these texts can be discussed in terms of a new homosexual subjectivity, sometimes through the ways in which the characters are presented by the narrator, sometimes through the interiority of the characters themselves.

As many critics have noted, Caminha's 1895 novel is among the first to have a homosexual character as its protagonist¹ (and in Brazilian literature it is considered the first novel with a black protagonist). While Amaro, the "bom crioulo" of the title, is never described with a noun or adjective that would define his sexuality, he is clearly endowed with a sexual orientation of the kind that was already being described as homosexual. Interestingly, he is also the active partner in the relationship with the cabin boy Aleixo, who is described as effeminate and passive in both his homosexual liaison with Amaro and his subsequent heterosexual relations with Dona Carolina. The vocabulary that does come into play in the novel—the descriptions of Aleixo as an "efebo" (48, 58, 90 and *passim*), the reference to Amaro as an "erotônimo" and "uranista" (76), the chapter that describes Aleixo and Amaro's first "delito contra a natureza" (38) and the invocation of Sodom (48)—show the competing vocabularies that Caminha, a liberal defender of the new Brazilian republic and a self-proclaimed disciple of Emile Zola's naturalism, with its scientific approach to the representation of society, had at his disposal. In fact, it can be argued that Caminha's novel clearly shows the ways in which the new scientific and medical discourses move to displace the religious vocabulary, and at the same time hark back to the ancient Greeks shows an interest in representations of sexual identities that were independent of the Judeo-Christian vocabulary.

Amaro, the former slave, is described by Luis Zapata in his introduction to the Spanish translation of the novel as the first homosexual in "nuestra literatura" (*Bom Crioulo*, Spanish translation, 17), by which

¹ See Balderston and Quiroga, 123-33.

Zapata seems to mean modern Western literature as he specifically notes that *Bom Crioulo* is earlier than Belgian novelist Georges Eekhoud's *Escal-Vigor* (1899). Before meeting Aleixo, Amaro's strongest bodily feeling seems to be his shame on being stripped naked (48-49), a scene that marks his transition from the status of a fugitive slave to that of a sailor. His negative feelings about the "perversions" of the sea captains under whom he served are expressed twice (25 and 68-69); he feels no identification with those whose sexual lives are a consequence of their power. Instead, Amaro discovers his sexuality as an adult when he vows to protect Aleixo on shipboard, and suddenly awakes to the pleasures of "gozo pederasta" (40), although in the same passage it is made clear that he was sexually indifferent to women. His discovery of sex is referred to several times as "aquilo" or "that" (40, 41, 53), as if euphemism were necessary in describing the character's inner feelings. The narrator, however, feels no need for euphemism: he frankly describes Amaro in turn as a happy husband (97), a jealous capitalist (97), a wild animal ("uma fera," 54) and an "African fetishist" worshiping a totem (76) and guarding an amulet (78). Amaro's feelings of jealousy (89-90 and 93-94) are frankly described in terms of an anxiety of possession. It is clear, then, that for the narrator Amaro is someone with a fixed homosexual orientation, and in that sense Zapata is correct to call him the first homosexual, though interestingly it is the active, not the passive, partner who is marked as homosexual in this pioneering work.

The object of his desire is more complicated. Aleixo's passivity is frequently remarked upon (48 and *passim*), as is his shame at being "used" sexually, even held in "slavery" (71). Dona Carolina even thinks of him as almost a virgin (56), despite his having been in a relationship with Amaro for some time: "virgem talvez" with women, but certainly not in any literal sense of the term (and in fact, the moment when he loses his virginity with Amaro is described as such: 37). His fear of Amaro unmistakably runs through his period of cohabitation with Dona Carolina. She, in turn, is clearly the one who seduces him, even possesses him, though through this period of being possessed he seems to discover his virility and become less of a boy and more of a man. Carolina is certainly the sexual aggressor (58),

and later it is stated that her sexual feelings are product of an innate hermaphroditism (75); the inversion of roles, then, is quite explicit, with the scene of Carolina's possession of Aleixo cast in terms of a lesbian relationship, what would later be termed a "butch-femme" relationship (not unlike the greatest scene of sexual possession in Latin American literature, the flashback in José Donoso's *El lugar sin límites*).

