From the Margin and Into the Mainstream: Assimilative Elements of the Contemporary Gay Mexican Novel (1980-2000)

Troy James Prinkey
Greensburg, Pennsylvania

B.A., University of Pennsylvania, 1995
M.A., University of Virginia, 1998

A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese

University of Virginia
May 2004

Abstract

The three authors treated in this dissertation all indicate a moving away from a narration that uses shock and explicitness as a tool for social awareness, and toward a more understated approach in order to communicate similar truths in a more artistic fashion with less grand-standing and with a diminished emphasis on sexuality as it pertains specifically to a same-sex context. Three chapters will illustrate this point in detail in various fields of inquiry.

In chapter one, the work of Luis Zapata, whose opus spans more than twenty years, will be examined. Specifically, the moments in Adonis García: el vampiro de la colonia Roma, En jirones and Siete noches junto al mar that deal with sex will show how these novels will progressively emphasize sexuality and gender roles rather than mere sex and eroticism.

Chapter two considers the kind of thematic mitigation seen in Zapata's novels in José Joaquín Blanco's Las púberes canéforas and Mátame y verás. In Blanco's case, the focus is not on sex/eroticism and sexuality, but rather on homophobia. Blanco underscores how homophobia and violence

are intertwined, and argues that understanding and tolerance are ways to combat homophobia and violence, especially, but certainly not exclusively, as it relates to the homosexual.

Chapter three deals with Mario Bellatin's highly allegorical, though realistic novels, Salón de belleza and Poeta Ciego. Bellatin's writing falls into the camp of the later novels of Zapata and Blanco (Siete noches junto al mar and Mátame y verás, specifically). This is to say that Bellatin's texts are already thematically reticent, but the difference between his novel and those of Zapata and Blanco lies in innovation in the form of allegory. The AIDS epidemic is the focus of Salón de belleza, but by altogether eliminating the word "AIDS", we are made to think more deeply about sickness in general and the formation of stigma associated with it. In Bellatin's subsequent Poeta Ciego, society's formation of stigma in general displaces any significant discussion of AIDS, thereby continuing the trajectory of increasing thematic reserve.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

First of all, I need to thank my highly efficient advisor, Donald L. Shaw. In addition to giving speedy and invaluable constructive criticism of my written work, I also thank him for his frequent "pep-talks". Regardless of how many times I heard from him that you can actually make a dissertation exist, there were days that I sincerely doubted my own ability to do so. His advice, which I don't think he'll mind my passing along, to, "get it written, don't get it right--at least not at first," provided me with much of the necessary impetus and encouragement to write this disseratation.

I am particularly grateful for my friendship with Susie Hozik Santos. She could not have known upon meeting on our first day of classes as Master's students that she would not only be one of my best friends but also a constant peer editor. I hope she does not regret her early enlistment, for without her guidance provided on demand sometimes every day--every day--this dissertation would be just a string of interesting observations.

Arantxa Alegre has been the most constant presence in the final stages of this process, and I would have been in short supply of some much-needed buffoonery and companionship if it were not for her.

I nearly have to offer co-authorship of this dissertation to my life partner, Robert Maitner, without whose support, sense of humor (and patience!), it simply would not exist. And, finally, I dedicate this dissertation in honor of my parents, James Murray Prinkey, Jr. and Toni Kay Moore Prinkey who have my biggest cheerleaders--since birth--and to the memory of all of my family's James who have preceded me, especially James Murray Prinkey, Sr. and James Edward Moore.

Introduction

THE CURRENT GAY NOVEL, not only here, in the United States, but also in Mexico, is a burgeoning and excitingly rich genre ripe for investigation. Mexico has a richer tradition of gay writing and a more deeply-rooted gay culture and community than at first may be apparent to the casual observer. Salvador Novo and José Ceballos Maldonado represent two important voices in gay literature in Mexico, and a discussion of their respective social environments as background to the current examples of the genre is necessary.

The decade of the 1920s, the highpoint in the life of the openly gay and "effeminate" poet, Salvador Novo, inaugurates in Mexico a period of condemnation and celebration of sexual difference. According to Carlos Monsiváis, Mexican government officials were being outed, or at least being placed under suspicion of being homosexual, to the end of garnering support for or opposition to pieces of legislation. As evidence of the lengths to which this scrutiny went, Jiménez Rueda, as cited by Monsiváis, the former not limiting himself only to commentary about government officials "de dudosa condición psicológica" (22),

goes so far as to complain about the "afeminamiento de la literatura", which, according to him, is rooted in "un homosexualismo, imitado a la burguesía francesa actual" (24).

As counterbalance to this intolerance, however, and in the face of such fear of being outed, Salvador Novo, whom I use as the most salient representative of other (g)literati of his generation,[1] strolls the streets of Mexico City dressed "dandily" and makes comments--full of "effeminate" exaggeration and teasing--to friends in such public places as city buses:

> Cuando llegamos a la esquina en que nos teníamos que bajar, Salvador se levantó--echándose una retocada, así muy rara--, jaló el timbre y gritó "¡hasta aquí, jotos! ["fairies"]" Nadie se movió, y entonces volteó y volvió a gritar: "¡hasta aquiiií!["] y nos señaló con el dedo: "tú, tú, tú ...". (Enrique Aguilar in Novo 27)

As further proof of how official forms of homophobic discourse were being neutralized, the following quote shows

[1] Monsiváis makes note of at least Salvador Novo, Xavier Villaurrutia, Carlos Pellicer, and Elías Nandino as examples of sexual non-conformists who happen to be writers. Monsiváis goes on to make a notably long list of the names of people who belong to other vocations (25).

ambivalence about making one of the deciding issues of the day out of something as inconsequential as homosexuality--in fact, this quote represents a remarkable affirmation of the existence of differences of every kind--not just sexual--in Mexican society: "Y si se dejan ver las mujeres liberadas, los ateos, los comecuras, los comunistas, los partidarios del amor libre, ¿por qué no y pese a todo los gays?" (Monsiváis 25). The 1920s, therefore, prove an important moment, if not because of a proliferation of gay literature, then certainly of an awakening in Mexican society resulting in an early interrogation of sexuality.

In light of the lack of available information or primary sources (i.e., criticism, novels), published between 1920 and 1960, I qualify these years a lull as regards gay issues in prose fiction. The flashpoint and movement from which gay Mexican fiction appropriated many themes was the 1960s' "Onda", which introduced in the novel the following characteristics: the use of slang, neologisms, word play, sexual relations, adolescence, urban settings, music, and communication technologies such as tape recorders and telephones as efficient vehicles for narrative (D'Lugo 163-164). Many of these features are seen in the novels treated

in this dissertation, which is to say, in large part (and especially in the cases of Luis Zapata and José Joaquín Blanco), that the contemporary gay novel has been heavily influenced by Onda writers like José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz, Parménides García Saldaña, Orlando Ortiz and Margarita Dalton.

José Ceballos Maldonado's much celebrated novel from 1969, Después de todo, is the seminal moment in the emergence of the gay novel.[2] The gay novel in Mexico, and consciousness surrounding gay issues in general, has its true beginning in the 1960s. Después de todo is described as, "a narrative of homoerotic love that abandons the time-worn pattern of the pathetic chronicle of disastrous encounters, persecutions, and emotional and physical destruction" (104). We can say, therefore, that Después de todo made significant in-roads into changing how society perceived gays. At the same time, though, the stereotype that gay men are sexually insatiable can be noted even in this groundbreaking novel.

---

[2] According to D.W. Foster, both John S. Brushwood and Luis Mario Schneider point to Después de todo as, "the most influential homosexual novel of Mexican literature" (1991, 103). At the same time, Foster has signaled Miguel Barbachano Ponce's novel El diario de José Toledo (1964) as the first Mexican novel of a gay theme (Foster 1993: 92).

It seems more than coincidental that during Ceballos Maldonado's same decade, social change worldwide was afoot: there were the democratic Mexican student movement of 1968, protests against the war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Cold World scuffles, and perhaps most important to this dissertation, the act of civil disobedience in 1969 at a gay bar in New York City called The Stonewall. All of these changes sounded the drumbeat of change.

In Mexico, the 1970s and 1980s saw an explosion in the publishing of literature containing homosexual themes. The following is by no means an exhaustive listing of gay novels written in the 1970s and 1980s, but they are, according to Vicente F. Torres, important examples to mention: El desconocido and Flash Back (Raúl Rodríguez Cetina, 1977 and 1982, respectively), Mocambo (Alberto Dallal, 1976), El vino de los bravos (Luis González del Alba, 1981), Octavio (Jorge Arturo Ojeda, 1982), Sobre esta piedra (Carlos Eduardo Turón, 1981) and Utopía Gay (José Rafael Calva, 1984) (139). The flourishing of the gay novel after 1960 indicates an increasing consciousness, acceptance and popularity in Mexico of literature that treats sexual difference. In this

listing of influential gay novels are frequently included Zapata (especially El vampiro de la colonia Roma, 1979, and En jirones, 1985) and Blanco (especially Las púberes canéforas, 1983). In an article by Marina Pérez de Mendiola that deals with Las púberes canéforas,[3] and, in which Torres' bibliographical listing reappears, she submits that Amora (Rosamaría Roffiel, 1989) and Lunas (Sabina Berman, 1988) should be added to this list (88). These novels show that the field is certainly not held exclusively by male writers, and that lesbian literature is on the rise as well.

Current-day periodicals, pamphlets (and even mere "rags") that treat issues relevant to the gay community such as gay "culture", community, civil rights, sex/eroticism, gender, AIDS, etc., abound in Mexico, which demonstrates that the country has enjoyed a longer consciousness regarding gay issues than most people generally assume. Though most are published in the capital, and presumably purchased by a gay reading public, their wider diffusion, whose level I have yet to gauge, is predictable. The foregoing is a listing, though certainly not exhaustive, of these periodicals: Apolo, Atraciov: los hombres más dellos,

[3] Many critics, among them, Mario Muñoz, include the majority of these novels in a list of the most groundbreaking ones in Mexican gay fiction.

Boys & Toys, 41 Sonar Fantasmas, del Orto Lado [sic],[4] Crisálida, Diferente, Frontera Gay: la Voz de la Diversidad Humana (Baja California), Hermes, Macho Tips, Nuevo Ambiente, Opus Gay,[5] El Otro Lado, Ser Gay: el magazine nacional gay, Y Qué? and gm (Gay México). My point in presenting such a sizable list is to illustrate by way of simple head-count the number of periodicals available to a gay reading public, wherein matters of sex, sexuality, equality and culture can be freely discussed. Conversely, it is primarily through these newspapers and magazines that an urban and urbane gay Mexican public becomes increasingly aware of available "literature"--in the form of prose fiction and poetry--published by scores of writers whose texts treat issues of interest and importance to their own demographic.

The presence in Mexico of what I call "a gay consciousness" is further demonstrated by the not-insignificant number of presses, often, though certainly not exclusively, committed to the publication of gay literature.

