

## Changing Sexual and Gender Paradigms

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The emergence of overt sexual themes in the Spanish novel of the last quarter of the twentieth century is closely related to the profound changes (political, legal, religious, and social) taking place in Spanish society over those years. While some of these changes affected other Western nations at approximately the same time (and there was a corresponding boom in homosexual themes in mainstream literature), there are some peculiarities in the case of Spain. Strictly censored during the dictatorship, erotic literature gradually became associated with a set of forbidden topics, such as violence, nudity, drugs, and critical comments about the conservative values defended by the regime and the Church. Not surprisingly, these were the themes that dissident writers of fiction embraced to express their opposition to the authoritarian regime. The same happened with the expression of outlawed identities, such as Catalan and Basque nationalism and all forms of sexuality outside marriage. Since in one way or another all these themes and identities were closely associated with the cause of freedom and anti-Francoism, it became relatively common for Spanish writers of the second half of the twentieth century to combine them. In this chapter, we shall look at positive versions of homosexuality in relation to ideas of freedom, at both political and individual level.

Under Franco's regime, homosexuals and other sexual minorities had been severely repressed by the law, both indirectly (public scandal, moral diktat, and so on) and also directly with the promulgation of a *Ley de peligrosidad social*, an act introduced in the last years of the regime that targeted tramps, prostitutes, procurers, homosexuals, and others deemed potentially dangerous to the wellbeing of society. Homosexuals sentenced under this legislation were typically confined to a psychiatric hospital and forced to undergo corrective sexual therapy; three-year jail terms were common. The act was enforced between 1970 and 1978 but criticized on many fronts; after Franco's death in 1975 that criticism increased both in frequency and in volume. *Dignitat*, a Barcelona-based homosexual liberation group led by a Jesuit, Salvador Guasch Figueras, issued in January 1977 a statement signed by a number of psychiatrists. Known as the *Documento de los 24*, it asserted that sexual

orientation was not a choice, that homophobia was culturally determined, and that homosexual acts constituted natural behaviour for homosexuals.

Socialist-led governments in the 1980s adopted a tolerant stance towards homosexuals, while visible communities of sexually diverse people began to form in the larger cities. An incipient gay pop culture emerged in alternative circles and produced not only works of art but also organizations and associations with clearly stated legal objectives. In 1995 the Socialist government passed a Criminal Code that introduced anti-discrimination legislation and abolished the laws that had been used against homosexual and sexual minorities. Soon afterwards the conservative government led by the Popular Party gave *de facto* couples some rights regardless of sex and sexual orientation, although no changes were made to existing legislation on partnership and marriage. An increasing number of local councils enacted laws granting gay and lesbian couples full partnership rights as civil unions. Some autonomous governments, Catalonia (1998) and Aragon (1999), for example, passed comprehensive partnership laws.

In 2004, the newly elected Socialist government announced its intention to remove from the statute book all legislation involving any discriminatory element against sexual minorities. A year later, all gender-specific terms were removed from the Marriage Law, thus making possible, for the first time in the nation's history, marriages between people of the same sex. On 2 July 2005 Spain became one of only three countries worldwide to give legal recognition to same-sex marriages; a few days later Canada joined Spain, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

At the same time as these changes in law were being enacted, a visible evolution in social values and attitudes was taking place. In Europe, Spain is the most extreme example of changed attitudes towards homosexuals. Attitudes in most Western countries shifted significantly in the last quarter of the twentieth century, but there was little or substantial change in the US, Australia, or Mexico, while other countries, such as Portugal, Ireland, and Japan, actually made things more difficult for homosexuals. In many countries, homosexuality still remains a crime (Inglehart 1990–97 and 2004).

