CHAPTER 39

SECRETS AND TRUTHS

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Xavier Villaurrutia (1903–1950) writes in the first stanza of his "Nocturno de los ángeles" (Nocturne of the Angels/L.A. Nocturne, 1936; all translations mine):

> Se diría que las calles fluyen dulcemente en la noche.
> Las luces no son tan vivas que logren desvelar el secreto,
> el secreto que los hombres que van y vienen conocen,
> porque todos están en el secreto
> y nada se ganaría con partirlo en mil pedazos
> si, por el contrario, es tan dulce guardarlo
> y compartirlo sólo con la persona elegida.
>
> One could say that the streets flow sweetly in the night.
> The lights are not so bright as to reveal the secret,
> secret known to the men who come and go,
> they are all in the secret
> no one would gain anything from having it shatter
> when it is doubly sweet to keep it
> and share it only with the chosen one.

Here we might recall Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reflection on "open secrets" in the first chapter of *Epistemology of the Closet*: "In the modern cultures of the West, same-sex desire is still structured by its distinctive public/private status, at once marginal and central, as *the* open secret" (22), and that hiding it is "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence" (3). Similarly, in *The Novel and the Police*, D. A. Miller asserts: "I can't quite tell my secret, because then it would be known that there was nothing really special to hide, and no one really special to hide it. But I can't quite keep it either, because then it would not be believed that there was something to hide and someone to hide it" (194). Miller later quotes a character from Oscar Wilde: "[secrecy] is the one thing that can make modern life mysterious and marvelous. The commonest thing is delightful if one only hides it" (195).

There are many Latin American texts that could say with Villaurrutia that everyone is in on the secret (and has a stake in keeping it that way). Even one of the founding texts of Latin American gay literature, the novel *La pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* [1924; Passion and Death of the Priest Deusto] by the Chilean writer who called himself Augusto D'Halmar (1880–1950), tends to take refuge in assertions of this kind: "lo nuestro no tiene solución en esta tierra" (259) ("our love has no solution in this world,". The exceptions to this rule, Adolfo Caminha's (1867–1897) *Bom Crioulo* [1895; Good Creole] and the play *Los invertidos* [1914; The Inverts] by José González Castillo (1885–1937) do call "inversion" and "pederasty" by their names, but they do so–and we should recall that these are texts written under the tutelage of the naturalism of Emile Zola, with its discourse of the medicalization of sexuality–from the outside, from the vantage point of scientific truth. The nascent literature of homosexuality, from D'Halmar to the Mexican group Contemporáneos, instead chooses to evade these pseudoscientific categories, preferring to speak from silence.

There is surely no better example of this structure of the "open secret" than the famous short story "El hombre que parecía un caballo" [1914; "The Man Who Looked Like a Horse"] by the Guatemalan writer Rafael Arévalo Martínez (1884–1975), inspired in the ambiguous relationship he had with the Colombian poet who would later call himself Porfirio Barba Jacob (but who in this period used the pseudonym Ricardo Arenales, much closer to the name of the character in the story, the "señor de Aretal"). What is of interest in this story is not so much the fact that it alludes to homoerotic desire, but the identification, on the part of both Arévalo Martínez and Barba Jacob, with the characters in the story, and the manner in which this identification insinuated itself into literary gossip (and literary history, as we shall see later on) but also into the two writers' "self-fashioning," to use Stephen Greenblatt's term. What is never made explicit in the story becomes so in the public threats that Barba Jacob makes after the story's publication, although nothing was to come of those threats, no doubt because Barba Jacob enjoyed the notoriety pressed upon him by his sometime friend. This is, then, an "outing" story, with the curious effect that the intended victim was to forge a new identity around the caricature of himself in the text (see Balderston 1997).

José Lezama Lima (1910–1976) writes of this in *Paradiso* (1966), in the famous dialogue in Chapter 9 in which Fronesis, Foción, and Cemí debate the nature of homosexuality and the contributions of homosexuals to history and culture:

> Recuerde usted aquel poeta Barba Jacob, que estuvo en La Habana hace pocos meses, deber haber tomado su nombre de aquel heresiarca demoníaco del XVI, pues no sólo tenía semejanza en el patronómico sino que era un homosexual propagandista de su odio a la mujer. Tiene un soneto, que es su ars poética, en el que termina consignando su ideal de vida artística, "pulir mi obra y cultivar mis vicios." Su demonismo siempre me ha parecido anacrónico, creía en el vicio y en las obras pulidas, dos tonterías que sólo existen para los posesos frígidos. (252)
>
> You remember that poet Barba Jacob, who was in Havana a few months ago: he must have taken his name from that notorious sixteenth-century heretic, since he resembled his precursor not only in name but also in that both were homosexual propagandists for the hatred of women. He wrote a sonnet, his *ars poética*, in which he defines his literary ideal as "polishing my work and cultivating my vices." His demonism always seemed anachronistic to me: He believed in vice and in polished works, two idiocies that exist only for frigid maniacs.