---

[4] This title is playfully "misspelled". "Orto" is slang for anus and therefore, the title could be translated roughly into English as, "From the Backside".

[5] This title is another example of a play on words: Opus Dei is an international Roman Catholic group of peripheral importance which argues for fundamentalist interpretations of Papal decrees and a pronounced purity of religion.

The names of such publishing entities as AbrAxas, Cal y Arena, Océano, Grijalbo, Era and Tusquets reappear in the bibliographic information of many of the texts of concern to a gay audience. In the parlance of the day, one may even consider them "gay-friendly" presses.

Before we speak specifically about any authors or their works, or theoretical approaches to the same, however, a clarification is needed, specifically, of what "gay fiction/literature" means. On the surface, the notion may seem obvious, but the categories established by David William Foster are comprehensive and largely conceived in a proper fashion. According to Foster, gay fiction can encompass works written by

> 1) those individuals with a professed gay identity ... ; 2) those individuals who have written on gay themes ... ; and, finally, 3) any individual who, although not dealing overtly with a gay identity, has authored works in which something like a gay sensibility can be identified, no matter how problematically. (1991 xxviii)

These categories have probably always existed de facto before Foster codified them, but of each category more needs to be said.

For example, the first category assumes that an author of a self-professed same-sex affectional orientation will be of similar-enough mindset to another, such that, research, and therefore, comparison of works meeting this requirement would be valid; however, in light of the increasing "independence of the literary text and its immunity to the possibility of being unified or limited by any notion of what the author intended, or 'crafted' into the work" born of Post-Structuralism, it is unclear to what extent Foster's first category is relevant to this study (Barry 66). What may be apparent from this category is that authors of a same-sex affectional orientation may have individual life experiences that resemble each other, and, insofar as their effects on the author may manifest themselves in their works, a comparison may be possible. Nonetheless, any literary analysis based solely on any author's or group of authors' sexual orientation is wholly incomplete and superficial.

Queer Theorists would maintain, in fact, that exclusivity and cliquism based on, in this view, deceptively essentialist characteristics of a binary gender system are counterproductive to investigating the motivations at the root of power based on gender and gender identity acquisition patterns themselves.[6] I shall say more about this later in this introduction.

The second and third categories Foster delineates, however, are more complex, interesting and illustrative, since they provide a much wider window onto sexuality and gender identity. This wider, more inclusive point of view would allow for commentary from both homo- and heterosexual critics and include analyses of works, penned by authors, who, for lack of a better term, we refer to as "straight".

What is a bit restrictive, however, in each of these categories is, ironically, the use of the term "gay". Although the term is representative of a margin-privileging perspective, it de-emphasizes issues that are related to homosexuality. By using 'gay' exclusively, issues such as bisexuality, transgendered identities and subsequent exile

---

[6] For further information on Queer Theory one could read Queer Theory: An Introduction, wherein the author, Annamarie Jagose, deftly handles the intricacies of Queer Theory, Postmodernism and Gay and Lesbian Criticism.

literatures, patterns of gender identity acquisition and performance that could be grouped under a queer rubric are not privileged. Instead, analysis of literature that contains only male-male or female-female (i.e., "gay") relationships gives the impression of superiority. I propose, therefore, probably in a move of which Foster himself would approve, modification of his use of "gay" to read, "queer" in the interest of inclusiveness and diversity.[7]

The problem that arises from changing "gay" to "queer" is that, in Latin America, notions of sexuality and gender differ greatly from those found in an Anglo-American contexts.[8] Raymond Ellis has summarized most eloquently the difference between the two social contexts: "whereas Anglo-American conceptions of sex and gender derive largely from an ontology of individual identity [i.e., "gay" and

---

[7] Foster's own Sexual Textualities: Essays on Queering Latin American Literature (1997) seems to indicate the critic's own emerging preference for "queer" in place of "gay". The authoritative and ground-breaking works that treat the theoretical intricacies of Queer Theory are: Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky's Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction (ed., Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), Epistemology of the Closet (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990), Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia UP, 1985); Annamarie Jagose's Queer Theory: An Introduction (New York: New York UP, 1996); Judith Butler's Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990); Michael Warner's Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory (ed., Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993); and, Alexander Doty's Making Things Perfectly Queer (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993).

[8] These terms are slowly making their way into the mainstream of criticism written in Spanish.

"lesbian"], the 'ambiente' is a common space arising from a reciprocity of praxes [i.e., naming/categories fluctuate or resist definition]" (3). What this means for the critic of Latin American gay literature is that since a system of naming dependent upon self-identifying with a term for one's own sexual identity is largely lacking (or, at least, has been for a long time), remembering Foster's definition, making reference to a "gay sensibility" is, therefore, problematic.[9] Nonetheless, the "ambiente", in which sexual identity is dependent first upon what you do sexually and second upon which gender society believes you belong to, can actually prove to be more flexible and inventive than any Anglo-American ontological system.

This said, it can be observed that Mexican "works in which something like a gay sensibility can be identified" (Foster xxviii) treat this sensibility in one of two ways: either the author insists to the point of exhaustion on the character(s)' homosexuality; or, it is subordinated to other concerns to the point of becoming nearly imperceptible. The former, more overt style had been the standard in early works (1960s-80s), and the latter, obfuscating, trend is

[9] Lillian Manzor-Coats has recognized this same problem (p. xxx, "Introduction").

more prevalent in the most recent novels (late 1980s to the present). It is my contention that, because of a maturing Mexican society in general, and of a more sophisticated, though limited, readership in particular, the gay Mexican novel is ceasing to be so garishly gay and more understatedly artistic. This said, it bears pointing out that these recent, more mainstream novels do not abandon a queer/gay aesthetics or their roots in this aesthetics' link to homosexuality. Rather, they use this aesthetics to flesh out concerns that, while manifest in the gay community, are problems in society at large. How this phenomenon occurs can be traced to the following interchange: early novels which focus exclusively on homosexuality and its sex acts do so in order to immediately pique the reader's interest. This ensures, presumably, that the whole novel will be read--the audience will continue to read since it anticipates the next lurid sex scene. Authorial insistence on eroticism, in this case, de-sensitizes the reader generally to such a degree that its acceptance (and any larger theoretical implications about sexuality) secretes itself into the reader's subconscious. This desensitization, I argue, accomplishes a furthering of a "gay [rights] agenda", and at the very least

merely creates a [more] tolerant reader. One would expect, then, that, with time, a more tolerant [read: more sophisticated] readership comes to expect less shock and more story/workmanship. After all, once an author has made his point that "gay sex", for example, is "just sex", any more insistence on the matter would be like preaching to the proverbial choir.

All the authors included in this study reveal an outlook that is the legacy of an interesting, and, at times, contradictory relationship Mexican society has maintained with its brightest, and sometimes, "gayest" citizens. The authors treated here are all male, though this is not exactly by design on my part. For reasons that deserve further investigation, women writers tend not to write about male-male desire, which is the frame of reference for the works dealt with in this dissertation. Since I believe that works that treat female-female sexual desire merit a completely different foregrounding, one that would entail a thoroughgoing analysis of feminism, I have limited my literary selections to those works which treat male-male sexual desire. In the event that I have excluded any female writer's work that treats same-sex male desire, it is not

because I did so purposely, but rather, because no such work presented itself to me. Indeed, a female perspective on male-male relations may have proved helpful to my analyses.

The three authors treated in this dissertation all indicate a moving away from a narration that uses shock and explicitness as a tool for social awareness, and toward understated rhetoric to communicate similar truths in a more artistic fashion with less grand-standing and with a diminished emphasis on homosexuality. Three chapters will illustrate this point in detail in various fields of inquiry.

In chapter one, the work of Luis Zapata, whose opus spans more than twenty years, will be examined. Specifically, I shall discuss the references to sex between men in Adonis García: el vampiro de la colonia Roma, En jirones and Siete noches junto al mar in an effort to show how these novels will progressively emphasize sexuality and gender roles rather than mere sex and eroticism.

Chapter two considers the kind of thematic mitigation seen in Zapata's novels in José Joaquín Blanco's Las púberes canéforas and Mátame y verás. In Blanco's case, the focus is not on sex/eroticism and sexuality, but rather on

homophobia--an important issue in the gay community. Blanco highlights a peculiar 'Mexicanness' in the violent behaviors of some of the denizens of the capital towards gays, underscoring how homophobia and violence are intertwined. Blanco argues for understanding and tolerance as ways to combat homophobia and violence, especially, but certainly not exclusively, as it relates to the homosexual. Nonetheless, it is in his earlier novel, Las púberes canéforas, that he is most insistent upon the threat of potential violence against gays finding a home in homophobic discourse. In Mátame y verás we see a much less fanatical stance taken against homophobia--homophobic discourse becomes an outlet for misunderstanding between gays and straights and actually leads--in an almost utopian fashion--to mutual respect. This chapter undertakes an explanation of the interconnectedness of misunderstanding, homophobia and violence. Specifically, I shall examine how such negative aspects of human interactions can--suprisingly, and according to Blanco--end in harmony.

Chapter three deals with Mario Bellatin's highly allegorical and realist novel, Salón de belleza. Bellatin's writing falls into the camp of writing represented by the

later novels of Zapata and Blanco (Siete noches junto al mar and Mátame y verás, specifically). This is to say that Bellatin's texts are already reticent, and he represents a new pattern in Mexican literature. The principal difference between his novels and those of Zapata and Blanco lies in thematic and stylistic innovation and the use of allegory. The AIDS epidemic is the focus of Salón de belleza, but by altogether eliminating the word "AIDS", Bellatin forces a deeper examination of sickness in general and the formation of stigma associated with it. In Bellatin's subsequent Poeta Ciego, society's formation of stigma in general displaces any significant discussion of AIDS, thereby reinscribing the tendency to couch issues of importance to the gay community in larger social issues.

Zapata, Blanco and Bellatin must somehow figure into a larger picture of Spanish American literature, or at least, Mexican literature. In their work, because of the use of eroticism and focus on the city and youth, these works are fairly typical of a Post-Boom aesthetics.[10] Indeed, the novels in question include others of the Post-Boom's primary initiatives, like increased reader friendliness and

[10] For an explanation of the Post-Boom in Spanish America, refer to Part One of Donald L. Shaw's The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction.

a heightened social awareness. Nevertheless, there is something inherently different between the authors in this study and other Post-Boom writers. This difference is primarily localized in their seemingly innate desire to resist any categorization--either ideologically (vis-à-vis concepts of sexuality), thematically, structurally, or in terms of any particular "literary movement". These authors bask in their desire to "not belong", which is indicative of a queer impulse that appears to have been embraced by all three authors. Contemporary gay fiction in Mexico is perhaps not a movement in itself, but it is certainly at least, dare I say, a Postmodern, margin-blurring step towards equality on all levels.