For many years the history of homosexuality in modern Spain remained unexplored territory. Spanish scholars and university leaders in the humanities largely avoided the topic; surprisingly enough, it was commonly recognized that Spain was 'one of the countries with the richest homosexual history', which was 'gradually becoming better known', and that 'an appreciation of same-sex love, along with a cult of beauty and poetry' had been 'present during many periods of Spain's history' (Eisenberg 1990: 1236). Despite legal and social changes, that academic attitude has not totally disappeared. In literature and fiction, homosexual issues are not regarded by critics as of interest in themselves. Gay characters or situations are not mentioned in most critical works, book reviews, or even book covers, and those in a position

to define the literary canon apparently remain impervious to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender realities. It is no surprise, therefore, that no masterwork of gay literature has ever been included in any account of the Spanish literary canon. For many, the theme of same-sex relationships is irrelevant, and the reasons for acclaiming openly gay authors, such as Álvaro Pombo, Juan Goytisolo, or Eduardo Mendicutti lie elsewhere: their concern with the nature and the culture of homosexuality is, for the majority of heterosexual critics, hard to understand.

The rapid change that affected gay and lesbian culture in the last quarter of the last century does not show signs of slowing. One of the palpable effects of the same-sex marriage legislation of 2005 has to do, precisely, with the normalization of sexually diverse themes in literature. For instance, gay readers no longer need mainstream literature to deal with gay themes, as a distinctive gay market now caters to their cultural needs. Gay writers now write for gay readers in ways unimaginable in the 1970s. Gay writers, of course, do write mainstream literature as well, but new players in the literary market are already bringing about changes to the way homosexual literature is produced and consumed that may not be apparent to the general public for some time yet. A proper understanding of the literature of this period of transition (from a predominantly heteronormative to a non-homophobic society) has to be based on certain premisses (Martínez-Exposito 2004).

The first is that homosexuality is not a stable term, either politically or ideologically. The history and evolution of the word 'homosexual' in the last century reveals a discontinuous and fragmented succession of different meanings – from physiological malformation to cultural trend. For nationalist ideologues at the turn of the twentieth century homosexuality represented a destructive moral disease, similar in its effects on the life of the nation to a lethal virus in a living organism. For modernist and avant-garde poets, homosexuality was often a social pose, a sign of distinction, an emblem of sophistication and sensibility. In Francoist Spain, it was taboo. Popular mass culture from the 1970s onwards made comic use of homosexuality, frequently degrading and insulting both male and female homosexuals. The list goes on and on, revealing that homosexuality is an elastic concept whose precise definition has not been settled. Essentialists and constructivists have made use of the semantic instability of the concept to argue their respective positions – although in the Spanish case the debate was more tenuous because homosexuality has never been understood as an identity issue (the persistence of a 'Mediterranean homosexuality' has been adduced as a probable reason for this rejection of homosexuality as identity).

The second premiss is that the Spanish literary canon has never accepted writing about homosexuality as of any real interest. Traditionally excluded from the canon on ideological and moral grounds, homosexuality has now entered the works of literary historians as a secondary attribute of writers

who are considered great for reasons other than their homosexuality or their contribution to homosexual literary traditions. For example, the poets Federico García Lorca and Luis Cernuda are rarely credited as great gay writers by literary historians. The same happens with the important confessional voices of Terenci Moix, Juan Goytisolo, Luis Antonio de Villena, and Jaime Gil de Biedma. Álvaro Pombo may be frequently praised as a magnificent stylist, Luis Antonio de Villena as an eminent aesthete, and Juan Goytisolo as a sharp critic of national myths, but very rarely is Pombo given any credit for his extraordinary analyses of internalized homophobia, Villena for his contribution to pederast dandyism, Goytisolo for his exploration of Spain's sodomite past. Typically, the works of major Spanish gay and lesbian writers are meticulously de-homosexualized by the literary establishment.

The third premiss is that the so-called 'gay community' has created its own mechanisms to reward literary and cultural products in part as a consequence of the mainstream literary establishment's unwillingness to acknowledge homosexuality as of literary value in itself. Some of the authors canonized by the gay community, such as Eduardo Mendicutti or Jaime Bayly, are well known to mainstream readers; the works of others circulate mainly in gay and lesbian circles (Llamas & Vidarte 1999). The fourth premiss is that gay culture is heavily influenced by North American gay cultural models. In other words, there is a delocalization or dislocation of homosexuality *qua* cultural paradigm, which makes it less obviously Spanish or local than it may have been in the past. And, finally, there is a fifth premiss: that the gay community has created a new orthodoxy (a new canon) independent of mainstream society that regulates many aspects of gay culture. Together with this orthodoxy a new heterodoxy has been created that has produced a dissident gay culture.