Identity is constituted in *Bom Crioulo* through spectacle. Dona Carolina first receives Amaro and Aleixo in her house after returning from a play called *Drama no alto mar* (45),² there is a reference to *Othello* (90), and the final scene in which Amaro kills Aleixo takes place after Carolina and Aleixo return from a play about the assault on the Bastille (100). Theatricality is crucial here, as in many realist and naturalist texts, because the relation with the other, and the definition of the self, is mediated through the gaze. In this regard, three crucial scenes punctuate the novel. In the first, Aleixo feels shame not on being possessed by Amaro but when the latter insists that he strip completely naked: Amaro's pleasure at looking at the naked Aleixo is cast in terms of the contemplation of a statue, and more specifically in terms of the code of androgynous representation that was associated with youthful male beauty in ancient Greece (48). Similarly Dona Carolina insists twice on looking at Aleixo when he is naked (73, 86), with the first occasion being described as one in which she "absorbs" him and in which he is "transfigured" in her gaze. A scene in which people in the street contemplate a fight between two men (68) is specifically reprised at the end, when the narrator carefully describes the scene in which Amaro kills Aleixo as one in which the spectators crane toward the unseen spectacle which is hidden from them by an inner circle of spectators (101). Aleixo, then, is gazed upon, and the gaze is specifically cast as an act of possession; Amaro, Carolina, the passersby, and ultimately the reader gaze eagerly upon him and possess him. Interestingly, in the final two paragraphs of the novel the narrator informs us that the passersby are so eager to look at Aleixo's dead body that they barely notice Amaro being led off by the guards; this information is double-edged, since it

² This was an 1882 play by the Portuguese playwright António Miguel de Silveira Muniz (1857-1932).

obliges us to look at Amaro, and then to acknowledge that throughout the novel he too has been gazed upon, and that he is cast as a different model of male beauty, muscular, strong, proud, a Herakles perhaps to Aleixo's Antinoos. In a novel that is so aware about the dynamics of power, Caminha opens up a space of ambiguity about the relation between the possessor and the possessed. In a key moment in the first romance that is narrated, Amaro says to Aleixo: "Ou bem que somos ou bem que não somos" (48); at the end, demanding recognition, he says to him "Sou eu mesmo" (100). The gaze is rarely or never mutual in this novel—one person is marked as seeing, the other as being seen—but the roles that are played can shift, and in this power dynamic the reader is implicated as well. Spectatorship is mobile in this novel, and is always involved with processes of possession and identification.

The narrator, and the reader for that matter, is crucial to Rafael Arévalo Martínez's 1914 short story "El hombre que parecía un caballo" though in a quite different way. A first person narrative, "El hombre" tells of the narrator's fascination with his friend, "el señor de Aretal," a feeling of being seduced that turns abruptly into panic and rejection. By a series of somewhat bizarre displacements, the seduction is told through an unfolding series of descriptions of Aretal's jewels, then of a spontaneous combustion that takes place between the two, then of a dramatic inversion that is described through the image of an iceberg. Though the dominant image of the story, the one which gives it its title, is that of Aretal as a horse, someone who cannot love women because he is not a man, but also someone who cannot love men because he is not a man, the narrator's own experience is described through the mineral, not the animal, realm. Thus, the relation between the two is described as one of reflected light: "Me asomaba con tanta avidez al agua clara de su espíritu, que pudo tener una imagen exacta de mí. Me había aproximado lo suficiente, y además yo también era una cosa clara que no interceptaba la luz" (7). If in later texts like the 1950 "Complejidad sexual" Arévalo describes a relation in Jungian terms as the fusion of opposites, so in this early one, in language that perhaps derives more from his interest in theosophy than in early psychoanalysis, the relation is described as spiritual but is mediated