Chapter One

Luis Zapata: The Journey from Sex to Sexuality and into the Mexican Mainstream

Born in 1951 in Chilpancingo, Luis Zapata burst onto the literary scene in Mexico with the 1979 publication of Las aventuras, desventuras y sueños de Adonis García, el vampiro de la colonia Roma,[1] which critics consider his first important work. From there, his work, almost exclusively as a novelist, spans two decades and includes Hasta en las mejores familias (1975), De pétalos perennes (1981), Melodrama (1983), De amor es mi negra pena (1983), En jirones (1985), La hermana secreta de Angélica María (1989), Ese amor que hasta ayer nos quemaba (1989), De cuerpo entero (1990), ¿Por qué mejor no nos vamos? (1992), La pasión más fuerte (1995), and, most recently, Siete noches junto al mar (1999). One of the reasons I choose Zapata for inclusion in this study is exactly this extensive body of work, for any trend within his writing could be indicative of tendencies of other authors writing

[1] The quotations included in this chapter will be taken from the 1996 Grijalbo edition, whose title was modified to El vampiro de la colonia Roma. The 1981 English translation of the novel done by Gay Sunshine Press bore the title, Adonis García: A Picaresque Novel. All subsequent Spanish-language editions have been shortened in this way, and English ones are similarly short (simply, Adonis García).

during all or part of Zapata's twenty years of production.

The existing criticism concerning Luis Zapata's opus is varied and relatively abundant. Yet even as late as 1997, with ten published novels he gained critical attention both here and abroad; nonetheless, he was being inexplicably excluded by significant sourcebooks published in the United States.[2]

Critics have generally insisted on Zapata's works as gay artifacts primarily because they detail sex acts between men, and perhaps more importantly, because they treat larger questions of sexuality of interest to the critic of Spanish American gay fiction. Early articles that treated El vampiro de la colonia Roma by such critics as Didier T. Jaén, Santos Torres-Rosado, and Alicia Covarrubias focused on the phenomenon in Mexico of the "neo-picaresca". The neo-picaresque included a fairly small number of published novels, but they all showed qualities

---

[2] For example, Zapata doen not make the cut in Spanish American Authors: the Twentieth Century (Ángel Flores, ed.), or the seemingly exhaustive works, the Dictionary of Mexican Literature (Eladio Cortés, ed.) or the Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature (Verity Smith, ed.). Thanks to A Bibliographical Guide to Spanish American Literature: Twentieth Century Sources (Walter Rela, ed.), the first mention of Luis Zapata I have been able to locate is in an athology of young writers entitled, Jaula de palabras (Gustavo Sainz, ed.) a scant year after the publication of Zapata's most acclaimed work, El vampiro de la colonia Roma. Such an early sighting/citing becomes more understandable when considering that the same publisher, Grijalbo, is responsible for the Sainz critical text and Zapata's novel.

of the Renaissance version of the genre. Contemporary, marginalized characters (whether by socioeconomic, cultural, ethnic or sexual reasons) were given a voice in the neo-picaresque. El vampiro de la colonia Roma is universally considered an example of the genre.

Maurice Westmoreland has more recently by-passed this discussion, choosing to treat instead specific topics in Zapata's novels, such as camp and postmodern depthlessness. A point that frequently emerges in a dissertation by Víctor F. Torres-Ortiz, is that Zapata's early narrative, especially, is "transgressive" and provides a "break" from what comes before it; or that Zapata's style is "innovative" (Torres-Rosado). I contest few of these foregoing critics' conclusions, but what is necessary for a full understanding of the novelistic enterprise of Luis Zapata, and something lacking in existing criticism, is a consideration of his use of eroticism and sex and its relation to what becomes, in the works of Zapata, a well-articulated and inclusive conception of sexuality. Most recently, Siete noches junto al mar demonstrates a banalization of sexuality and instead favors multiple themes. It is, additionally, significantly less insistent

on only gay-interested themes.

The statement that Luis Zapata is widely accepted as the first fiction writer in Mexico to openly treat issues of a homosexual nature would be inaccurate and incomplete, but once the qualification is added that he does so unabashedly and without regard for possible negative reactions from the critics and general reading public, frequently treating sex and sexuality with abandon, the statement does move closer to reality. At the same time, Zapata endeavors to directly and indirectly articulate that sexuality is a construction, a façade for power structures and gender roles, and that essential categories of sexual identity actually do not exist (as he does in El vampiro de la colonia Roma). That Zapata does this should come as no surprise once we consider how Robert Ellis has recently described how sexuality is perceived of in Latin America: "whereas Anglo-American conceptions of sex and gender derive largely from an ontology of individual identity, the 'ambiente' is a common space arising from a reciprocity of praxes" (3).

Given the comparative freedom surrounding sexuality in contemporary urban Mexico, reticence concerning the

treatment of sex acts between men in one of his most recent novels, Siete noches junto al mar, seems counterintuitive--the late 1990s were, after all, famous for their gaudiness and irreverence toward sexuality. Generally speaking, Luis Zapata's works evolve in a direction away from bawdy descriptions of same-sex intimate relations and more significantly toward a portrait of the constructed nature of sexual identity. Once this is achieved, sexuality ceases to be the author's main concern. He assimilates it and other social issues of importance to a gay audience into a worldvision where sexual preference still matters, but which yields a bit to the desire for wider readership. Reticence, as I have termed this phenomenon, on Zapata's part seems indicative of the tendency in contemporary gay Mexican fiction to gain a wider audience for books that are still specifically gay-themed by 'toning-down' that which makes them gay and by placing special emphasis on a more universal aspect of the same topic. In this chapter, we shall examine El vampiro de la colonia Roma (1979), En jirones (1985), and Siete noches junto al mar (1999) in an attempt to trace the means by which reticence emerges as a narrative element and to surmise about its efficacy as a

tool for incorporation into mainstream literature.

In the way of making some generalizations about the novels to be discussed in this chapter, it can be said that they are invariably direct: there is a first-person narrator/voice (as is the case in both El vampiro de la colonia Roma and En jirones, although this last is done so in a modified epistolary/"diary" style. Siete noches junto al mar's first person passes from one directly-narrated anecdote to another). In addition, sex and sexuality are treated openly in varying levels of explicitness.

El vampiro de la colonia Roma

El vampiro de la colonia Roma's original publication date of 1979 is probably too early even for such a risqué novel to have been written in the United States (except, perhaps, in the genre of erotica). About its public and critical reception, José Joaquín Blanco says that El vampiro de la colonia Roma was:

> un estallido: al mismo tiempo escándalo social que éxito y de ventas, lo que ya es mucho decir en un país antilibresco donde generalmente no importa nada que no salga en la televisión. Pero las

> cuentas de su impacto distaron de ser alegres ... se dio una especie de linchamiento moral y literario capaz de turbar los nervios más templados. (188)

The frankness with which the protagonist, Adonis García, narrates his sexual conquests is as shocking for the uninitiated reader as it is intriguing. Without a doubt, this frankness was unconventional in its lack of decorum and politeness in a relatively conservative and traditional contemporary Mexico.

The lewd nature of some of the passages in the novel are resminiscent of (though more blunt than) those seen in works like Lazarillo de Tormes or El Buscón. The latter, despite their sometimes piquant elements, are securely positioned in the canon of Hispanism. Fastening El vampiro de la colonia Roma onto this hoary and prestigious form allowed Zapata's work to garner wider acceptance than its theme of same-sex sexual explicitness would have otherwise most likely permitted. Even while the dialogue El vampiro de la colonia Roma maintains with the picaresque novel seems to renovate it technically and thematically from within, it does hitch itself onto its widely-accepted

literary tradition, thereby reaching a broad readership.[3]

The tape-recorded, and subsequently transcribed, rambling monologues of a real-life, adolescent, Mexican male prostitute, Adonis García, are the basis for the novel. El vampiro de la colonia Roma is not the first example of the use of a tape recorder to a narrative end. Ten years before Zapata's novel was published, Elena Poniatowska purports to have used the tape recorded conversations as the basis for Hasta no verte Jesús mío, wherein the protagonist, Jesusa Palancares, serves as the novel's first person narrative voice. Instead of a traditional narrative form, though, Zapata changes Poniatowska's transcription method to suit his purposes--absent the punction character "the period", the reader pauses only when prompted visually by the text. The reader slows his reading pace when Adonis pauses for breath, changes the topic of conversation, etc., all of which is shown in the text as actual, physical lacunæ in the form of blank spots. The uninterrupted, unnegotiated stream of information germane to El vampiro de la colonia Roma's

[3] Other picaresque novels installed in the canons of Hispanism include Lazarillo de Tormes, Francisco de Quevedo's El Buscón, Mateo Alemán's Guzmán de Alfarache, José Joaquín Lizardi de Fernández' El Periquillo Sarniento.

directly-transcribed testimony has the inevitable effect of creating verisimilitude and interest. As we have said, though the basis for the text before the reader is actually a manuscript of the tape-recorded monologues conducted by the author with a real-life adolescent male prostitute, Zapata selected, edited, and elaborated upon existing recordings to create El vampiro de la colonia Roma. In short, both Poniatowska's Jesusa Palancares and Zapata's Adonis García are people from real life who, at the same time, exist as characters in a work of fiction.

At no point in El vampiro de la colonia Roma does the voice of a third-person narrator interrupt the steady stream of bawdy language and depiction of ribald activity. What is palpable is a mere presence of an interviewer, revealed by Adonis' need to sometimes repeat part of a question that he supposedly does not hear or understand, or by which he is surprised. This off-tape interviewer, whose voice we do not hear, does not represent, I contend, any significant presence of a second character in the novel.

The visually-disorienting transcription approach I describe has been criticized by John S. Brushwood in the following, somewhat disingenuous manner: "El autor oscurece

su capacidad narrativa al elaborar un malogrado experimento, usando espacios en blanco en lugar de puntuación (80-81).[4] Though straightforward in its style and language and somewhat crude in its form, this does not diminish the level of character development achieved by Zapata: Adonis follows a socio-economically difficult Lazarillo-esque trajectory changing (in this case, sexual) "amos" or masters during which the protagonist comes to realize that his caste will forever remain downtrodden and he will be continually physically exploited in this imperfect world, despite the relative economic success he has enjoyed. This trajectory--upwardly mobile socially, and downwardly mobile morally--mirrors quite closely the Lazarillo. Given El vampiro de la colonia Roma's conformity to this structure, I shall not examine this trajectory exactly; rather, I shall advance an examination of the primary occurrences of Adonis' evolving conception of sexuality.

This having been said, it is important to note that the character development is of little importance to the trajectory itself of the novel in terms of Adonis' (lack

[4] However contradictory of Brushwood's account, there actually is punctuation in the form of question marks, parentheses and quotation marks.

of) social maturation. Adonis' thoughts coalescence around an inclusive notion of sexuality rather than around considerations of social mobility per se. Categories of sexual identity and gender in Mexico traditionally associated with the now-outdated active-passive dyad do not serve Adonis well as a way to identify himself, and rather, he lives in the accepting "ambiente" as an easygoing sexual nonconformist.