With these premisses in mind, it is easy to understand that, despite the positive changes in legislation and a favorable evolution of social attitudes, homosexuality largely remains a controversial topic, both in society and in its literary and artistic representations. The third-person approach of many early attempts to present homosexual characters reveals the difficulties that gay writers faced under the Franco regime. Such a distancing approach to homosexuals as 'they' or 'people like that' was favored by writers deliberately choosing to present an unsympathetic view of the subject. Sometimes a 'they' narrative focuses on one particular character and studies in some detail his or her homosexuality. First-person narratives, typically autobiographies or pseudo-autobiographies, represent a courageous step forward and one that required some sort of personal coming-out; in some instances, writers adopted the plural 'we' to denote the identification of the homosexual writer with a cause or a community. These rhetorical positionings ('they', 'he/she', 'I', 'we') are associated with different kinds of homosexual literature.

Authors critical of homosexuality have often use distancing rhetorical

devices. Camilo José Cela adopted a 'they' discursive strategy in relation to all the homosexuals that appear in his densely populated novels, such as *\*La Colmena* (1951), *\*San Camilo, 1936* (1969), and *\*Mazurca para dos muertos* (1983); only in *\*Madera de boj* (1999) is a homosexual character treated kindly by the narrative voice. Cela's homosexuals are simply ridiculous and naive, mere caricatures of what a homophobic tradition has commonly led us to believe homosexuals are.<sup>1</sup> The same distancing, disgusted approach can be found in novels by Carmen Laforet (*La insolación*, 1963), and Ana María Matute. The latter offers negative depictions of male homosexuality in *\*Fiesta al noroeste* (1953) and of lesbianism in *\*Los soldados lloran de noche* (1964). In the former, a dysfunctional need to exert control leads a rural cacique to rape the mother of the young man he secretly desires, who happens to be his half-brother. In the latter, the narrator does not offer a direct account of the relation between the two female protagonists, and this only serves to make the whole narrative more sordid. In both novels the main homosexual characters are portrayed as repulsive and perverse. An exception is Francisco Umbral's novel *El Giocondo* (1970) describing a sleazy gay piano bar in the Madrid of the 1960s, from the point of view of a gigolo, with a depth of character that elicits the empathy of the reader.

During the last years of Franco's life homosexuality became a more fashionable literary topic, and the trend gathered momentum when censorship was abolished in 1977. As a result, those who intended to explore the 'new' field were confronted by some important questions about models and sources. What sort of homosexuality was to be portrayed? What intertextual links were to be established? What purpose would the new theme serve? In short, where and how were the new writers going to get their material?

A quick answer to the last question could have been, of course, real life. Writers would only need to go to those recently legalized bars and cafés where homosexuals gathered and take notes on what they saw. That is what the anthropologist Oscar Guasch (1991) and the journalist Leopoldo Alas Mínguez (1994) claim to have done, and not without some measure of success. And that is precisely what many well-intentioned novelists and authors did in the 1980s. Many of them had been frequenting those same bars for years, or had long-standing contacts with lesbians or gay men, and decided just to tell their personal stories in a more or less literary manner. One writer even claimed to have modeled his characters on real-life people:

I do not intend to name the recipients of this open letter because, even where they are based on real models their names would not be relevant to my purpose. I will not hesitate to name persons, trade marks, or businesses

<sup>1</sup> One of Cela's more cruel portraits of a homosexual is Matitias el Profeta, a character in *\*San Camilo, 1936* who commits suicide by inserting a pistol in his anus and shooting.

of a dubious reputation if I need to do so. There is nothing more despicable than those warnings at the beginning of certain novels or films: 'All resemblance with real facts or persons is a mere coincidence'. I maintain that all resemblance with real facts or persons is pure observation.

(Domínguez Olano 1974: 8).