through material terms. Here is the description of his spontaneous combustion: “Además me encendí. La nutrición es una combustión. Quién sabe qué niño divino regó en mi espíritu un reguero de pólvora, de nafta, de algo inflamable, y el señor de Aretal, que había sabido aproximarse hasta mí, le había dado fuego. Yo tuve el placer de arder: es decir, de llenar mi destino. Comprendí que era una cosa esencialmente inflamable” (8). And in the following paragraph: “Yo ardí y el señor de Aretal me vio arder. En una maravillosa armonía, nuestros dos átomos de hidrógeno y de oxígeno habían llegado tan cerca, que prolongándose, emanando porciones de sí, casi llegaron a juntarse en alguna cosa viva” (8). “Una estaba fecundando a la otra. Hasta que...” (8). This is immediately followed by the image of the iceberg (informed, no doubt, by the disaster of the Titanic, just a year before the composition of the story): “¿Habéis oído de esos carámbanos de hielo que, arrastrados a aguas tibias por una corriente submarina, se desintegran en su base, hasta que perdido un maravilloso equilibrio, giran sobre sí mismos en una apocalíptica vuelta, rápidos, inesperados, presentando a la faz del sol lo que antes estaba oculto entre las aguas? Así, invertidos, parecen inconscientes de los navíos que, al hundirse su parte superior, hicieron descender al abismo. Inconscientes de la pérdida de los nidos que ya se habían formado en su parte vuelta entonces a la luz, en la relativa estabilidad de esas dos cosas frágiles: los huevos y los hielos” (8). Here Arévalo introduces two crucial terms from the sexual science of the period, the adjective “inconsciente,” used to discover the hidden movements of the libido, and the term “invertidos,” soon to be displaced in common discourse by the term “homosexuals.” “Invertidos,” of course, refers to a model in which masculine and feminine attributes, normally kept separate, could be transmuted or distorted. The image that Arévalo uses here, that of the melting and collapsing iceberg, implies a traumatic origin of sexuality; it interrupts the moment of spontaneous combustion, dousing those fires, and, in an odd image, drowning the eggs that had been laid on the ice.

I have written elsewhere (*Deseo* 35-44) about the biographical circumstance in which this story was written, and about the ways in which Arévalo, termed by Fernando Vallejo a mediocre writer who wrote one

brilliant text, describes his ardent friendship with the Colombian poet Miguel Angel Osorio, known in this period by the pseudonym of Ricardo Arenales. Out of this text Osorio/Arenales would forge a new self, a *poète maudit* known as Porfirio Barba Jacob, and his poetry of androgyny and desire would be understood in terms of a homosexual identity. The representation of Aretal, then, would serve to give name to a future identity, and Barba Jacob, initially shocked by the way his friend represented him in the story, would cultivate the daemonic being represented in it. Arévalo, meanwhile, would become a spiritual writer who would never again represent himself in such unstable (and bizarrely displaced) terms. His story about Gabriela Mistral, “La signature de la esfinge” (1933), for instance, represents Mistral’s lesbianism in equally phobic terms, but the narrator’s experience is not so destabilizing; he is a spectator to her leonine nature, but is in no danger of being swallowed up. The dedication to Mistral reads: “A Gabriela, ofrece este símbolo de una gran desolación femenina, EL AUTOR” (31), preserving the idea of inversion, perhaps, but within the contradictory feminine nature of the character of Elena. Arévalo’s later writings show his fascination with Jung’s ideas of the fusion of the masculine and the feminine, but in a spiritual sense; in “Complejidad sexual” (1950), for instance, he writes: “Es que, por supuesto, en realidad, no existen, en cada cuerpo diferentemente sexuado, dos almas y media; sino que sólo existe un alma muy compleja, con atributos femeniles y masculinos, al mismo tiempo; una sola alma compuesta con cualidades de distinto sexo” (200). “El hombre que parecía un caballo” is unique in Arévalo’s writings in that it narrates in graphic material terms an experience of the discovery of an inverted self. Out of this panic comes his only great text.