Despite the lack of character profundity, Brushwood does not deny the high level of identification with Adonis that the author is able to bring about. He does not explain how this can happen in what he has frivolously termed a "malogrado experimento". There is much artistic merit in this novel, despite the dismissive tone of this albeit well-known critic. Theoretically, in order to achieve sympathy with the protagonist, the reader should share with him some character trait, whether emotional or tangible. Since Adonis is a young, Mexican, male hustler, and few if any readers would share this socioeconomic condition, this appears unlikely. However, it is his affable nature and ability "to roll with the punches", as it were, that allow us to identify with him. Moreover, in a world where one

feels himself from time to time overextended and underappreciated, his exploited nature makes him seem at least rather similar to ourselves.

On a purely statistical level, Adonis makes roughly fifty-three separate references to his sexual interludes, either for the purpose of pleasure or pay. He has so much sex that he imagines one day,

> me iban a hacer una estatua ¿no? / imagínate ... / con la verga bien parada / y con la mano haciendo una seña así ... / y chance y hasta se volvía milagrosa / la estatua / digo / que pasara la gente ¿no? a sobarle el pito / para que les diera potencia eterna / y luego cuando les hiciera un milagro / que le colgaran pititos / así / como a los santos / en señal de agradecimiento (90-91)[5]

In terms of how Adonis treats sex, he at the same time espouses both a flippant and serious attitude. This assertion seems to be so contradictory as to approach the flippant itself, but to Adonis, the mental aspects one normally ascribes to sex under ideal circumstances (i.e.,

---

[5] The somewhat visually disorienting way in which I reproduce this passage is intentional and is meant to show where in the text Adonis pauses, which, as I have said, are shown in the original text as blank spaces of varying size. I do

were he not a hustler) are completely lacking in him--at least from all outward appearances--so that the reader is left with the impression that he is only interested in sex for either physical pleasure or money (never love), depending on his need at the moment. At the same time, however, the roguish hero so prides himself on his sexual expertise and endurance that his very ego has become dependent on them. It is this dependence on others' estimation of him that makes the reader suspect that sex is psychically important to Adonis, and that the accompanying behaviors and his dismissive attitude belie the role of prostitute, and that they play a more serious part in his character than Adonis would ever admit.

It is exactly each of Adonis' longer-term, same-sex partners, (first his unnamed childhood friend; then René, Zabaleta, Pepe, and Federico), however, who contribute to a psychological deterioration that ultimately estranges him to the extent that, at the end of the novel, he envisions abandoning this world for another planet altogether. In play, there are two sometimes contradictory currents: 1) the tricks he turns that are, at the same time, an example

---

not mimic the length of the original blank spaces in the interest of conserving space.

both of his worth and worthlessness and 2) the longer-term relationships that should prove more expressive of Adonis' opinions of sexuality and yet cause him the most psychic injury. We shall focus our attention on the latter relationships, since they are more specific and finite in nature, rather than on his "tricks".

Before this can be done, however, an understanding of the nature of sexuality in Mexico should be understood. In a 1989 article by the social anthropologist at the University of California-Irvine, J.M. Carrier, traditional sexual behavior in Mexico is explained in the following way:

> Mexican males involved in homosexual behavior operate in a sociocultural environment which leads them to expect that they should play either the anal insertive or receptive sexual role but not both, and that he should receive ultimate sexual satisfaction with anal intercourse rather than fellatio. By and large a result of sharply defined gender roles in the society, the general belief is that feminine males are passive and penetrable, like females, that masculine males are active and

> impenetrable, and that the anus provides sexual pleasure like the vagina. Participants in homosexual encounters are thus motivated by their cultural environment to establish a sexual role preference and to focus on anal intercourse. (1989: 133)[6]

Of note in this passage is the insistence on role and not identity. The emphasis on praxes and not an ontology of self-identity reinforces Robert Ellis' passage referenced earlier in this chapter.[7]

On the first page of the novel, Adonis recounts a dream to the mute interviewer.[8] He says that he is at a party where "se veía que todos eran heterosexuales" (13). True, dream sequences are rarely easily explained, but Adonis' statement that,

> tenían cara de heterosexuales / pus no te puedo

---

[6] Further proof of this phenomenon exists in the recent Book by Matthew c. Gutman, The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City. Also see Jacobo Schifter's Lila's House for similar occurrences in Costa Rica, indicative of a certain applicability to Latin America in general for this kind of sexual behavior.

[7] See page 22.

[8] Each "cinta" ("tape") constitues a chapter, and all begin with Adonis recounting a dream. These dreams come to represent a narratological unity unto themselves which points to the internal, mental and emotional degradation Adonis begins to feel more intensely as the novel progresses. He senses that descent and not ascent is his true destiny, and this plays out parallel to the real-life events that succeed the details of each chapter's dream.

> decir cómo son las caras de los heterosexuales / pero uno / como homosexual / ha aprendido a ver en la cara de la gente su / este / onda sexual (17)

seems almost too remarkable to seem credible, even in the surreal world of dreams. This self-consciousness reveals itself later in the dream when the same faces he has just described suddenly metamorphose into those of "gente de ambiente" ["gays"]. Once the straight faces have changed into gay faces, he says, "me empecé a sentir incómodo" (17). The implication here, is that, in terms of sexuality, "como homosexual" (as Adonis says), one is sensitive to one's own and others' sexuality because of the unease ("incómodo") he feels at possibly being discovered as different from everyone else (i.e., not straight).[9] While this dream sequence, therefore, establishes sexuality as a theme, the upcoming insistence on sexual activity in the novel is initially sublimated. Zapata could have chosen, especially in the erotically-charged realm of dreams, to highlight eroticism, but instead, it becomes apparent that his primary concern is the formation of sexual identity.

---

[9] This phenomenon has been termed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Queer Christmas" or "Queer Childhood". For more information regarding the fear of discovery one feels as a homosexual, see her extremely well-structured introductory essay in Epistemology of the Closet or "Queer and Now" (in Tendencies).

Specifically, the dream selection draws what appears to be a clear line between the "ambiente", homosexuality and heterosexuality--categories that according to Adonis, and in keeping with Ellis and Carrier, are separate. Homosexuality is too strict a category for Adonis, and he chooses to privelege the more inclusive notion of "ambiente". This first tape/chapter deals with Adonis' most basic, early feelings of affinity for other men, though not necessarily desire for sex with them.

In the second chapter/tape, once Adonis arrives in the capital from the province, an adolescent Adonis finds that his brother has taken a male lover, Frenchi (a nickname derived from Efrén). In the following quote, the brother serves for Adonis' forthright description of a human sexuality constantly in flux: "Mi hermano era / es / buga ["straight"] / para que veas a dónde nos lleva la vida a veces / bueno / no buga buga / ¿quién es totalmente buga? / nadie ¿verdad?" (41). Despite the fact that the brother has sex with a man, traditionally, and remembering what Carrier tells us, Mexican males who maintain an active insertor role, despite the gender of the object of desire, are considered typical and not outside acceptable forms of

sexual expression for the Mexican male. Therefore, since Adonis says, "nomás mi hermano se lo cogía", we can assume that in the eyes of Mexican society, the brother would be considered, "normal" or "still" straight. That Adonis feels the need to point out that his brother maintains the role of active insertor tells the reader various important details: first, Adonis is aware that in Mexico, gender is based, among other things, on sexual role/position preference, and secondly, he knows that for some people these roles work well and lend something to the psychology of the person in question. For Adonis, however, these roles are limiting, as we shall see.

Proof of his sexual iconoclasm is evidenced in a statement from his description of Frenchi that, on the surface appears to have a homophobic ring; however, upon closer evaluation, the description is actually a disavowal of society's need to "know" one's sexual orientation. Adonis' philosophy on sexuality, with specific reference to gender roles, shows, perhaps surprisingly, an apparent, measured intolerance for "locas"--literally "crazy girls" or "fairies", or, in other words, men who are effeminate. In reference to Frenchi, Adonis says, "las locas son las que

nos desprestigian a los homosexuales de corazón / a los homosexuales serios / je / a los que no tenemos que andar gritando a los cuatro vientos que somos putos" (41). It is not the effeminacy that Adonis criticizes, which we may have expected, and as the statement seems to imply. The object of criticism is rather the need of "fairies" to profess their sexuality to the world. This statement is intolerant of Frenchi not because he is effeminate, but rather because he believes his own sexuality, and sexuality in general, for that matter, is of enough importance that it must be professed to complete strangers. This is a radical move on Zapata's part, for at the same time it affirms the right to be sexually different, and even, indirectly, effeminate. At the same time, and in a very Foucauldian manner, such a statement downplays the strong desire in society to want "know" someone's sexuality.

Despite a childhood discomfort with coming to terms with his homosexuality, by the time of the recording of these monologues, Adonis has apparently become completely comfortable with his sexuality:

> la homosexualidad es una cosa de lo más normal ¿no? / como pienso ahorita / que cada uno tiene

> derecho a hacer con su vida sexual lo que se le pegue la gana / no me hubiera sentido tan mal ¿verdad? / pero entonces sí me sacaba mucho de onda sentirme diferente (27)

The seemingly offhand manner in which he treats sexuality here is indicative of a mixture of two character traits: Adonis is at ease with his own identity, but, as the author himself notes in an interview, it may also be typical of a more general tendency on the part of the protagonist to "no tomar en serio lo que está sucediendo" (Zapata in Teichmann 361). Through Adonis' words, Zapata de-emphasizes the stigma of supposed difference and deviance that has traditionally surrounded a same-sex affectional preference/orientation. By asserting this, though, he simultaneously and ironically, implants the very thought he hoped to de-emphasize.

The attention-getting power of some of the sex scenes which will be examined is obvious, but nearly half the times erotic elements are present, they serve as vehicles for Adonis' opinions about more thought-provoking questions concerning sexual identity. The relationship between Zapata's indirect message that sexuality should be more

inclusive and fluid and Adonis' (much simpler) statements about, and more telling actions regarding, the same issue is unclear in the sense that one cannot tell where Adonis the real-life prostitute stops and his presence in fiction (i.e., of Zapata's creation of him) begins. In essence, sex in the novel forces people to think about more than just sex. As proof of this, when the novel is re-examined it can be seen that in twenty-one of the fifty-three separate sexual experiences of the young protagonist, or forty percent of the time, commentary from Adonis regarding sexual identity is intermingled with the explicit descriptions of the intimate relations.