An autobiographical element, or first-hand knowledge of homosexual ghettos is evident in several 'I' narratives: Moreno García's *Confesiones de un homosexual* (1977; written under the pseudonym of 'J. M. West'), Antonio Roig Roselló's *Todos los parques no son un paraíso* (1977) and *Vidente en rebeldía: Un proceso en la Iglesia* (1979), Lluís Fernández's *El anarquista desnudo* (1979), Luis Antonio de Villena's *Amor pasión* (1983) and *Chicos* (1989), Carlos Sanrune's *El gladiador de Chueca* (1992), Juan Soto Puente's *Un hombre llamado Katy* (1993), and José Ángel Mañas's *Historias del Kronen* (1994). Others simply used the raw material from real life to decorate stories that had little to do with homosexuality as such. This is the case of the majority of Spanish films, particularly comic ones. Examples include Pedro Almodóvar's *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto?* (1984), in which a rather repulsive pederast is somehow presented as an alternative to a low-class family; Fernando Colomo's *Alegre ma non troppo* (1994), with its humorous but shallow parody of Freud's theories on homosexuality; Manuel Gómez Pereira's *Boca a boca* (1995); and Olea's *Morirás en Chafarinas* (1994). And finally, a number of heterosexuals have used their first-hand experience to strengthen a moral judgement against homosexuality, as do Cela and also Francisco Umbral (*Tratado de perversiones*, 1977).

Homosexuality may well have been a radically new topic on the Spanish literary scene of the 1970s and '80s, but this does not mean it was unconnected to older traditions of various kinds. Let us understand both terms of the paradox: homosexuality offered a thematic literary field which was absolutely new for those who had been living under Francoist National-Catholicism (that is, the vast majority of Spaniards). But as a literary *topos* it was well established in the cultures of the ancient world, and it would be preposterous to imagine that Spanish gay authors of the 1970s were actually embarking on something totally new. There is a paradox, then: there are two ways one can look at the theme: homosexuality as novelty and homosexuality as tradition. While fiction writers and essayists (such as Juan Goytisolo, Terenci Moix, Juan Gil-Albert, Alvaro Pombo, Luis Antonio de Villena, and the others mentioned below) did indeed have a detailed knowledge of the literary homosexual tradition, an overwhelming majority of their readers (including critics and reviewers) regarded their homosexual-themed books as a radical and sometimes shocking innovation.

Juan Goytisolo makes a special use of homosexuality in many of his novels and autobiographical writings. Instead of associating homosexuality

with moral perversion or criminal tendencies, he uses it as an emblem of difference and distinction. In *\*Señas de identidad* (1966), *\*Reivindicación del conde don Julián* (1970), and *\*Juan sin tierra* (1975), homosexuality is presented in opposition to historical notions of Spanishness. While Spain is meant to represent, in these novels, oppression, intolerance and fanaticism, homosexuality is portrayed as part of a more liberal, tolerant, and sensual culture. There are many autobiographical elements in Goytisolo's novels, which may help to explain their ideological content, and he may be foregrounding homosexuality as a way of criticism of Spanish politics and society.<sup>2</sup>

Ramón Moix Messeguer, known as Terenci Moix, claimed to have been the first intellectual to come out as a gay man in Spain in the 1960s, but was frequently accused by gay activists of superficiality and excessive mannerism. Moix was an important gay voice in the 1970s, in particular in Catalonia, where gay liberation was intimately linked to Catalan nationalism (Catalan, rather than Spanish, was the language used by most gay intellectuals). Some of his early short stories in *La torre dels vicis capitals* (1967) were censored and homosexual relations had to be camouflaged as heterosexual. The first edition of his novel *El dia que va morir Marilyn* (1969) was also affected. His Catalan-language novel *Lleonard, o El sexe del àngels* was denied an important prize in 1969 because its strong criticism of Catalan cultural milieu; eventually, Moix would become uneasy with the Catalan literary world of letters and it was his output in Spanish that won him national and international acclaim. Moix's fictional approach to homosexuality is twofold. It appears as an unproblematic and joyous fact of life and as a carnivalesque element in the background. But it has also a darker side, as in the recurrent sadomasochist scenes of his science fiction dystopia *Mon masclé* (1971) and the story 'El dimoni'. Most of his gay protagonists are troubled, unbalanced individuals, who rarely achieve their goal of sentimental happiness and sexual fulfilment. Their sadomasochism is an allegory of the absolute loneliness of the individual, which is at times the loneliness of the individual who has no regard whatever for others. As Forrest put it, 'Moix's characters seem to have reached that supreme state of dominion and moral indifference that allows them to fulfil their potential without inhibitions' (1977: 926). This tension between comic pose and tragic pathos is indeed one of the most obvious features of Moix's gay-related novels. In 1990, he started publishing his long autobiography, *El peso de la paja*, the first part of which was signifi-