Los invertidos, a 1914 play by the Argentine anarchist writer José González Castillo, satirizes the hypocrisies and cruelty of the bourgeoisie by focusing on a single wealthy (and extravagantly dysfunctional) family. The term “invertidos” is invoked explicitly in its then-current medical and legal sense, when Julián, the son who serves as scribe to his powerful father, reads aloud the father’s letter to a judge about a case of murder by an

invertido. The opening lines, in which Julián reads aloud, “con dificultad,” from his father’s manuscript, are:

El procesado Calixto, señor juez, según propia manifestación y según los antecedentes acumulados en autos, constituye uno de esos interesantes casos de inversión sexual que la patología ha definido ya exactamente en infinidad de obras sobre la materia. No aparecen en él, después de un prolijo estudio orgánico, las deformaciones fisiológicas que a tales casos, por excepción, caracterizan y que inspiró a los griegos el mito de Hermafrodita, pero sus hábitos, marcadamente femeninos, las sutilezas de su idiosincrasia, sus mismas predilecciones por todas esas futilidades que constituyen el encanto de las mujeres, la inflexión de su voz, suave y acariciadora, la misma constante manifestación de vagas coqueterías femeninas, nos hacen pensar que estamos en presencia de uno de esos extraños fenómenos de desdoblamiento sensual que, más que a una aberración del sexo, obedecen a una perversión del instinto, aguzada por el exceso de los placeres, la fragilidad de una insuficiente educación físico-moral y aún quizás, por las tendencias ancestrales de una herencia morbosa. (11-12)

The father’s voice, repeated tentatively in the son’s, tells of the rise of a new way of talking about sexuality; the report is that of a medical doctor who is informing a judge about the absence of physiological traits and the presence of psychological ones, perhaps due to genetics. In this sense, the opening scene is interesting in that the father, Doctor Flórez, has a secret (or “inverted”) life, in company with his school friend Pérez; if there is a genetic predisposition to perversity, then the son, Julián, may well have inherited it. As the play advances through three swift acts Pérez and Flórez gather in a *garçonnière* with several cross-dressing youths including one known as the Princesa de Borbón, Julián’s mother Clara is seduced by his father’s lover Pérez in that very *garçonnière*, Clara discovers her husband’s duplicity, she shoots at Flórez and Pérez with her husband’s gun, killing only Pérez, and then—offstage, but in presence of the son—the father commits suicide. As a satire of the decadent habits of the ruling class *Los invertidos* is extravagant but hard to parse in terms of its intentionality. It came from a tradition of social realist theater where plays had theses (which according to Nora Mazziotti and Aníbal Ford is clearly the case with González Castillo’s other work), but the thesis here is ambiguous. Clearly Flórez is viewed as a manipulative hypocrite, someone who uses discourses of power to camouflage his own actions and desires. What motivates the

others is not so clear: is Pérez genuinely interested in possessing his friend's wife, or is this a parlor game that has gotten out of hand? What does the son make of his parents' actions and roles? The characters seem to follow a sexual script that is subject to rules beyond their making; the melodramatic structure suggests the decline and fall of a class, but whether Julián and his sister are spared is by no means clear. Because this is a theatrical work it is not clear whether any of the characters speaks for the author. Their identities are constructed in relation to those of others, a slippery process in which it is not clear where the contagion of sexual inversion stops.³

The greatest, and most radical, of the works I am discussing today is Augusto D'Halmar's 1924 novel *La pasión y muerte del cura Deusto*, set in Seville in 1913 (about which Sylvia Molloy has written an important essay). It begins with the arrival of a young Basque priest, the Father Deusto of the title, who arrives in the southern Spanish city at the age of thirty, in the company of the family domestic, Mónica. The novel opens with a guided tour of the ancient and decadent city, in which Deusto is led around by a young half-gypsy youth, Pedro Miguel. Deusto soon brings Pedro Miguel into the parish house, trains him to be the lead singer in the choir, and eventually makes him sacristan. The novel is the story of the intense (but unconsummated) desire between Deusto and Pedro Miguel. In contrast to the other works we have looked at today, D'Halmar totally avoids the invocation of classifications and categories. His Seville is sensual and pagan and Christian and repressive, yet the vocabulary used to define sexual experience and identity is avoided altogether. Pedro Miguel cares for Deusto when he faints in a fever induced by the heat of summer (but also perhaps by the heat of his unstated desire), and kisses the unconscious priest; later Deusto will care for Pedro Miguel after his suicide attempt. Deusto is said to be at one point "como emasculado por su ministerio" (248), but clearly his sexual desires are not those of a eunuch. One of the most explicit scenes in the novel is that of the characters' dreams in chapter seven of the second part. It is clear from the imagery in these that