The moments in which Zapata combines sexually explicit language with more profundity regarding about sexual identity, what is shown is that Adonis appears unencumbered by traditionally Latin American notions of sexual identity that are, in turn, linked to sexual role/position. Let us examine what on the surface appears only to be an explicitly sexual scene. I reproduce this lengthy passage not to tire a reader unaccustomed to Mexican slang of a sexal nature or, even, in its very reproduction, attempt to reinscribe the intrigue surrounding the sex scenes that

Zapata includes in such abundance. Rather, I do so in order to show exactly the level of detail of these scenes and the point-blank way in which they are presented. In none of the criticism is the reprodcution of such a sexually-charged passage found, even when the article discusses the novel's eroticism, sexuality, etc. If continually omitted because of a self-perpetuating regime of silence, the point-counterpoint--sex-sexuality--impetus of El vampiro de la colonia Roma will be lost.[10]

The scene in question contains implications about what it means to be gay in Mexico. It also indicates Adonis' refusal to participate in a repressive regime of sexual identity(-ies) that is pre-ordained by sexual role or position. As background, Zabaleta is one of Adonis' regular customers and also happens to be a wealthy diplomat of high prestige in Mexico. The diplomat sets out to initiate Adonis in the finer points of assuming the anally-receptive sexual position while they vacation in Acapulco. Adonis balks, saying that, though not a novice as the "passive"

---

[10] Indeed, seventeen years ago José Joaquín Blanco indirectly condemns this avoidance in professional criticism: "La ignorancia y la cursilería supusieron que lo vulgar, lo fácil o superficial era hablar de [la sensualidad, el erotismo y el sexo], cuando ocurre precisamente lo contrario: no hay nada más difícil, nada que requiera mayor inteligencia y sostenido rigor profesional" (1990: 189).

participant, he has never felt the intense pleasure that is supposed to accompany this position. Adonis remembers Zabaleta having opined that this lack of pleasure, "'seguramente es porque nunca te han rozado la próstata / en cuanto te toquen la próstata / vas a empezar a sentir ese placer'" (77). In the ensuing "chingada de [su] vida", Adonis says that Zabaleta

> me daba y me preguntaba '¿te gusta así?' / y yo 'no / no siento nada / nomás un dolor de la chingada' / entonces me cambió de posición / que de a gatas / que de a pasito de ángel / que de a cabrito al precipicio / y que ora de pollito rostizado / y me seguía picando para un lado y para el otro / total / que me dio la chingada de mi vida y nunca sentí nada agradable / afortunadamente / ya se vino / si no / imagínate / se hubiera pasado toda la noche dándome pa dentro / tratando de localizarme la próstata (77)

What we see in the passage is that Adonis does not adhere strictly to the insertor-only role prescribed, as we have said, by the 'vampiro' title he has assumed.[11] Rather

---

[11] Muuray and Dynes have dosumented that "vampiro" can imply "hustler" and person who occupies the active-insertor role.

atypically of the prevailing implications of such a title, Adonis freely "gives" or "receives", depending on the desires of his partner at that moment. Adonis' willingness to occupy either a "passive" or "active" sexual position subversively plays with this entire notion. Carrier's observation that "feminine males are passive and penetrable [and therefore, presumably, able to be designated 'homosexual'], that masculine males are active and impenetrable [and, therefore, perhaps still 'heterosexual, despite having sex with men]" (Carrier 133) is overturned when Adonis says, "lo que yo no entendía / no sabía / era que el que se cogía al puto también era homosexual" (46). At all accounts Adonis is not effeminate, and so, in contradiction to the Carrier passage, occupies either the anal insertive or receptive sexual role freely.

We repeatedly see this ambiguity in Adonis: in reference to his first night of prositution, he notes, "primera noche de debut en el talón y ya picado / me picó / lo piqué / me volvió a picar / o al revés / no me acuerdo del orden" (49). We can conclude, therefore, that despite how predominantly sexual and devoid of intellectual intent the scene appears to be--though replete with titillation--

Zapata has, in fact, imbued the character and the scene itself with deeper connotations that probe the heart of what it means to be sexually different in Mexico. In fact, though there are, as previously stated, fifty-three scenes that make specific reference to Adonis' sexual activity, there are sixty-one instances of a deeper, specific, articulation of sexuality. It is true that at times Adonis seems to espouse the traditional notions surrounding sexual expression (e.g., the reference to his brother as "buga", or "straight"). It is useful to Adonis to describe the sexuality of others in essentialist terms, but a similarly rigid system of categorization simply does not work for him: depending on the moment, he is either "pasivo" or "activo" (i.e., feminine/effeminate or masculine).

Foremost to him is freedom to self-identify depending on the circumstances. He seems to provide such seemingly rigid descriptions of friends and loved ones solely to show how inflexible others perceive of themselves, and to provide a seemingly static point of reference to which he himself almost never adheres.

<u>En jirones</u>

Looking forward six years, the 1985 novel, En jirones, contains several similarities to El vampiro de la colonia Roma: there is an abundant use of sex and commentary on sexuality, innovation of form, and an exclusively first-person perspective. En jirones is the epitome of the solipsistic novel, if not in content, certainly insofar as style is concerned. The entire novel describes from a first-person perspective, in the form of diary entries, the torrid, on-again off-again same-sex love affair between A. (whose full name is never supplied) and the narrator/diary writer, Sebastián. That "nothing happens" in the novel would be a simplification of the facts, but the novel is primarily an alternation between the written expression of the obsessive, smothering infatuation/love the adolescent Sebastián has for A.[12] and their passionate and sometimes violent sexual encounters; Sebastián's need to write about A. and their physical love; and a conscious self-examination of a writing process (we are, after all, reading Sebastián's diary). Claudia Schaefer-Rodríguez has described the argument in the following way: "Writing and sex are the acts

[12] Chapter Four, which deals with Alfredo Espinosa's novel, Obra negra, will involve the continuation of the infatuation/love aspect that serves as mere point of departure for Zapata in En jirones.

through which Sebastián feels alive, and he describes each in detail to form a 'novela intimista' [intimate novel; Teichmann]" (Schaefer-Rodríguez 465). In the novel's closing few lines, as Sebastián's diary tells, the deleterious nature of their relationship has inflicted such psychological harm on him that he cannot even contemplate allowing A. to enter his dreams until after the passage of several years. It is a relationship in which mutual understanding and respect remain unrealized. This is the reason why no personal fulfillment or even resolution can be reached. Here is how Schaefer-Rodríguez explains the lack of self-realization in En jirones:

> Rather than being left with a sense of completion or wholeness or the definitive reassembly of the psychological and narrative fragments, we find a vortex of movement, of endless process ... ending with the repetition of their frenzied sexual encounters. (465)

This is not a surprising conclusion given the title of the novel (En jirones, or, "In Tatters") and the same critic's assertion that the "concept of rupture orders this narrative" (465).

As late as 1991, David William Foster had even described En jirones as "by far the most sexually explicit gay novel published so far in Mexico, perhaps in Spanish America" (37). We see here, though, that the detailing of the sex between the two characters, although still a primary focus of the novel, and even, incredibly, much more explicit than what is seen in El vampiro de la colonia Roma, erodes a bit more in En jirones--enough for us to be able to glimpse a continued and more abstract fashioning of a theory surrounding the formation of sexual identity in Mexican society. In contrast to the method used in El vampiro de la colonia Roma, in En jirones discussion of sexuality becomes increasingly separated from scenes of a purely erotic/sexual nature. This widening gap suggests that Zapata's aim is to invite his audience to think more abstractly about sexuality and to put it into the context of a modern and modernizing world.

Whereas the sole source of commentary regarding the formation of sexual identity in El vampiro de la colonia Roma was the novel's title character, Adonis, En jirones allows the reader a more balanced view that is articulated by both characters. A difference in En jirones, though, is

the deliberate nature that the characters' discussions about sexuality takes. Adonis, in contrast, was a character more of action than of thought. Sebastián, the protagonist and writer of the diary entries that make up the novel, interacts with A., and records their exchanges. The result, therefore, is a theory of sexuality that, because of give-and-take debate between the two characters who more often than not are outside the realm of actual sexual relations, is richer and more balanced than that afforded by the opinions of one character, as was the case in El vampiro de la colonia Roma. In En jirones, Zapata seems more able to discuss sexuality separately from erotic pleasure.

It bears repeating, however, that the instances of love-making in this novel are more intense and particularized than El vampiro de la colonia Roma's, and in some cases they even become passionate to the point of being physically assaultive. Zapata has been able to successfully publish three intervening novels (De pétalos perennes, De amor es mi negra pena and Melodrama) by major publishers in Mexico and to have El vampiro de la colonia Roma translated by the lead U.S. gay press of the moment (Sunshine Press). Zapata's return to ribald sexual activity as a major theme

may come as a surprise. One wonders if the intention of such a return is to gain even greater market diffusion. Actually, the three intervening novels never really left it--the theme is present in De amor es mi negra pena (1983), and to a lesser degree in Melodrama (1983); though not at all in De pétalos perennes (1981). What is of note in the intensification of the sex/sexuality theme, once he treats it again in earnest in En jirones, is the evolution away from the previously widely-held perception in Mexico (and in the U.S. as well at that time) that sex/sexual position and sexuality can never be kept apart. In El vampiro de la colonia Roma, we saw how sexual position and sexual identity are related in Mexico, though eschewed by Adonis himself. There is a variation on this theme in En jirones. Indeed, the thought of anally penetrating A. veritably haunts the obsessive Sebastián. The following, piquant passage is proof of Zapata's focus on eroticism (and sexual position) as a useful vehicle for his call for increased sexual inclusivity and tolerance of difference. At the end of the passage reproduced below, which finishes a diary entry, Sebastián mentions that "esta noche [A.] duerme conmigo". Sebastián has previously expressed his rivalry with A.'s girlfriend.

Moreover, after Sebastián gains access to A.'s (mostly) restricted gluteal region, A. sleeps with Sebastián, and not his steady girlfriend. In the novel, therefore, the position of active insertor is less symbolic of sexual identity than it is of sexual dominance, or in the specific case of Sebastián, of owning A. to some degree. Sebastián feels that his being able to assume an active insertor role is indicative of A.'s commitment to their relationship as well as of Sebastián's monopoly over A's body and concomitant right to feel jealous of A.'s girlfriend and future wife:

> A. me desviste y me rompe la camisa; me lastima la verga al abrirme frenético el pantalón. Rasga mi carne con sus uñas. Yo, en cambio, empiezo a acariciarlo delicadamente; le pido si me deje lamer su culo: ya no parece tener miedo a las palabras. Cruza sus piernas sobre mi espalda y me ofrece ese objeto tan codiciado: lo lamo con fruición, restriego en él mi lengua, lo baño de saliva. Que si le meto la verga. Me contesta que no, que no le gusta, que le duele mucho, que nunca lo ha hecho. Le digo que me dé chance, que no lo voy a lastimar. No, que eso no. Insisto, aunque

> sea la puntita. Bueno, pero que no me mueva mucho, que deje que él sólo se la acomode. Toma mi verga con sus manos y la coloca en su sitio adecuado. Empuja tantito me dice, y yo le meto toda la cabeza. El contacto con el culo caliente me hace sentir al borde de la eyaculación. Ay, espérate, dice; que le duele; que la saque. Yo trato de penetrarlo un poco más. Me lo impide: agarra mi verga y la saca. El movimiento brusco hace que me venga en su mano. Después, A. se unta mis mecos en el culo; me pide que le meta el dedo; resbala fácilmente. Sobo su próstata mientras le mamo el pito; al igual que su verga, va entiesándose conforme aumenta la excitación; la froto hasta que su dureza me indica que está a punto de venirse. Caudalosamente inunda mi boca, mi garganta; casi me ahoga. Luego descansamos ... Le digo que lo quiero, que estoy muy contento ... Esta noche [A.] duerme conmigo. (104)

The reader unaccustomed to such vivid detail will excuse the perhaps exaggerated length of this excerpt. Again, however, existing criticism's collective shudders,

winces and flinches in the face of such compelling and meaningful prose is surprising. Here, Sebastián is able to obtain at least some access to an area of A.'s body that A. has deemed relatively off-limits until now. It seems unnecessary to reiterate why the taboo may be understandable--given what Carrier has already highlighted and Gutman has confirmed twenty years later--since A. does not self-identify as gay, he is thus not obliged to assume a submissive/passive (i.e., effeminate) position for Sebastián.