The portrayal of Porfirio Barba Jacob (1883–1942) as a "propagandist" for homosexuality owes a great deal to the caricature of him that appeared a half-century earlier in Arévalo Martínez's story. It is interesting that, in Lezama's Catholic, neo-baroque take on these questions, "propaganda" (a word whose origin, as is well known, has to do with the Roman Catholic Church) is taken as wholly negative. There are gay characters in *Paradiso*–Foción is the most important–who fall in love only then to suffer in silence. "Open secrets" are preferred to publicity (here called "propaganda").

And yet, this tendency is not the only one that existed in Latin America in the years prior to the 1960s and 1970s (decades that marked important changes in this discourse, as we shall see). In the most important text of a different kind, the essay "Ballagas en persona" [1955; "Ballagas in Person"], by another great Cuban writer of those years, Virgilio Piñera

(1912–1979), the following is stated: "Si los franceses escriben sobre Gide tomando como punto de partida el homosexualismo de este escritor; si los ingleses hacen lo mismo con Wilde, yo no veo por qué los cubanos no podemos hablar de Ballagas en tanto que homosexual. ¿Es que los franceses y los ingleses tienen la exclusiva de tal tema?" (194). ["If the French write about Gide taking his homosexuality as a point of departure, if the English do the same with Wilde, I cannot see why we Cubans cannot speak of Ballagas as a homosexual. Or do the French and English have exclusive rights to this topic?"].

It is interesting to note that the poems by Ballagas that Piñera cites most frequently as products of the conflicted sexuality of the Cuban poet, "Elegía sin nombre" and "Nocturno y elegías," adhere closely to the rhetoric of "open secrets" that we saw in the poem by Villaurrutia.

"Elegía sin nombre" opens with epigraphs from Whitman and Cernuda, a signal to the gay reader to keep an eye out for the expression of homosexual feelings, but the dominant note in the poem is that of the rhetoric of silence:

¡Ya es mucho parecerme a mis palidas manos
y a mi frente clavada por un amor inmenso,
frutecido de nombres, sin identificarse
con la luz que recortan las cosas agriamente!
¡Ya es mucho unir los labios para que no se escape
y huya y se desvanezca
mi secreto de carne, mi secreto de lágrimas,
mi beso entrecortado!

(142)

It is already so much to resemble my pale hands
and my forehead pierced by a great love,
fruiting with names, not spoken
with the light that cuts bitterly through things!
It is already so much to join lips so that
my secret of flesh, my secret of tears,
my interrupted kiss,
not come out, flee, are swept away!

In these verses, we note the repetition of the word "secret," the absence of grammatical signs indicative of the gender of the "immense love"–an ambiguity that is maintained nearly throughout the poem–and the fact that the loved one remains "unidentified." The most open verses in the poem are these:

Así anduvimos luego uno al lado del otro,
y pude descubrir que era tu cuerpo alegre
una cosa que crece como una llamarada
que desafía al viento,
mastil, columna, torre,
en ritmo de estatua
y era la primavera inquieta de tu sangre
una músima presa en tus quemadas carnes.

(143)

Thus we walked one next to the other,
and I could see that your happy body
was a thing that grew like a flame
defying the wind,
mast, column, tower,
with the rhythm of a statue,
and that the restless springtime of your life
was a captive music in your burning flesh.

Here the synecdoche obviously links the "happy [or gay?] body" of the beloved with his erect phallus ("mastil, columna, torre" 'mast, column, tower'), while the masculine pronouns ("uno al lado del otro" 'one next to the other') suggests that the beloved is male.

"Nocturno y elegía" ("Nocturne and Elegy"), the next poem in *Júbilo y fuga* (Jubilation and flight), opens with the following lines:

Si pregunta por mí, traza en el suelo
una cruz de silencio y de ceniza
sobre el impuro nombre que padezco.

(145)

If he asks for me, trace on the ground
a cross of silence and ashes
over the impure name that I bear.

And the following stanza begins:

No le digas que lloro todavía
acariciando el hueco de su ausencia
donde su ciega estatua queda impresa
siempre al acecho de que el cuerpo vuelva.

(145)

Don't tell him that I still weep
hugging the emptiness of his absence
where his blind statue imprinted itself
always waiting for the body to return.