³ David William Foster has studied this play in terms of what he calls the "vampire theory of homosexuality."

D'Halmar had read Freud on the interpretation of dreams, though no psychoanalytic language is used.

The most physically intense scene takes place in the fifth chapter of the third and last part. Pedro Miguel has recovered from his suicide attempt and comes into the church on Maundy Thursday; Deusto who, like Jesus, has turned thirty three, is praying, alone:

Lentamente Pedro Miguel había venido hasta él, como si le supiese allí, y en silencio se dejó caer a sus plantas y permaneció también casi inmóvil. ¡El templo, la casa parroquial, la parroquia, la ciudad, quién sabe, el mundo entero, todo comenzaba a dormirse en torno de ellos, en la red aisladora de la lluvia! Estaban solos, y no podían hablar sin desencadenar lo inevitable. Entonces, sobre las duras rodillas del sacerdote vasco, vino a descansar dulcemente la cabeza rizada del gitano.

El no hizo un movimiento. Aquella cabeza se apesantaba sobre sus faldas como si estuviese tronchada, como debió pesar la del Bautista en el plato de oro de Salomé. Y Deusto sufría la tentación de hundir sus manos entre los ensortijados cabellos, de pasarlas por ese entrecejo cerrado, de tocar con las yemas de los dedos los párpados sensibles y ojerosos y las pestañas estremecidas, de correrles hasta la boca y los dientes húmedos, por sobre aquella tez aterciopelada como un fruto en sazón. Y el cuello estaba allí, tan fácil de aprisionar, de estrechar y de estrangular. “Solamente a los puros les es permitido matar”; ¿quién había expresado esta idea? El sentía contra su muslo, a través de la sotana, el calor, la pulsación de las arterias de la sien y de la garganta. Y le pareció que un pajarillo o un animalito infinitamente tibio como un gato, se le había abandonado, todo él palpitante como un corazón. Entonces él también se repitió, mentalmente, que pasara de él, si posible sin beberla, esa copa también presentada por un ángel. (255-56)

The intensity of this passage, and of several others in the novel, derives from the ferocious conflict between physical sensation and mental repression. What D'Halmar achieves—in a novel that is part of a rich anticlerical tradition, at the same time that it is imbued with Christian imagery—is a heightened sense of the flesh's desires. He does this by focalizing the novel almost completely through Deusto, who understands perfectly what he is rejecting, and feels the pangs of temptation again and again. Pedro Miguel protests that he is acting against both of their feelings. “Tú sabes . . . que yo no lo sabía. Pero ahora comprendo más que nunca que lo nuestro no tiene solución en esta tierra,” says Deusto. “No, no soy yo. No, no eres tú, por piedad, no nos entreacusemos mutuamente. Nadie hasta ahora había encarado este problema. Tú no puedes ser lo que has sido para

mí; yo no quiero, porque tampoco puedo, ser otra cosa que lo que hasta ahora. No podemos seguir juntos, ni podremos separarnos” (259). When Pedro Miguel replies that God must have willed this impossible desire, Deusto replies: “Sí, pero Él, que es el acicate, Él es a la vez el freno. El freno y el acicate” (259). The dreadful choice of “continence” is the highest form of lust (260). The kiss on which they part—a kiss in which both are awake, unlike the other kiss that Pedro Miguel gave to the unconscious Deusto early in the novel—is not a mutual one; Pedro Miguel kisses Deusto’s cheek, and then both go off to their (adjoining) rooms in the parish house.