Sebastián and A. do openly debate the nature of homosexuality in Mexico. Sebastián argues that, despite prevailing stereotypes that say gay men are generally more sensitive and open, sexual object choice has very little to do with such psychological or character traits. Sexual object choice, in fact, says very little about any person outside of the biological sex of that choice, which, in turn, may not be immutable. In fact, this kind of urban, perhaps uniquely western (read: U.S. and not Mexican) mode of "being gay" is defined in this next quote:

> Le pregunto por qué, si la idea de ser homosexual le aterra, tiene amistad con homosexuales.

> Contesta que se siente a gusto, que son gente más sensible / sensible mi glande / más abierta / más abierto mi orificio urinario / que lo entienden. Que no diga pendejadas, replico, que su aparente aliviane únicamente encubre un sexismo baboso e infundado ... : ser homosexual no implica ser sensible ni nada por el estilo; su actitud es lo contrario de la de cualquier machín pendejo, que cree que los jotos sólo pueden ser modistas o peinadores como en las películas de Mauricio Garcés. / A lo mejor tienes razón; soy un pendejo. / No, tampoco te pongas en esa posición de víctima humillada; lo que te estoy diciendo es que tu visión es muy parcial, y lo que me dices no es más que una coartada entre putos como <u>tú,</u> sin sentimientos de culpa. (28 original emphasis)

When examining this passage we must bear in mind that what takes place in the novel is supposed to have occurred in the 1950s. The kind of forward-thinking version of homosexuality espoused by Sebastián in this quote certainly would have even been out of place in the United States in the 1950s, let alone 1950s Mexico. What we have in this quote,

therefore, is largely an anachronistic, foreshadowing kind of thinking--both of time and of place. It is a useful anachronism for Zapata to employ, though, since it makes his (modern-day) audience, begin to think generally along lines of human sexuality. Indeed, that the events of the novel supposedly happened almost thirty-five years ago (at the time of En jirones' publication) may force a reader to reexamine his or her own outmoded way of thinking about sexual identity. In essence, the reader would discover that, if Sebastián is so revolutionary and activist in his thinking about sexuality, she should be also. At this moment in history, which is supposedly 1950s Mexico, that one's affectional orientation has nothing to say about one's level of open-mindedness or sensitivity would have collided with accepted stereotypes. Indeed, any notion even of a gay community, something at which Sebastián seems to hint, is largely nonexistent in 1950s Mexican society.

Another characteristic of the previous passage is that it is notably devoid of any eroticism. Unlike El vampiro de la colonia Roma, where the two themes are either inextricable or at least closely allied, with En jirones, Zapata has begun to detach eroticism and sex (and the social

connotations of sexual position, etc., in Mexico) from sexual identity.

All of this is not to say that anything as radical as a queer sensibility is, as yet, palpable in any real way. Without entering into a prolonged discussion of the intricacies of Queer Theory, there is no attempt in the novel to dissociate biological sex from gender constructs, or to suggest that even biological sex should be unmoored from sexual object choice, etc.--all notions implicit in Queer Theory. What is present in the novel, however, is that the idea that homosexuality, as a unique position of personal experiential authority in society that preconditions many personal and public interactions, exists. Furthermore, A., and apparently Zapata, feel that this voice is in need of articulation within society as well as in and by the individual who may profess an alliance to homosexuality. We see this in the following quote: "Mientras [A.] no tenga que nombrar sus actos, decir sus sentimientos, no hay problema: su homosexualidad no existe. Pospongo, pues, la necesaria conversación aclaratoria" (51). The "conversación aclaratoria" represents the unique identity in society of which Sebastián is forcing a definition. The

following exchange between Sebastián and A. allows us to see what definitions of 'gay subjectivity' were then (i.e., in 1950) being proffered in Mexico:

> [Sebastián:] ¿Me quieres aunque no cojamos? ¿Así como soy contigo: collón, irresponsible, grosero? [A.:] Sí, así como eres. ¿Por qué? ¿porque te gusta que te humillen? Tapón de boca. Sin embargo, respondo: no sé, pero así te quiero; déjame quererte como eres, ¿no? Yo quisiera poder quererte igual, dice mirándome a los ojos con gotas de sudor en los párpados: me gusta cómo eres, lo que haces; si no fueras hombre, podría enamorarme de ti, estar loco por ti. (79)

What we find here is that, in Sebastián's mind a same-sex relationship--yes, in Mexico and, yes, in 1950--is possible. He loves A. as much as he possibly can. The same is true of the love A. has for Sebastián, but for A., specifically because Sebastián is a man, he must limit the nature of their relationship to a physical one. At the same time, though, A. wishes for their sexual encounters to continue, and knows that his own inner conflict over accepting his possible homosexuality, even whether he considers himself

gay, is at the root of the discord between the lovers: [A.:] "no quiero que me dejes de ver; tú no te preocupes: el que está mal soy yo; yo soy el que tiene que resolver sus broncas; me gustaría que me ayudaras, pero si no puedes, ni modo" (83). A. needs to clarify his sexual identity to be able to reach some private peace.

Guilt, a result of the social stigma that comes from self-identifying as gay, should not be a consideration for a man who maintains an active/insertor role with another man. Interestingly, though A. is an unswerving "top", he does experience guilt, as evidenced by the following passage from Sebastián's diary:

> teme a la soledad, pero aún más intimar sexualmente con alguien; no puede dejar de sentir que está cometiendo algo grave, algo que violenta todo su equilibrio; lo desea, pero se desprecia después. (85)

Even though A. maintains an active insertor role in the relationship, a role that in Mexico, according to Carrier, does not necessarily immediately identify one as gay, he still experiences guilt. A. infers that, despite the supposed prevailing intellectual disconnect between

active/insertor and "homosexual" in Mexico, there is reason for pause when considering one's own sexual identity.

It is apparent that Zapata is inserting a modern-day sensibility into his discourse as it pertains to sexuality. It has been my contention that En jirones strives to significantly uncouple sexual position and sexual identity. The foregoing textual evidence seems to imply that one man who has sex with another, even casually and while maintaining an active/insertor role, which A. does, still distorts the process of sexual self-identification, despite existing documentation and testimony to the contrary.

Siete noches junto al mar

In the 1999 novel, Siete noches junto al mar, four friends sit around and tell each other stories ranging from the mundane (going to the doctor and leaving without paying the bill; a teenage girl whose rebellion is limited to a short haircut) to the intriguing (the rape that a transsexual does not mind, and perhaps even enjoyed; or infidelity in a same-sex relationship). This most recent novel by no means shows Zapata at his technical best, but insofar as it represents an evolution in his fiction it is

significant. In 1979, El vampiro de la colonia Roma included explicit discussion of sexuality inserted into erotic scenes and En jirones' discussion of sexuality occurred primarily outside the realm of eroticism. In contrast, sexuality per se is not even a topic for discussion in Siete noches junto al mar. This is not to say that the novel (which is really only a collection of directly-narrated short stories or anecdotes) does not have as its focus things queer. Compared to other works in this study, however, only twenty percent of the narration contains any reference to a gay character. It is usually limited to straightforward, uncomplicated descriptions of that character's daily adventures. When the story does center around a gay person or a same-sex couple, his/their sexuality is not what is of importance, nor do said characters themselves opine on the implications of a so-called "homosexual existence".

Even the fact that one of the novel's primary narrators is gay does not provoke a description of much profundity in matters of sexuality--one simply is gay, and just as simply has an existence. It would seem that the gay narrator, Iván, is a fully-adjusted, "normal", contributing member of society, who is simply on vacation hamming it up with

friends in Acapulco. In other words, Siete noches junto al mar's Iván is not the male prostitute in search of the next trick or fix (like El vampiro de la colonia Roma's Adonis), nor is he the reclusive, obsessive, oversexed, intellectual writer type that ceases to function on a daily basis when the object of his obsession is absent (like Sebastián in En jirones). Zapata's implication is that, since, with any luck, the same audience will have been reading him since the late seventies which saw the advent of his first, sexy and sex-driven novels, the discernible trend toward acceptance of the expression of different sexualities in Mexico in general will be likewise palpable in his own fiction. Generally speaking, a writer who describes either an outmoded social milieu or an outmoded character in any milieu is not as appealing as characters with whom we can identify because of shared experience. Zapata modernizes accordingly in Siete noches junto al mar: the characters' thoughts regarding sexuality are either uncomplicated or these characters are even comfortable in their own skin--so much so that they mirror the increasing permissive and indifferent climate concerning sexuality in contemporary urban Mexico.