Like the references to silences and secrets, this allusion to the statue–what the body of the beloved leaves in memory, a memory as much physical as mental–forms part of a code that is repeated in various gay poets of Ballagas's generation. It is present, for instance, in Villaurrutia's "Nocturno de la estatua" (Nocturne of the statue) and in various of his other poems, as well as in the fourth poem of Salvador Novo's *Nuevo amor* (New love), which reads:

Junto a tu cuerpo totalmente entregado al mío
junto a tus hombros tersos de que nacen las rutas
de tu abrazo,
de que nacen tu voz y tus miradas,
claras y remotas,
sentí de pronto el infinito vacío de tu ausencia.
Si todos estos años que me falta
como una planta trepadora que se coge del viento
he sentido que llega o que regresa de cada contacto
y ávidamente rasgo todos los días un mensaje que nada
contiene sino una fecha
y su nombre se agranda y vibra cada vez
más profundamente
porque su voz no era más que para mi oído,
porque ciega mis ojos cuando aparta los suyos
y mi alma es como un gran templo deshabitado.
Pero este cuerpo tuyo es un dios extraño
forjado en mis recuerdos, reflejo de mí mismo,
suave de mi tersura, grande por mis deseos,
máscara
estatua que he erigido a su memoria.

(86)

Beside your body offered completely to mine
beside your taut shoulders where the routes
of your embrace are born,
where your voice and your clear,
remote glances are born,
I suddenly felt the infinite emptiness of your absence.
If all the years that remain to me

like a climbing plant that grasps onto the wind
I have felt arriving or returning at every touch
and I avidly scratch each day for a message that
contains nothing but a date
and his name gets larger and vibrates ever
more deeply
because his voice speaks to no ear but my own,
because he blinded my eyes when he turned his aside
and my soul is like a great empty temple.
But this body of yours is a strange god
forged of my memories, a reflection of myself,
soft in my tautness, large to my desire,
mask
statue that I have erected to his memory.

It is striking that the same vocabulary–absence, body, statue, memory, blindness–is at the heart of the Ballagas poems and of those of the Contemporáneos. If Neil Bartlett, in his remarkable book *Who Was That Man? A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde* (39–59), has been able to reconstruct the "language of flowers" that the contemporaries of Wilde–and Proust–used as coded speech, so we can suspect that in the 1930s and 1940s something similar happened with the language of statues, at least in the Spanish-speaking world, and that the legacy of this tradition would be the famous concept of *imago* in Lezama.

It is pathetic and yet amusing that this language of concealment, or interrupted discourse among the chosen few, should come to be the prevailing note of the final paragraphs of the preface that Osvaldo Navarro wrote for the edition of Ballagas's poems that was published by Editorial Letras Cubanas in 1984, which is full of such silliness as:

> Por eso, en alguna reunión de amigos inteligentes y sensibles, en la unión de alguna pareja que disfruta esa magnífica y unánime soledad que se produce entre un hombre y una mujer enamorados, alguien, algún amigo, o uno de los dos en la pareja, recordará de pronto un verso de Ballagas, y todos, y ellos dos, tendrán de pronto la noción precisa de que en el hombre hay algo de inmortal y eterno, algo bello y real que vive con nosotros y que el poeta nos lo advierte, porque el poeta es el único humano que muere antes de morir y uno de los pocos que nos ayuda a vivir mas allá de la muerte. (40)
>
> That is why, in a gathering of sensitive, intelligent friends, during the union of a couple that enjoys that magnificent and harmonious solitude that happens when a man and a woman are in love, someone, some friend, or one of the members of the couple will suddenly remember a verse by Ballagas, and the two of them will suddenly have the precise notion of what in man is immortal and eternal, something beautiful and real that lives in us and that the poet informs us about, because the poet is the only human being who dies before dying and one of the few who helps us live after death.

The paragraph before this depends completely on the rhetoric of secrets–messages whispered through half-open doors, bouquets of flowers offered–while the second clarifies, rather clumsily, that "the union of a couple" is properly defined as (and limited to) the union of "a man and a woman in love," so that the reader will not suffer any unwelcome surprise, not be led on by any degree of ambiguity. But as Piñera clarifies, even this sort of heterosexual union was a motive of anguish for Ballagas, who "llega a la mujer y al hijo muy diferentemente de lo que lo haría el hombre heterosexual" (198) ("approaches his wife and son in ways very different from how a heterosexual man would do"). Piñera notes that in the period in which the poet wrote the two elegies mentioned, 1937–38, "Ballagas acaba de salir, como quien dice, de un amor fracasado con una persona de su mismo sexo (prefiero expresarme así y no con el método elusivo de Vitier–'los amantes sin saberlo, son empujados por el destino hacia el fatal encuentro'–que provocará burlonas sonrisas en los amigos y enemigos del poeta)" ("Ballagas had just come out, so to speak, of a failed affair with a person of his same sex [I prefer to express myself that way and not in Vitier's elusive fashion–'the lovers, without knowing it, are impelled by fate toward their fatal meeting'–that surely provokes joking smiles among the friends and enemies of the poet]." Piñera comments that when "Elegía" appeared "ciertos homosexuales de capilla" ("some militant homosexuals") thought "¡Por fin alguien nos representa!" ("Finally someone represents us!") and "ciertos intelectuales de capilla" ("certain militant intellectuals") in their turn thought: "Es poesía 'engagé', ya el uranismo cubano tiene su profeta" (198) ("This is engaged poetry; finally Cuban perversion has found its prophet,". And he clarifies that when Ballagas marries and has a son ten years later, "esas 'reinas' y esos 'plumíferos', incapaces de medir la larga agonía que es una década de escrúpulos de conciencia, convierten el 'crédito' concedido al poeta en 'descrédito', el activo en pasivo" (199) ("those queens and those scribblers, incapable of sensing the long anguish that is a whole decade of scruples of conscience, convert the 'credit' granted the poet into 'debit,' the active into passive"). Given the sense that these final adjectives have in the world of male homosexuality, this phrase breaks definitively with the rhetoric of silence, secrets, flowers, and statues.