And it is at this point that a scene takes place in Deusto’s imagination that is as extraordinary as what has just happened. Deusto thinks of opening the door, of opening Pedro Miguel’s door, or at least of spying through the keyhole of Pedro Miguel’s door: “Un momento Deusto, como alucinado, tuvo la idea de mirar por la cerradura. Y sólo volvió en sí al temor del ojo verde que podía encontrarse con el ojo negro” (262). He knows that the other is feeling the same temptations, and is holding back out of respect for the priest’s constraints. Nothing is left but the final scene when Deusto rushes to the train station, talks to Pedro Miguel who is heading north to Madrid, refuses to climb on board, and then walks north along the train tracks to his fate: like Anna Karenina, he will be killed by the force of the train, and in this case the train is the one that is taking his beloved away from Seville. (This scene, by the way, is the one that served as the basis for the illustration that graces the cover of early editions of the novel.)

D’Halmar is different from the other writers discussed so far in that he tells his novel through the priest, verbally incarnating the impossible force of desire. Though his novel is set in an ecclesiastical setting and is full of church Latin and Christian imagery it expresses a yearning for a sexuality without constraint. At the same time, the expression of repressed desire makes for a great intensity of sensation quite unlike anything else in Latin America in the period. That is, the force of the novel is cleverly focalized through the priest, with whose dilemmas, but also with whose desires, the reader is invited to identify.

Alfonso Hernández Catá's 1929 novel *El ángel de Sodoma*, also set in a Spanish port (perhaps Cádiz, where the Cuban novelist was born), concerns the oldest child in a noble family that has fallen on hard times after the death first of the mother and then the death (probably by suicide) of the father. José María's sexual awakening takes place at the circus, when his younger brother, a sailor, insists on going to see the show of two acrobats, a brother and a sister, whose trapeze artist is performed in the air above a lion and tiger. José María's brother is in love with the sister; José María becomes conscious that he has eyes only for the brother, the "hércules apolíneo" (42). His discovery is couched in the language of genetic degeneration: "¿De cuál antepasado le venía la degeneración? ¿O habrían brotado en él por mal milagro, invistiéndole del funesto deshonor propio del cabeza de una estirpe de sexo espurio, marcada por la Naturaleza con la ambigüedad del hermafrodita" (38). Late in the novel the word arrives that a disaster has happened in the circus; José María imagines (without any evidence) that the acrobats have been devoured by the lion and tiger.

José María's life beginning with his discovery at the circus will be a struggle to avoid contamination, though this is not couched in the religious language of *La Pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* but in terms of a discourse of medicine and hygiene. His "symptoms" (30) demand stern control, at least until he gets his two sisters married off (the younger one to a man he admires, at least platonically). He then sets off for Paris, where he buys a new wardrobe, perhaps as a first gesture of self-liberation, and explores the Bois de Boulogne and other places of encounter. In a shop he encounters a young man who is accompanying a much older one (his father or his sugar daddy?), who gives him a note inviting him to meet the next day at five at Metro Juvel. José María takes the train to the station but at the last moment chooses—instead of a first sexual encounter—to throw himself to his death under the wheels of the subway train. The final line: "Un largo estrépito de hierros y de gritos pasó sobre su carne virgen e impura" (86). His flesh of course is not impure, since he has never acted on his desires. He has, however, defined himself as one of a secret tribe (and the Proustian

echo may be intentional) whose members seek one another out with a glance:

Hasta su turbación al esquivar o sostener algunas miradas de hombres, en la calle, tomaba sentido pleno de acusación” (38). Another such man “sostuvo la mirada obligándole a abatirla . . . y, en un barrio sórdido, un hallazgo terrible, repugnante, que le hizo vivir el mal prodigio de hallarse ante un espejo cuya luna, en lugar de devolverle su imagen real, le diera la del ser risible y vil en que podía llegar a trocarse si dejaba libres sus instintos: un afeminado grotesco, pintarrajeado, jacarandoso y repulsivo, quien, con una flor en la oreja, pasó de una puerta a otra afrontando con cinismo jovial la rechifla de las mujerzuelas apostadas en los umbrales, (62-63)

This “other”—himself if he lets himself go—is “grotesque” not only in his aspect but in his attitude: he exhibits himself to the gaze of the public women in the street, and is subject of their gossip. José María prefers to die rather than discovering what this option might be like.