Despite the prevalence of characters who are at ease with their identity, there is at least one in the novel who has a difficult time being gay and coming-out. Individual stories that demonstrate this must surely abound, but taken as a whole, Zapata's message is one of a sexually evolving Mexico. By 1999 Zapata subordinates the coming-out portion of anyone's experience, (if and when he even chooses to tell such a story), to more aesthetic considerations. One such story is found in Siete noches junto al mar, though, at this point in Zapata's career, the coming-out experience is no longer the relevant information, and is even trivialized through farce: Memo is a friend of the narrator Iván. Through him, we find out that, although he is in a committed relationship with his lover, Raúl, Memo is restless and yearns to meet and "know" other men. He meets a 23-year-old man from Zacatecas whom he describes in the following stereotypically gay terms:

> que no se veía completamente super-buga ... pero de esas personas que dan la impresión de ser un poco más sensibles, o de movimientos apenas perceptiblemente más delicados que los de los demás. Pero nada obvio. (130)

In the story the Zacatecano's lack of exposure to a gay community and his opressive family have prohibited any formulation of sexual identity, and he begins to ask Memo all manner of questions, from How do gays live? to Does being gay complicate matters for you at work? (131). Once the man is more at ease with Memo and has confirmed for the reader suspicions surrounding his own sexuality, the inexperienced twenty-something initiates intimacy with Memo, who willingly accepts his advances. The frenzied and liberating nature of their foreplay ends in the tearing of Memo's partner's frenum/frenulum[13] and a strangely comical scene of bloodletting ensues--strangely comical because the reader does not anticipate this kind of twist given the sexual overtones and that they emanate from the coupling of two men. Indeed, the reader's attention until this point in the anecdote has been focused nearly exclusively on sex between men. The climax of this anecdote could have been that Memo had successfully cheated on his mate with an inexperienced, very attractive young man. Even the dramatic

[13] The definition given by the dictionary says that this is any part of the body that checks or controls movement. The example given in the dictionary is the fold of skin under the tongue. Whether it is this that breaks during the course of foreplay between Memo and the 23-year-old is unknown, though from context, it appears to be other than this fold of skin spoken of by the dictionary. It is my supposition that the fold of skin that is torn is located at the end of the foreskin of the penis, just before the pupace.

discovery of the short-lived affair would have been a satisfying conclusion. In earlier gay fiction, merely self-identifying as gay would have been a satisfying climactic moment. Zapata, however, turns the scene into a modern-day comedy of errors, wherein the coming-out as well as affair aspects of the story are completely eclipsed by farce. At this point in Zapata's career, sexuality and sex serve as backdrop for more compelling twists in storytelling whose interest is not limited to a gay or even, necessarily, a gay-friendly audience.

Humor supplants questions of sex and sexuality in another episode that has its roots in infidelity between same-sex partners, and is found earlier in the novel. Mariano and Armando are the characters found in the anecdote given the partially ironic title of "La pareja feliz" (56-64). Both the story's theme of infidelity and its play on the traditionally heterosexually-associated catch-phrase, "The Happy Couple", makes the title doubly ironic. The jealous nature of Mariano prompts him to test his lover, and he asks our Iván to be the administrator of this test. While Mariano is away on travel for a conference, Iván is to provoke Armando to see if he responds to his advances. If he

does, Mariano will leave Armando. If, however, Armando rejects Iván, then Mariano will be thankful to be in a committed relationship, apologize, and finally drop his jealousy. In an unexpected turn of events that turns the test subject into its administrator, Armando is the one who actually commences foreplay with Iván. The irony here is that the affair between Iván and Armando, and at Mariano's expense, continues the entire time Mariano is away, and the adultery remains secret. Mariano is none the wiser, and, based on Iván's misleading praise of Armando, believes his relationship is immune to infidelity, and moves with Armando to Tijuana where "siguen siendo la pareja ideal" (63). Iván deepens the irony of the story and provides its humorous moral at its close by saying that his reason in telling it was, "Para que vean que sí hay historias de amor que sí tienen finales felices" (64).

The theme of adultery between same sex couples is a new one, and although both stories detail sexual relations, irony replaces sex as the principal feature. What Zapata has done in Siete noches junto al mar is to shift focus away from sex and toward the ironies and normal ups and downs of any relationship. Indeed, Zapata has in essence made

palpable, through its very repetition, the fact that sex is central to any human existence. That the only characters in his novels that seem to demonstrate this are gay becomes less important, as we have just seen, since he privileges narrative techniques such as irony and humor over explicitly sexual elements.

Emphasis on eroticism is of less importance in this novel than in the novels previously treated in this study. It remains a topic of discussion, though, especially for the gay character, Iván, and the details are as abundant here as in El vampiro de la colonia Roma or En jirones. However, even this character is becoming increasingly aware of the waning effectiveness of eroticism as a tool for storytelling:

> No voy a abusar de su infinita paciencia, ni de las descripciones sicalípticas, porque ya me he extendido demasiado en otras situaciones semejantes, y el sexo, aunque sabroso, no admite muchas variantes: para muestra, basten las películas pornográficas, que casi siempre uno se las tiene que echar en fast forward para no aburrirse. (237)

The message is that sexual intrigue, thought "tasty", according to Iván, is disposable, due to its repetitive nature. Since this "sex is boring" refrain occurs at the end of the penultimate story--a mere twelve pages from the end of the novel, in fact--Zapata ensures that this message remains fresh in the mind of his reader. Here Zapata directly articulates his apparently contradictory feelings regarding the use of sex and erotic elements as effective components of narrative. If Zapata feels that an insistence on erotic elements is boring, his incorporation of sexual language and eroticism in this novel--which does feature it much less than some of his other novels--seems mysterious. On the other hand, once we realize that his intention in this quote is to force the reader to think about more than the lurid details--something this study has as its own objective--the mystery is solved.

The quote I just referenced occurs when Iván's friends hire him a prostitute for his birthday. All the while, Iván thinks that the prostitute, Jorge (or Jorgito), is truly in love with him. In fact, Jorge does come to be in love with Iván over the course of several days of love-making. Though the circumstances under which he comes to love him are less

than romantic, Iván and Jorge have a year-long relationship. Iván chooses to largely overlook the sexual elements of their relationship in telling us his own story. This reaction is indicative of Zapata's desire to finally move the reader's attention away from sex and how it may tangentially inform sexuality and toward a more mainstream version of (same-sex) sexuality that implies idealized, and perhaps even "real" love, however ephemeral or tentative it may be.

Another sexual theme that begins to receive attention with Siete noches junto al mar is that of safer sex. Spreading the word about safer sex has remained an important issue in the gay community since the advent of AIDS more than two decades ago. Zapata now embarks on the issue's campaign trail, and though it fails to reach crusade-level proportions in this novel, it is of note because it is fresh territory for him and Mexican literature. Indeed, that safer sex is for everyone becomes his message. On four separate occasions, which represent, incidentally, a four hundred percent increase in the frequency of references in the other two novels treated in this study, Iván mentions the use of condoms (61, 148, 178, 238). In three of these four

references, the condom is used in relations between men who have anal sex. In the scene where Iván and Armando have sex, it is Armando who brings the condom and lubricant (61). In another incident, Iván is the one who comes prepared for roadside sex with a condom in the glove compartment of his car (178). A scant ten pages before the end of the novel, Iván again dons a condom to have sex with his newly found Jorge, who will become his lover of over a year (239).

The fourth example, however, takes on a different hue. The preceding citations of condom use, however limited in their pertinence to sex between men, move from a "gays-only" point of view on the subject in order to insert it into the straight reader's conscience. Judging from the novel so far one could deduce that condoms are best suited for gay men who engage in anal sex. Indeed, anecdotally speaking, among heterosexuals birth control takes the form of a pill (and not a condom) because it is supposedly more pleasurable for the man.[14] Among heterosexual couples, contracting an STD all too often remains a secondary concern. As a means to counter traditional heterosexual avoidance of the condom, Iván

[14] In a remarkable story that illustrates the resistance to condom use among (too) many in Mexican society, Matthew C. Gutmann tells of a woman who approaches a doctor at a state-run health service in Mexico City for condoms, who is told

recounts the sexual voracity of the Swedes as encountered by his friend on a visit to Stockholm. This is a rare instance of relations between members of the opposite sex in the works of Zapata, wherein we are told that an old woman on the metro eyes an attractive young man, who responds by allowing the woman to casually perform oral sex on him. Though the scene is obviously hyperbolic, it is used as evidence of how uncomplicated an issue sex is in Sweden and of how much sex they really have--after all, no one on the Stockholm metro seems startled at this turn of events. True, the condom makes no appearance here, but the next morning, the same friend of Iván strolls through a park and mistakes piles of used condoms for fallen leaves: "es que de veras eran toneladas de condones usados" (148). Foreigners' strong belief in safer sex for everyone (and not just gays) is, according to Iván, evidence that, "los países nórdicos tenían mucho más libertad sexual que los otros" (148). What Zapata has actually done, though, with the scene on the metro firmly planted in the reader's mind, followed by the image of piles of used condoms, is to link sex between straight people and the prolific use of condoms. Safer sex

---

that "prophylactics are for promiscuous women" and that "condoms are painful for men" (121).

is no longer important to just gay men, and should be practiced, like it supposedly is in Swedish society, by all.

Another example of how Siete noches junto al mar makes typically gay concerns break into a larger social arena is Zapata's treatment of AIDS. In one exchange between two of Zapata's narrators the reader is reminded that this is an age whose sexually-transmitted diseases are not always curable:

> -- ... es como cuando le hablas a un cuate médico y le dices que un amigo tuyo tiene gonorrea, que qué sería bueno que tomara.
>
> --Exactamente, mi adorado.
>
> --Aunque eso era antes, cuando aún había enfermedades venéreas que se podían curar.
>
> --¡Ay, horror! (original emphasis 148-49)

There is little doubt that AIDS has caused a change in thinking of all STDs as curable, and is the reason behind the "ay, horror" remark. The lack of a marker for gender with regard to AIDS in this passage is indicative of Zapata's hope that the disease can be dislodged from an exclusively gay frame of reference and to universalize it to the point that it becomes everyone's concern.

In conclusion, the reader who has journeyed with Zapata through more than twenty years of writing will have doubtless witnessed some defining and difficult moments in the gay rights movement. At least according to Zapata's fiction, these moments, rooted in a perceived difference that finds its expression in sexuality, can mostly be relinquished to the past. Gays are now so tightly woven into the larger social tapestry that a definition of any individual based on the gender of his/her object of desire is now supplementary information--not unimportant, but rather, secondary to--daily existence.

Zapata's portrayal of this daily existence, however, still appears to be somehow always characterized by an abundance of sex, ephemeral relationships, drug abuse and psychological dysfunction. In El vampiro de la colonia Roma, as a result of Adonis' being used and abused (sexually), and his own drug and alcohol abuse, there is a descent into despair and disillusionment with the world; in En jirones, Sebastián is forced to leave the city and is perhaps permanently psychologically damaged from his relationship with A. On the surface, one could surmise that Zapata's body of work does not seem very hopeful for a

happy existence for gay people. In Siete noches junto al mar, nothing more than surface-level anecdotes are presented that, when they do feature a gay character, seem to feature sex at the same time. Nonetheless, it does not obsessively treat same-sex relations, and there is a discernible alteration in gaze, away from titillation and toward irony and humor which more subtly implies an evolving sophistication in narrative technique. This is not to say that titillation is the primary impetus behind the sex in El vampiro de la colonia Roma or En jirones. Instead, we have only in this most recent novel become armed, by the gay character himself, with the key to interpreting every one of Zapata's sexual scenes--alone they can be repetitive and even "boring", but under a different lens, they imply larger subjects like sexuality and gender role, safer sex and existence as a whole. Indeed, his work, far from implying a pessimistic future for his gay characters, simply shows that the human condition is so complex and so inextricably linked to what is essentially a depraved world that gays, as an example of those living in the margins, can hardly help living a life

that is fraught with hardship--especially when the average heterosexual suffers similarly.