So it is not unreasonable to say that the fundamental break in the treatment of the topic of homosexuality in Latin America takes place–rather secretly, since the article did not circulate all that widely–in this 1955 article by Piñera. In outing Ballagas (posthumously), in saying in "Ballagas en persona" that it is important to speak of his tortured homosexuality and the false heterosexuality he used to conceal it, Piñera–against the Origenistas, and especially against Lezama and Cintio Vitier (b. 1921)–made it possible for other writers fifteen years later (in Cuba, Antón Arrufat [b. 1935] and Reinaldo Arenas [1943–1990], and elsewhere in the continent, Luis Zapata [b. 1951], Manuel Ramos Otero [1948–1990], Néstor Perlongher [1949–1992], Darcy Penteado [1926–1990], João Silverio Trevisan [b. 1944]) to live their homosexuality more openly and to deal with the theme outside the tortuous labyrinths of previous generations. Though little known outside of Cuba in the 1950s, and though not collected into a book until Arrufat and Carlos Bonfil gathered Piñera's poetry and criticism into a volume published in Mexico City in 1994, Piñera's 1955 article did not actually produce this change of tone and approach, but it is evident that by insisting on speaking openly of Ballagas's homosexuality, Piñera (like Genet and Isherwood in the same period) anticipated in an isolated sense the striking change that was to occur in a more general way some fifteen or twenty years later. But the act of naming the other, of saying "I cannot see why we Cubans cannot speak of Ballagas' homosexuality," is not yet a public declaration of the writer's own homosexuality, and does not yet configure a public, collective identity from which one can speak.

In this regard one certainly thinks of Manuel Puig, who names homosexuality in *El beso de la mujer araña* [*Kiss of the Spider Woman*]–in the footnotes–and who forces the reader to associate the analytical discourse of the notes with the dialogue on top of the page between Molina and Arregui. At the

same time he makes fun of the rhetoric of open secrets in the final footnote, in which the author disguises himself as a woman, speaking through the invented Danish doctor, Anneli Taube, author of a book on sexuality and revolution. Puig and his novel–and the success that the characters have had in their successive incarnations in fiction, theater, cinema, and musical comedy–have no doubt done more than any other Latin American author and text to spark interesting and subtle discussions of the topic of homosexuality. If we were to repeat the experiment that Neil Bartlett proposes in his book on Wilde (26) of conducting a survey asking a Latin American sample to name one famous homosexual in the continent, much more than the name of Arenas or Sarduy or Perlongher or Ramos Otero, no doubt Puig's name would come up, even though he himself denied the existence of homosexual and heterosexual identities.

If a moment ago I mentioned a series of writers for whom it has proved easy or natural to define themselves as homosexual or incorporate a gay thematics openly in their work, then I think one figure who is of particular interest is the Venezuelan poet Armando Rojas Guardia (b. 1949). Since the publication of his book-length essay *El dios de la intemperie* [1985; The God of Inclemency], through *El calidoscopio de Hermes* [1989; The Kaleidoscope of Hermes], as well as in his poetry, Rojas Guardia has done as much as anyone to foster an intelligent and interesting discussion of the relations between homosexuality and other spheres of life, and of the ways in which an open gay sexuality can become part of a complex worldview. And he has done it in a relatively unusual sphere, certainly unusual in Latin America: in the religious sphere, and specifically within the Roman Catholic tradition, inscribing his reflections in the rich Catholic tradition of confessional literature.