<sup>2</sup> In his autobiographical work of 1982, *\*Coto vedado*, Juan Goytisolo reveals the decisive moments in his psychological and sexual development. The author claims it was the French writer Jean Genet who first helped him overcome his personal taboos and come to terms with his sexual orientation. He had sexual relations with both men and women, but admits to feeling reservations in his dealings with the opposite sex.

cantly titled *El cine de los sábados*, subsequent volumes being *Extraño en el paraíso* and *El beso de Peter Pan*. The work is particularly interesting to gay readers for his accounts of different experiences as an openly gay writer both in the last years of Franco's dictatorship and during the country's transition to democracy and new ethical values.

The poet and essayist Juan Gil-Albert made an important contribution to gay narrative prose both during and after the dictatorship. Exiled in France and Latin America, he returned to Spain in 1947 and went on writing prose and verse in private. *Heraclés*, a prose treatise on the culture of homosexuality, was written in 1955 but published only twenty years later. He was rehabilitated following a 1966 article by José Domingo in *Ínsula* which paved the way for a more general recognition and which eventually led to publication of *Fuentes de la constancia* in 1972, a book of poetry that influenced gay writers such as Jaime Gil de Biedma and Luis Antonio de Villena. Gil-Albert's more explicit gay works are *Valentín* (1974), *Razonamiento inagotable* (1979), *Los arcángeles* (1981) and *Tobeyo* (1989).

The Barcelona publisher Esther Tusquets is also well known as a novelist who explores female sexuality from a lesbian perspective. A late starter, Tusquets published her first novel, *\*El mismo mar de todos los veranos* in 1978, when she was forty-two years old. The book pioneered the coming-out lesbian novel in Spanish fiction and is one of the best novels of the late 1970s. Its psychoanalytical prose is full of lyrical imagery and Proustian digressions, actualized epiphanies, and the traumas and desires of a middle-aged protagonist undergoing a mid-life crisis. It was courageous of Tusquets to portray an asymmetrical love affair full of semi-autobiographical references between an adolescent Colombian girl and her college professor, a married woman from a privileged Barcelona background, who doubles also as narrator and subject in this story of unfulfilled desire. Tusquets' name has become associated with feminist and lesbian causes because of the openly erotic content of her novels, but she has rarely entered any public debate on the issue. *\*El mismo mar* was followed by *\*El amor es un juego solitario* (1979) and *\*Varada tras el último naufragio* (1980). These three novels portray women undergoing identity crises in a convoluted and hostile world. Their powerful lesbian sexuality and imagery has no precedent in Spanish literature and has made of the trilogy a landmark of lesbian narrative—although many of the relationships are more by way of female attachments than lesbian affairs. Other Tusquets novels that have received critical attention are *\*Para no volver* (1985) and *Con la miel en los labios* (1997), as well as the highly autobiographical short stories collected together in *Siete miradas en un mismo paisaje* (1982). In Tusquets' fictional universe, lesbian love is not seen as deviant; on the contrary, it leads to a better understanding of the self, to rebirth and to renewal. Relationships typically arise between women of different conditions (age, nationality, class); the reproduction of (patriarchal) stereotypes is deliberately avoided.

Tusquets has influenced the way the other women writers, such as Teresa Barbero and Marta Portal, deal with the topic of lesbianism.

Ana María Moix is another to explore female love and conflicting (or emerging) sexual identities in her short stories and poems, and in three novels: *\*Julia* (1970), *Walter, ¿por qué te fuiste?* (1973), and *Vals negro* (1994). Common characters and similar themes make the first two something of a diptych, although *\*Julia*, written as an internal monologue, is stylistically the more complex of the two. Lesbianism is presented here quite ambiguously: on the one hand, it is linked to the female/maternal universe, an idea which the first-person narrative voice clearly cherishes, but there is, on the other hand, a strong element of hatred against men in the work. Only retrospectively does Julia's fear of heterosexual love appear inexorably linked to the trauma of the rape she suffered when she was twelve.