The second edition of the Hernández Catá novel was published with a preface by Gregorio Marañón and an afterword by Luis Jiménez de Asúa; the names of these Spanish intellectuals appear in the same large type on the cover as that of the author.⁴ These paratexts do something that the text itself does not: name it as a representation of “homosexualismo,” as the word was then, and argue that the novel can serve as a pedagogical tool. According to Jiménez de Asúa, one day the legal status of homosexuals will change: “llegará un día en que los homosexuales estarán mirados como enfermos y no como delincuentes” (92), a fascinating statement that shows the limits of social discourse on this subject at the time. If, according to the same writer, this novel is “profundamente educativa” (90), it is because it is part of a campaign against conservative (especially Catholic) obscurantism; Jiménez de Asúa observes that at the time (and he was writing in Madrid in 1929, during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera) censorship served to distort public ideas about sexuality. The novel, enclosed in these serious political and social tracts, is not so direct about its purpose, but it is clear about the fact of sexual identity: “No se trata de una cosa que puedes adquirir o dejar, sino de algo que ‘eres’, porque naciste así, porque te engendraron así” (51). Jiménez de Asúa argues that the novel is important because it is “el drama íntimo de un homosexual heroico que se entregó a la

⁴ On this, see Bejel 68-74.

muerte sin claudicar” (93); the “heroism” seems to consist not in choosing death but in not compromising, though it could be argued that Hernández Catá’s hero gives way to his desires even less than D’Halmar’s Father Deusto.

Ofelia Rodríguez Acosta’s 1929 novel *La vida manda* is, as Nina Menéndez has shown, one of the few Latin American texts of the period to deal seriously with lesbian desire, though in a subplot. While Gertrudis the protagonist’s story mostly concerns her relationship with two male lovers, she is pursued quite eloquently by another woman, Delia, a minor character who makes appearances in several chapters. Menéndez focuses on a series of dialogues between Gertrudis and Delia in which Gertrudis makes clear that she agrees with Delia that women should be free to make their own decisions, and that she knows perfectly well what sort of decisions Delia has made. “Usted sabe que yo sé quién es usted” (104): Delia’s sexual identity is public, and publicly acknowledged. While Gertrudis herself seeks self-realization in a world of work, where her liaisons are with married men and therefore by definition private, her friend embodies a sexual option that she herself does not choose, except perhaps in a daydream (discussed by Menéndez, 184). Menéndez comments: “Although Rodríguez Acosta does not explicitly condone homosexuality, there is clearly an absence in the novel of any ideal model of female sexuality or womanhood that would exclude a lesbian identity, which is quite significant given the rampant homophobia of the mainstream feminist movement in Cuba at the time and the generalized social invisibility of lesbians in Latin American society” (187). It should be noted that Rodríguez Acosta’s novel, like Hernández Catá’s, was in dialogue with Gregorio Marañón’s ideas about sexuality, though it was not published (as was *El ángel de Sodoma*) with a preface by the Spanish sexologist.

Carlos Montenegro’s 1938 novel *Hombres sin mujer*, based on the author’s experiences in a Cuban prison, is not unlike *Bom Crioulo* in its basic plot. Pascasio Speek, a muscular black man of Jamaican descent, becomes interested within the masculine world of the prison in a vulnerable young inmate, Andrés, who has recently arrived and is pursued by many of the older and more powerful men. Pascasio offers Andrés his

friendship and protection. Though Pascasio has been on good behavior for seven years, and has resisted entry into the homosexual world that surrounds him, the young man's vulnerability leads to a great passion, which will end gruesomely when Pascasio falls into a huge sawblade in the shop where he works. By then he is a broken man, worn down by his failure to protect Andrés from the most insistent of his pursuers. As in the other cases we have looked at, though, the melodramatic ending offers up an example of a heroic sacrifice.