In *El dios de la intemperie*, the homosexual topic emerges, in a rather heterodox way, from a discussion of spiritual experience. Rojas Guardia asserts that from such experience, especially mystic experience, "brota, en cierta forma, una estética" ("in a sense, an esthetic springs forth," (39). He mentions Pasolini's film "Teorema," in which "el misterioso huésped . . . trastorna . . . la vida de todos . . ., convoca a éstos al desierto, al lugar de la más absoluta desnudez, un lugar simbólico en mitad del cual el hombre encuentra el contacto con una epifanía llameante, con el grito de la última desgarradura" (46) ("the mysterious guest turns everyone else's life inside out, bringing them together in the desert, in the place of utter nakedness, a symbolic place in the midst of which man encounters a burning epiphany, with a rending cry"). He then refers openly to "mi específico carácter homosexual" (84) ("my specific homosexual nature), and comments:

> La vida espiritual del homosexual se enfrenta, en el marco de la sociedad regida por la Norma heterosexual y patriarcal, a específicos peligros. Como no existen paradigmas positivos para el eros homoerótico, la existencia homosexual se gesta en la entraña de una trampa mortal: la tácita vinculación que va estableciéndose en el inconsciente entre cuerpo, goce, vida de los sentidos, erotismo, por un lado, y, por otro, satanismo, imagen bufonesca de la atracción hacia personas del mismo sexo, criminalidad latente, malignidad radical. (84–85)
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> The spiritual life of the homosexual is confronted, within the framework of a society ruled by a heterosexual and patriarchal norm, with specific dangers. Just as positive paradigms do not exist to talk about homoerotic love, so homosexual existence comes to be within the confines of a lethal trap: the tacit links in the unconscious between the body, pleasure, the life of the senses, the erotic, on the one hand, and satanism, a clownish image of same-sex attraction, latent criminality, radical evil, on the other.

Since a large part of this book tells of the author's experience in mental hospitals, the importance of the link between homosexuality and madness is perhaps emphasized more than the wished-for positive images. He later summarizes: "Mi homoerotismo me ha conducido a la heterotopía" ("My homoerotic feelings have led me to a heterotopia"), a term he defines, after de Certeau, as "el lugar otro, fuera-de-la-ley" ("the other place, outside the law") (106). And he therefore defines desire as "no . . . simplemente una epifanía de la afirmación de sí" (127) ("not simply an epiphany in the affirmation of the self) but as "la búsqueda del Otro, del Otro como tal Otro, como absolutamente Otro" ("the search for the Other, for the Other as Other, as absolutely Other").

Four years later, in "Pequeña serenata amorosa" ["Little Amorous Serenade"] in *El calidoscopio de Hermes* (1989), he deepens his discussion of this topic, but now with regard to a less metaphysical Other: "Junto a él percibo con exactitud por qué soy homosexual. El presencializa ante mí, y mas aún, dentro de mí, un acorde de la ternura. Pero este acorde es esencialmente viril: sólo un hombre puede manifestarlo" (143–44) ("When I am with him I know precisely why I am homosexual. He makes present for me, or better still, inside of me, a note of tenderness. But this note is essentially male: only a man can make it manifest"). And he later comments: "Para el homosexual, constituye empresa titánica construir la espiritualidad de una pareja. Y ello porque pertenecemos a una especie amorosa para la que no existe, diseñado, un orden cultural" (152) ("For the homosexual, it is a titanic enterprise to construct a spiritual dimension to a relationship. And that is because we belong to a loving species for which a defined cultural order does not exist"). It seems to me that the almost unique contribution of Rojas Guardia to Latin American discussions of the topic of homosexuality is his insistence on the changes–the wrenching changes, as witnessed by his experience of mental illness, but also changes that fascinate due to his insistence on a spiritual dimension to homoerotic desire–necessary to produce a future world in which homosexual love might be accepted in society and might discover positive features currently obscured by fear and rejection. He is a Utopian thinker, something rarely seen in the continent and in his milieu.

The passages from speaking of a secret in which all are invested to naming homosexuality, and from there to naming oneself as homosexual, are long, slow processes, though they do crystallize around a few moments, as we have seen. And it is interesting that they should have happened in Latin America at roughly the same time as elsewhere: Piñera's essay is from 1955, and *Paradiso* and *El lugar sin límites* [Place Without Limits] are from the late 1960s, a little before Stonewall and the gay liberation movements. The liberation movements are explicitly named in the footnotes to *El beso de la mujer araña*, and the works of Luis Zapata and Néstor Perlongher are unimaginable without them. And I believe that the possibility of writers naming themselves as gay has depended on the existence of the international movements (and of the national ones, however small), that even the Catholic and spiritual homosexuality of Armando Rojas Guardia, for example–his reflection on the gay couple in "Pequeña serenata amorosa," in which he yearns for social rituals that would foster the spiritual dimension in homosexual relationships–could not be expressed if it were

not for the prior move from the individual to the collective, and from the linking of the personal and the political.