Not all women novelists who write about homosexual themes are or identify themselves as lesbians. Rosa Montero explores in *\*Crónica del desamor* (1979) and *\*La función delta* (1981) some of the most controversial topics of early post-Franco years, such as abortion and male homosexuality. In her novels, the male homosexual is clearly disempowered by his own homosexuality, which is a source of unhappiness and frustration and eventually leads gay characters to self-harm and alienation from a heteronormative society. Olga Guirao masquerades as a shy homosexual in *Mi querido Sebastián* (1992), a novel in the form of a long letter written by an older gay male to his much younger former lover. This first-person novel represents one of the most interesting cases of transvestite narrative in contemporary Spanish novel (a women writer ventriloquizing a first-person male narrator). Among the younger writers, Lucía Etxebarria's *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* (1998) and Gabriela Bustelo's *Planeta hembra* (2001) introduce bisexual and lesbian themes as part of a larger array of uncommitted perspectives, registers, and narrative modes, from existential coming-of-age angst to sci-fi caricature.

Luis Antonio de Villena is one of the most conspicuous gay intellectuals in Spain today. Mainly a poet, he has also published literary prose, essays, and literary criticism, and maintains an active profile as a translator of gay poetry (the Greeks, Catullus, Michelangelo, Cavafy, and others). He has published essays and critical editions of major and minor Spanish 'decadent' writers, such as Antonio de Hoyos and Álvaro Retana, contributing to a greater knowledge of Spain's hidden gay literary traditions. His first narrative piece was a collection of short stories, *Para los dioses turcos* (1980), and since then he has published some twenty novels, including the strongly autobiographical *Ante el espejo* (1982), *Amor pasión* (1983), *Chicos* (1989), *Divino* (1994), *El mal mundo* (1999), *Huesos de Sodoma* (2004) and *Patria y sexo* (2004). Villena's approach to male homosexuality combines a decadent glorification of youth with a vivid awareness of literary and cultural traditions, in particular Hellenic and Mediterranean. His own persona, often character-

ized as one of rebellious and epicurean dandyism, is very often found in the first-person narratives of his stories. Over the years, he has changed his own attitude towards his own homosexual persona, in ways that parallel the changing experiences in the country: while in the 1970s and '80s he preferred to use the term 'ambiguity', in more recent times he has become much more explicit in embracing an openly gay identity and has published in some of the most visible publications of the gay community.

Álvaro Pombo produced *Relatos sobre la falta de substancia* in 1977. This was a collection of short stories some of which have an explicit homosexual content; a second collection was published in 1997 under the title *Cuentos reciclados*. Novels with explicit or oblique homosexual themes and characters include *\*El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983), *El hijo adoptivo* (1986), *Los delitos insignificantes* (1986), *El metro de platino iridiado* (1990), *Donde las mujeres* (1996), *El cielo raso* (2001) and *Contra natura* (2005). Pombo's openly gay literature has seldom received due attention from the critics. While *Los delitos insignificantes* is one of the most historically interesting novels of its kind, most reviewers did not focus in on its homosexuality as such, and in some cases the central gay storyline was cursorily dealt with as though it were mere anecdote. Gay themes and characters, however, have been a constant feature in many of Pombo's novels, together with a considerable presence of autobiographical elements. Pombo's gay characters problematize their own sexuality in ways that make the reader think of the author himself; for instance, many of them happen to be troubled fiction writers, such as Ortega in *Los delitos insignificantes* and Pancho in *El hijo adoptivo*, suggesting the same kind of link between writing and sexuality that we find in other homosexual novels such as those of Esther Tusquets. Pombo's greatest novel, *El metro de platino iridiado*, contains an important gay sub-plot which, as in most of his gay novels, presents a depressing and guilt-driven view of homosexuality. Pombo has often replied to critics of his unhappy portraits that it is the world they inhabit, rather than the characters themselves, which is depressing. His contribution to the gay novel consists of an extraordinarily detailed study of guilt, homophobia, and homosexual panic.