This novel, like the other texts we have examined, is also a theater of meaningful glances: Andrés gazes at the spectacle around him, as does Pascasio, and from time to time a gaze is returned. Montenegro's narrator uses the discourses of sexual and social science: "¿Qué otra cosa era posible allí? El hombre privado de mujer años tras años acaba por descubrir en otro hombre lo que echa de menos, lo que necesita tan perentoriamente, que aun en sueños le hace hervir la sangre, y despierto le coge todos los pensamientos y forma con ellos un mazacote que dedos invisibles modelan de mil maneras distintas, todas apuntando a lo anormal, a la locura. No importa que de pronto no se vea la carne; el sexo está en todo" (19). One of the prisoners remarks: "Que por no aguantar que el Isleño me llamase sodomita, cuando no lo era, tuve que convertirme en un sodomita de verdad y cambiarla a ella" (35). This use of "sodomita" among the prisoners' speech is mixed with slang terms, still common in Cuban slang today, like "pájaros," "bugarrones" and "maricas." The prison space, dominated by legal and medical authority, is a space of social control, and Pascasio learns terms there—"pederastía," "sodomía"—that he had not heard outside (52).

Andrés in turn comes to view himself as someone when two men fight over him "como si se tratase de la posesión de una prostituta" (76). His "sentimiento femenino de indefensión" (76) becomes, within the walls of the prison, a capital to be exploited, though he struggles to retain his virginity until late in the novel when he pawns it for what he hopes will be a favor to Pascasio, his one-time protector.

"Aquí no hay degenerados; hay solamente hombres sin mujer" (67): the characters seem to speak for the author, who in turn appears to share

Jiménez de Asúa's view that these degenerates are to be viewed as sick, not as sinful. The author seems to want to use the microcosm of the prison to analyze systems of social inequality in Machado's Cuba. A "novela de tesis," not unlike the "teatro de tesis" that was the context in which González Castillo wrote *Los invertidos*, this novel seeks to unmask, with unusual frankness for the time, the consequences of human exploitation. Though it focuses on male bonding within the world of the prison, it is less interested in that than in teaching about the flaws in the larger society.

The works we have examined show a variety of approaches to the representation of sexual diversity in Latin America at the end of the nineteenth century and the first four decades of the twentieth. All take place in the midst of a process of social change (from imperial to republican Brazil, during the struggle in Argentina for participatory democracy, and during a dark period of dictatorship in Cuba), and to different extents the sexual dynamic they reveal stands in for an analysis of other power relationships in society. They also emerge during a time when the vocabulary of sexuality was in a period of change due to a larger paradigm shift, and the uncertain mixtures of terms—from ancient Greece and the Bible to theological traditions as well as medical and legal ones—reflect this period of flux. In all of them we can see a homosexual subject emerging through conflict, but also through a process of interpellation and identification. While they may seem to argue for the impossibility of certain sexual options—the endings involve suicide, murder, hideous accidents, and in the case of *Los invertidos* all of the above—they also affirm the possibility of homosexual desire. "Lo nuestro no tiene solución en esta tierra," says D'Halmar's Father Deusto, and yet the fact that he can speak it is something of a triumph. These are literary works that hinge around recognition—a gaze returned, a head against a knee, two men on shipboard under the same blanket, a woman saying to another that she knows that the other knows that she knows—and that recognition becomes social and public. Though often plotted in terms of individual failure and tragedy, these are works that offer us a collective recognition, and in that sense Marañón and Jiménez de Asúa are right to note their didactic function. The emergence of a vocabulary—still in flux—is part of an uncertain process of

naming, which is both a spectacle—a looking at strange “others”—and of identification. Collective recognition becomes a process for speaking of identity as something new, as a series of wants and needs, of imagining the self through these others.

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