Literary histories of Latin America have rarely dealt with issues of sexuality, much less homosexuality, either with regard to literary works or to their authors. In what remains here I would like to look at a few examples of how literary historians have gone to considerable lengths to avoid saying anything about these issues, and of how revealing their statements–and their silences–have been in defining the prejudices that are at work in the construction of literary canons. "Discrimination" is a double-edged word, connoting both the faculty of good taste and the marginalization of everything that the arbiter of taste would prefer not to deal with, and not to have others see, hear mentioned, or read. Unfortunately, standards of what is fit to be read and commented upon have been profoundly conservative in Latin American literary studies, perhaps even more than in the literature itself.

It is revealing to see what literary historians have had to say about Augusto D'Halmar, in particular on his novel *La pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* (1924), the tragic story of the love between a Basque priest and a gypsy altar boy in Seville. In the several dozen literary histories I examined, the words "homosexual" or "homoerotic" are rarely used to describe the love, and some of the descriptions of the contents of the novel are hopelessly off the mark. The following, by the Peruvian critic Augusto Tamayo Vargas (from his *Literatura en Hispano América*, 1973; Literature in Hispanic America) is better than most, but he refers to the wrong (?!) title by D'Halmar:

> En *Juana Lucero* [*sic*], D'Halmar dota su prosa de una imaginación brillante, de un refinamiento sensual y busca el exótico ambiente de una Sevilla mórbida y pagana para amores homosexuales, dentro de un colorismo que venía del decadentismo modernista y avanzaba hacia el imaginismo de vanguardia. Oscar Wilde y D'Annunzio se veían tras sus narraciones poéticas. (306)
>
> In *Juana Lucero* [*sic*], D'Halmar endowed his prose with brilliant imagination, with sensual refinement, and sought out the exotic space of a delicate, pagan Seville as the backdrop for homosexual love, within a coloration that derives from modernista decadence and that points forward to the imagism of the avant garde. Oscar Wilde and D'Annunzio can be glimpsed in his poetic narration.

Fernando Alegría, in his *Historia de la novela hispanoamericana* [3rd ed., 1968; History of the Hispanic American Novel], says that D'Halmar and another Chilean writer, Edgardo Garrido Merino, "analizaron aspectos recónditos del alma española sin batir tantas castañuelas" (127) ("analyzed hidden aspects of the Spanish soul without clicking on so many castanets")–though Sylvia Molloy has noted, in a brilliant paper on D'Halmar, that it is precisely the febrile rhythm of castanets that accompanies the love story in the novel. Alegría devotes considerable space to D'Halmar in his history, but when he gets to the text that interests us he writes simply that this is "su mejor novela: *Pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* (1935); en ella combina estilo y perspicacia psicológica para analizar el desarrollo de una extraña pasión que une a un cura y a un niño" ("his best novel, *Pasión y muerte del cura Deusto* (1935), in which style and psychological perspicacity combine to analyze the growth of the strange passion that link a priest and a boy") (127). Orlando Gómez Gil, in his *Historia crítica de la literatura hispanoamericana* [1968; Critical History of Hispanic American Literature], summarizes the plot of the novel, which he calls "la extraña pasión de un jovencito de pueblo y un cura" ("the strange passion of a country youth and a priest") (472), notes the influence of Wilde, Flaubert, Maupassant, Daudet, and D'Annunzio, and concludes: "La obra vale, tanto por el lenguaje muy estilizado como por el análisis sicológico de los personajes de este drama de pasiones extrañas y morbosas" (472) ("The work matters, as much for its stylized language as for the psychological analysis of characters in a drama of strange and morbid passions"). Maximino Fernández Fraile, in his *Historia de la literatura chilena* [1994; History of Chilean Literature], is quite vague in his reference to "la relación ambigua y fuerte entre un joven y un adulto" (2: 356) ("the ambiguous and strong relationship between a youth and an adult"), while the "camino de la evasión" (2: 356) ("path of evasion") he mentions is as applicable to his own text (published, to be sure, by the Salesian Order) as it is to D'Halmar. But the prize for the silliest discussion of the novel is easily won by Enrique Anderson Imbert, in his *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* 2nd revised ed., [1970; History of Hispanic American Literature]:

> Transcurre en Sevilla, en 1913. Una Sevilla de turista. Una Sevilla pagana aun en sus fiestas religiosas. Y nos cuenta tres años de amistad equívoca, escabrosa, entre un cura y un vasco adolescente. El análisis psicológico es menos fino que la pintura de una atmósfera mórbida, "decadente", tal como gustaba a los modernistas. La vida eclesiástica no es austera: rodean al cura toreros, trapecistas de circo, pintores, tonadilleras, poetas. El mismo Deusto es músico; su amado Pedro Miguel, cantor y bailarín. Más esteticismo que psicologismo, más oscarwildismo que proustianismo en la descripción de ese amor que, "llegado al límite" no puede prolongarse. (460)
>
> It is set in Seville in 1913. A tourist Seville. A Seville still pagan in its religious holidays. And it tells us of a questionable, risqué, three-year friendship between a Basque priest and an adolescent. The psychological analysis is not as fine as the delination of a morbid, "decadent," atmosphere of the type that pleased the modernists. The ecclesiastical life is not austere: The priest is surrounded by bullfighters, trapeze artists, painters, songsters, poets. Deusto himself is a musician; his beloved Pedro Miguel, a singer and dancer. There is more aestheticism than "psychology," more Oscar Wildeism than Proustianism in the description of a love that, "having reached its extreme," can no longer be prolonged.