Eduardo Mendicutti is one of the most original voices in Spanish gay literature and one which succeeds in normalizing homosexual themes through a combination of autobiography and humour. Mendicutti is one of only a few openly gay Spanish writers, but he does not take an aggressively militant stance on the subject. Instead, he achieves his purpose by means of purely literary techniques, such as the conscious reworking of narrative genres, a detailed study of popular speech, the careful composition of character, and an apparently simple use of street humour (as opposed to the intellectual humour of Juan Goytisolo, Terenci Moix, or Alberto Cardín). Mendicutti's gay humour is effective in revealing other realities: typically, lives that go

unrecorded by mainstream society because of an unwillingness or inability to conform to accepted lifestyles. Mendicutti's gay characters are always slightly different from those around them, and the difference lies in their perception of things, their values, and their use of language. Mendicutti has also reflected upon his own approach to gay narrative, so often marked by the erratic, agonized search for happiness, and by unhappy endings to romantic storylines (usually because of the insurmountable differences between partners or the tragic and melodramatic frame narratives typical of homosexual romances). Mendicutti's gay novels include: *Cenizas* (1974), *Una mala noche la tiene cualquiera* (1982), *Última conversación* (1984), *El salto del ángel* (1985), *\*Siete contra Georgia* (1987), *Una caricia para Rebeca Soler* (1989), *Tiempos mejores* (1989), *El palomo cojo* (1991, the inspiration for Jaime de Armiñán's 1996 film of the same title), *Los novios búlgaros* (1993, which inspired Eloy de la Iglesia's last film in 2003), *Yo no tengo la culpa de haber nacido tan sexy* (1997), *El beso del cosaco* (2000), *El ángel descuidado* (2002), *Duelo en Marilyn City* (2003), and *La Susi en el vestuario blanco* (2003). There is a significant difference between the novels he set in the aristocratic Cadiz of the 1950s, where he spent his childhood, which are more lyrical and elegiac in tone, and his urban fiction set in a multicultural and postmodern Madrid, where absurdist and farcical plots involving homo- and heterosexual love do not hide Mendicutti's critical attitude towards Spanish cultural norms and modern practices.

With the advent of AIDS, Spanish gay literature took on new existential dimensions. The theme appears in novels such as Luis Antonio de Villena's *Chicos* that give voice to individual tragedies that are no respecters of background and social class. The ravages of the epidemic, far graver in Spain than in northern Europe, are not for Francisco Umbral the sign of any specifically Spanish crisis in health care, but rather a metaphor for a generalized defencelessness: the fear of religion and politics may have receded but AIDS has now become a 'punishment for the crime of believing ourselves free at last' (1993: 301). As Paul Julian Smith suggests, even homosexuality, once exploited and celebrated by Umbral in his column and his novels as a defining symptom of modernity, has now faded from view; it flowered for a single day in a 'grotesque fiesta of liberty', but gay men have now become 'ordinary people', their lives much like those of 'strange but acceptable' businessmen (Umbral 1993: 155–56).

Since the early 1990s, gay communities in Spain's main cities have developed a flourishing cultural market which has led to a redefinition of gay literature. The meaning of gayness has nowadays more to do with the act of consuming certain goods and services than it has with traditional notions of identity and desire. The needs of this emergent consumer market have favored the expansion of gay or gay-friendly providers in all areas, and literature is no exception. An example of this flourishing sector, publishers

Odisea and EGALES, are now publishing and promoting gay fiction specifically targeted to the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender communities. This is an all-gay business, where gay writers create characters and plots for a gay audience. However, the impact of this sort of literature outside the boundaries of the gay community is negligible: it is very hard to find gay books and magazines in mainstream bookstores, mainstream newspapers rarely review them, and academic literary critics tend to ignore their existence (although there are signs that academic attitudes in Spain are slowly changing).

#### Further reading

Alas (1994), Aliaga *et al.* (2001), Aliaga & Cortés (1997), Alonso & Castells (1992a), Barthes (1978), Bergmann & Smith (1995), Bristow (1997), Butler (1990), Buxán (1997), Cardín (1991), Dollimore (1991), Domínguez (1974), Forrest (1970), Foster (1999), Foucault (1976–84), Guasch (1991), Kelly (2000), Krauel (2001), Llamas (1998), Llamas & Vidarte (1999), Martínez (2004), Martínez-Expósito (1998), Mira (2004), Smith (1992 and 1998), Weeks (1985 and 1995).