Anderson Imbert never explains why he considers the matter of the novel "scabrous" and "morbid;" he seems to be fighting straw men in his discussion of the priest's lack of austerity, and his plot summary gives little inkling of Deusto's melodramatic suicide beneath the train that is carrying Pedro Miguel off to Madrid. Indeed, one has to wait until 1997 for a direct reference to both the theme of the novel and to the author's sexuality. In Verity Smith's *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, Darrell B. Lockhart notes:

> Recently . . . there has been a renewal of interest in his writing because of the open treatment of homoerotic themes found throughout the majority of his texts. In the past this topic, as well as the author's own sexuality, conveniently had been glossed over, mentioned in highly euphemistic terms, or neatly explained away by most critics, in spite of an often overt textual presence . . . . The work that most openly addresses this issue, *La pasión y muerte del cura Deusto*, contains all the characteristics of a tragic love story. The novel was written during the author's residence in Spain, and it takes place in Seville. The basic plot revolves around the personal conflict between religiosity and homosexual desire as experienced by a Basque priest who finds himself overwhelming[ly] attracted to an Andalusian boy. His desire eventually leads him to commit suicide rather than succumb to his physical yearnings and a love that must not be. (259)

It is sad to think that D'Halmar's novel had to wait more than seventy years to be described frankly in these terms, and interesting to reflect on the fact that literature has been more unfettered than literary criticism in Latin America. When discussing "El hombre que parecía un caballo," several of the literary histories note the relation of the story to gossip and intrigue, and many comment on Arévalo's "zoomorph" fiction, but almost none are clear about the homoerotic content of the text. Orlando Gómez Gil writes that Arévalo "presenta una caricatura del gran poeta colombiano Miguel Angel Osorio, más conocido por Porfirio Barba Jacob" (495) ("presents a caricature of the great Colombian poet Miguel Angel Osorio, better known as Porfirio Barba Jacob").

With regard to the Contemporáneos group in Mexico, no literary history I examined (except for specialized ones like David William Foster's reference works on gay and lesbian writing in Latin America, and the Gay Sunshine Press anthologies of Latin American writing) mentions the sexuality of most of the members of the group, the importance of homoerotic themes in their writing, or the ferocious polemics against them by the *estridentistas*, Diego Rivera, Manuel Maples Arce, Arqueles Vela, and others, which included a public campaign against the presence of "individuos de moralidad dudosa" ("individuals of uncertain morality"), "afeminados" ("effeminate men"), and "hermafroditas" ("hermaphrodites") in the postrevolutionary civil service. The closest reference to the issue is José Juan Arrom's brief mention, in his survey of the work of the group, of the representation of "un caso de manía obsesionante causada por fuerzas sexuales reprimidas" ("a case of obsessional mania caused by repressed sexual forces" (15) in a novel by Agustín Lazo, a member of the group who was much better known as an artist.

The only canonical work discussed in numerous literary histories in a way that makes the mention of homosexuality impossible to avoid is José Lezama Lima's *Paradiso* (1966). Because several central chapters of the novel are focused on "deviant" sexuality of several varieties, especially the famous Chapter 9 (the dialogue among Foción, Fronesis, and Cemí on homosexuality), the issue was difficult to avoid. Emir Rodríguez Monegal is celebratory in his "Tradition and Renewal" in César Fernández Moreno's *Latin America in its Literature* (1980) of the "creation of a summa" in the novel which is at once "a story of costumbrista appearance [and] a treatise about the heaven of childhood and the hell of sexual perversions" (107). Ramón Xirau, in "Crisis of Realism" in the same volume, says that Lezama's novel "narrates innocence and violence, ingenuousness and sexual deviations, delves deeply into evil, depravation and horror, mocks history and substitutes myth in its place" (149), though Fernando Alegría (in "Antiliterature," again in the same volume), attacks the novel as shapeless and chaotic, ruled by a "sexual time and a belly which thinks" (185). Haroldo de Campos, in the entry on "Beyond Exclusive Languages," celebrates *Paradiso* (1966) and Guimarães Rosa's (b. 1908–1967) *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956) as both baroque books, and mentions the sexual ambiguity in the latter work, but does not mention the presence of these issues in *Paradiso*. Kessel Schwartz, in *A New History of Spanish American Literature* (1971), is rather more explicit when he says that this novel "combines the real and the absurd in a new way, mixing magic and madness, hallucinations and visions, history and poetry, reality and dreams, memories of memories, erotic encounters, multiple fornications, phallic rituals, adultery, and debates on homosexuality, on which the novelist probably has more to say than any other Spanish American writer" (205), though rather peculiarly he summarizes: "To an average reader the novel may seem like a decided defense of homosexuality" (206), which begs the question of who this "average reader" might be. Randolph Pope, in his chapter of the *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, writes that "Long philosophical discussions on homosexuality bog down a few later chapters" (2: 275), a statement that suggests a critical distaste with homosexuality, or philosophy, or both.

Piñera's essay on Ballagas seems to be as unknown to literary historians as Piñera's work was to them, with the exception of historians of the theater, who could not but mention his pioneering role in the Cuban theater and in bringing to Latin America some aspects of the "theater of the absurd." I have seen no reference to homosexuality in discussions of Piñera or of Ballagas in the literary histories I have examined. What could certainly be claimed as the first frank discussion of homosexuality in Latin American literary criticism is mysteriously absent from accounts of Latin American literary history, even when both the author of the essay and its subject are writers whose works are dealt with in the histories.

The centrality of homosexuality and homophobia to the works of José Donoso (1925–1996), especially *El lugar sin límites* (1967), is also conspicuously absent from the references to Donoso in the histories, except for Randolph Pope's reference to the transvestite character (Manuela) and "a truck-driver who is a violent repressed homosexual" (Pancho) in his essay on the Boom novel in the *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* (2: 271–72). Most of these focus on *El obsceno pájaro de la noche* [1970; *The Obscene Bird of Night*, 1973], but not on the range of sexual expression in that novel, while references to *El lugar* tend to be in passing. Kessel Schwartz again is fairly forthright in his descriptions (but somewhat obtuse in his language) when he calls the Japonesita (little Japanese girl) "the daughter of a 'fairy'" and asserts that the novel "reaffirms the ambivalence of hetero- and homosexual relationships and the sexual and physical violence each human being nurtures within his soul" (159).

As for the newer, and much more explicit, gay literature of Latin America, much of it is too recent to be discussed much in the literary histories examined. Few historians have dealt forthrightly with the presence of gay themes in very transgressive ways, but those few are worth mentioning. David William Foster's *Handbook of Latin American Literature* (1987) refers (rather oddly, to my taste) to "the new gay and proletarian subgenres" (400). The *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana* [1985; History of Hispanic American Literature] by Teodosio Fernández, Selene Millares, and Eduardo Becerra refers frankly to the presence of homosexual themes in the works of Puig, Zapata, Perlongher, Moro, and others. The *Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker, is curious in that occasional reference is made to these authors, particularly in Gustavo Pellán's essay on recent developments in the novel, but only as part of a discussion of "novels that break with Spanish American literary and historical stereotypes by giving voice to the experience of women, homosexuals, and Jews" (2: 283), or later, "In two decades since 1970 the greater prominence of women novelists . . . of Jewish/Spanish American writers . . . and of a whole generation of university-educated novelists with lower-middle-class or proletarian background . . . and of homosexual writers such as

Reinaldo Arenas . . . Manuel Puig, and Severo Sarduy . . . who defy Spanish American machismo by writing openly about homosexuality in their novels, has resulted in a far less homogenous outlook than ever before" (2: 298–99). There is a further brief discussion of Arenas by William Luis (2: 539). Verity Smith's *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature* (1997) is exemplary in this respect, however.

To conclude, then, although Latin American writers first begin to write of gay love more than a hundred years ago, and although there are a series of important (and canonical) works from 1914 to the late 1960s that hinge on what Borges once termed, in a very different context, "la inminencia de una revelación, que no se produce" ("the imminence of a revelation that does not take place"), and there are important works from the 1970s to the present that are explicit in addressing these issues (sometimes in very transgressive ways, as in the works of Perlongher and Lamborghini), nevertheless literary historians have been much more cautious about naming names, about frankly describing the contents of texts, and about analyzing the construction of homosexual–and heterosexual (and other)–desire in Latin American writing. If there has been a flirting with open secrets in the last century of literary works from the region, in literary criticism, and even more strikingly in literary history, there has been a conspiracy of silence. If it were not for the important work in the last few years of such critics as Oscar Montero, José Quiroga, David William Foster, Jorge Salessi, and–most valiantly, and most importantly–Sylvia Molloy, the silence of the previous generations of scholars would still smother us. It is important to speak out, and to speak frankly, and to teach this material, to make, in Paulo Freire's famous phrase, a "pedagogy of the oppressed."

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