Chapter Two

José Joaquín Blanco: Homophobia: The Root of Urban Social (Dis)order and Reconstruction

HAVING PUBLISHED LITERARY CRITICISM (Crónica de la poesía mexicana reciente, Retratos con paisaje, La paja en el ojo, Las intensidades corrosivas, Letras al vuelo, Se llamaba Vasconcelos: una evocación literaria), literary history [(Crónica de la literatura reciente en México (1950-1980), La literatura en la Nueva España: Conquista y Nuevo Mundo)], essays [(José Revueltas, Función de medianoche, Cuando todas las chamacas se pusieron medias de nylon, Un chavo bien helado, Los mexicanos se pintan solos, Se visten novias (somos insuperables)], novels (La vida es larga y además no importa, Las púberes canéforas, Calles como incendios, Mátame y verás), short stories (Otra vez la playa, El castigador) and poetry (La ciudad tan personal, La siesta en el parque), José Joaquín Blanco is regarded by Mexicans as a prolific and skilled writer whose easy movement between literary genres is always impressive.[1] Furthermore, Blanco has become a cultural icon: his writing has come to represent the Mexican condition and responses to

it to such an extent that he is frequently grouped with such culturally significant writers representative of the Mexican voice as Salvador Novo, Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes. The two novels to be treated in this chapter, Las púberes canéforas and Mátame y verás, examine the plagues of violence and homophobia and their relationship in modern Mexico.

The term 'homophobia' is described by Byrne Fone to mean "fear and dislike of homosexuality and of those who practice it", which he believes may be based on the notion that "homosexuality and homosexuals disrupt the sexual and gender order supposedly established by what is often called natural law" (5). Fone's assertion that homophobia is "the last acceptable prejudice" (411) is rooted in the discourse endorsed by those who seek its legitimation through religion, science and the law (411-416).

This homophobia too frequently erupts into violence against gays: arguably, those who exact physical retribution on homosexuals 1) are trying to stamp out homosexuality in an effort to purge their subconscious of its own homoerotic inclinations which, in turn, they perceive as sinful or

---

[1] I am largely indebted to Miguel G. Rodríguez Lozano's essay, "La prosa liberadora de José Joaquin Blanco" for the bibliography I reproduce here.

socially unacceptable or 2) are irrationally fearful of a way of being that is so different from their own sphere of experience they feel it must be eradicated in order to eliminate their anxiety. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick affirms this violence-inducing reality in her Epistemology of the Closet when she says,

> men enter into adult masculine entitlement only through acceding to the permanent threat that the small space they have cleared for themselves on this terrain may always, just as arbitrarily and with just as much justification, be foreclosed. The result ... is, first, the acute manipulability, through the fear of one's own "homosexuality," of acculturated men; and second, a reservoir of potential for violence caused by the self-ignorance that this regime constitutively enforces. (186)

Among the recent cases of violence brought on by homophobia resulting from what Sedgwick Kosofsky terms "self-ignorance" are the beating death in November 1999 of Aaron Webster in Vancouver, British Columbia at the hands of at least three assailants armed with baseball bats and pool cues; the July

1999 murder at Fort Campbell, Kentucky of Private Barry Winchell by a fellow soldier; and Matthew Shepard's beating, abandonment and subsequent death in October 1999 in Wyoming--the culminating, pathetic example of how grotesquely homophobia and violence are commonly linked.[2]

The Webster, Winchell and Shepard cases in the United States and Canada are representative of sexuality-related hate crime. They also belong to the category of violent crimes in general, so it stands to reason that, where there is more violent crime there will be more sexuality-related hate crimes. When we consider, therefore, that in 1991 Mexico's incidence of generally violent crimes was 17.2 per 100,000 while the year before, that of the US was only 9.8 per 100,000, violent crime against sexual minorities must be an even greater concern.[3] The importance of eradicating homophobia, then, takes on especially strong overtones in Mexico, for, if Mexicans can collectively stamp out the kind of intolerance generated by hatred of homosexuality and, by extension, gays, that seems to spawn violence, this will

---

[2] These, certainly, are not the only instances of violence exacted against people solely because of their sexuality and the threat that others perceive it to be, but rather just some of the most horrifying in recent memory. Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky has even said, "There is reason to believe that gay-bashing is the most common and most rapidly increasing among what are becoming legally known as bias-related or hate-related crimes in the United States" (1990: 18).

begin to eliminate violence more generally, eventually leading to a more pacific and livable society. Las púberes canéforas, Blanco's 1983 novel, supports a gay civil rights agenda because it makes good sense for everyone--advocating the elimination of homophobia and violence against homosexuals would mean a less violent society for all concerned. Las púberes canéforas is a highly socially-motivated novel which advocates a message of acceptance and takes an unambiguously oppositional stance as regards homophobic discourse.

We must note here, however that there exists a curious contradiction. Blanco's premise that violence and homophobia are related and, therefore, that the latter must be eliminated does not prevent him from drawing the surprising conclusion later in his career (Mátame y verás) that homophobia is probably a necessary (and helpful) phase for the proper development of trust and acceptance between heterosexuals and homosexuals that will, in turn, lead to a more accepting society.

Las púberes canéforas

---

[3] United Nations in Prieur, 2.

In Blanco's 1983 novel, Las púberes canéforas, homophobia leads to violence against the gay prostitute, Felipe. Felipe is brutally beaten on the street and then kidnapped along with one of the novel's secondary characters, Claudia, who is accidentally shot and killed. Felipe's captors drive to the countryside in order to dump Claudia's body, and, presumably, once he is dispatched, to do likewise with Felipe. The novel opens with Felipe's abandonment in the wide-open expanse of the Mexican backwoods. Since the novel is narrated in reverse chronological order from this climactic scene, not unlike Gabriel García Márquez' Crónica de una muerte anunciada, the events leading up to Felipe's abduction are told after the moment the reader knows his fate. The level of detectable homophobia mounts as each piece of the puzzle snaps into place up until the novel's close.

Though Felipe's captors ultimately release him, it is not until much later in the novel that he reappears. The intervening hundred or so pages do contain passages with reference to Felipe (Guillermo receives a call from Felipe's father who tells him that he has checked into a hospital with serious injuries; Felipe's fixations, beauty and

foibles are also itemized). These details are all largely noted by an external, unobtrusive narrator. Felipe, however, is never really present at the moment of these recollections--the narration simply attempts to fill the gaps between Felipe's beating and his reappearance, so that the threatening situation in which Felipe will find himself may be better understood.

Chapter Seven is the focal point of the novel since it is where the details preceding the actual attack are supplied. This chapter develops as follows: Felipe and Analía (a female prostitute with whom he merely shares an apartment) attend a show at the Bingo-Bango club (whose entertainment includes a transvestite component). Analía and another woman are harassed in the bathroom by two bodyguards ("guaruras"), who in turn beat Martínez, one of the Bingo Bango's patrons. More bodyguards are dispatched to quell the brawl and Martínez leaves the bar (96), whereupon he vomits next to a black Dart (a kind of automobile). Martínez' only importance in the novel, therefore, is to draw the reader's attention to this vehicle, since it is the same black Dart that conveys Claudia's corpse and Felipe to the countryside.[4]

---

[4] It is unclear if the Dart's driver comes looking for Felipe or for Analía--Felipe is the first one to be assaulted, but Analía is the one first forced

The reader is thereby informed that Felipe's and Analía's two eventual attackers are already at hand in the bar.

Once in the countryside where the (living) Felipe and Claudia's corpse are driven (which is actually the first page of the novel), the kidnappers/killers are described in the following way: one is "Un hombre grande, robusto, grasoso, empapado de sudor" (11); and the other is "un muchacho hermoso, alto, con facciones muy claras y cierta elegancia campesina", (11) who is also described later as "moreno con hermosas facciones indígenas" (29). Felipe takes notice of the appearance of these bodyguards in the Bingo-Bango, and

> Al día siguiente, al buscar noticias sobre la muerte de Claudia, Felipe encontraría a esos mismos rostros en los periódicos, en fotografías de campaña electoral, muy alejados de la sección policíaca ... En una foto de primera plana ... incluso distinguiría al muchacho hermoso, de rostro aindiado y voz dulce, volteando con aprehensión hacia la izquierda y llevando la mano

---

into the vehicle. Claudia, a wholly underdeveloped character, winds up paying the ultimate price of losing her life merely because she goes to the aid of Analía in the street when the Dart shows up and its occupants stir up trouble.

> derecha hacia el lugar de la pistola, bajo el cinturón, precisamente junto al propio senador. (86)

This combination prolepsis/analepsis has the effect of already pointing the finger of guilt at the two men who have only just recently entered the bar.

These soon-to-be attackers are protégés of a violent master--el Senador Domínguez, who "se había hecho famoso en su carrera burocrática por su mano dura contra movimientos populares y trabajadores subversivos ... Su verdadera carrera había consistido en usar golpeadores y lúmpenes desamparados, para infiltrar y romper huelgas" (87). Domínguez serves as a model of the kind of corruption and violence that has been part of Mexican history for decades, even centuries. A few lines before this description, in the picture Felipe observes in the newspaper, the bodyguards of the senator appear in front of a national flag and its crest while presiding over the scene of three shooting victims of an ill-fated strike (86). This act of violence (and others like it) against the striking Mexican workers who "eran su verdadero ejercicio político" (88), therefore, inculpates one of the highest officials of the land (the senator

himself) and his bodyguards. By extension, a nation that would allow such atrocities, signaled by the presence of the national colors, is likewise guilty of the violence.[5] It is immediately after this strike is quelled with a rain of bullets that the senator and his men, now charged with violent energy, enter the Bingo-Bango to be further excited by images of naked and half-naked women (and men imitating women) (89).

Amidst this feverish atmosphere Felipe is caught up in the whirlwind of excitement and falls prey to the homophobic bodyguards. Their "inquietud carnal bullente, ... ávida de estallar en violencia" (91) fuels the inevitable disaster. Ironically, Felipe is escorted to the Senator's table. We notice the description, by now familiar to the reader, given of the bodyguard "[Felipe] sintió una mano en la rodilla. Era la de uno de los hombres del senador--grande, robusto, grasoso, empapado en sudor, de unos cuarenta y tantos años" (96 emphasis added). These are almost the exact words used on the first page of the novel to describe Felipe's attacker, so that in detective novel fashion, the reader is

[5] The axiom that both governed and governor are to blame in Spanish America for much of the violence and human rights abuses is even at the center of Miguel Ángel Asturias' seminal El Señor Presidente (1955).

shown the fate-determined path to chaos Felipe follows. The ensuing dialogue between Felipe and his eventual captor and brutalizer segues into Felipe's beating thanks to homophobia:

> --¿Y qué, tú eres uno de esos, de ésos, así, como la Cacahuata?
>
> --¿De ésos cómo?--dijo Felipe muy agrio.
>
> --Pues homocsesuales [sic], ¿eres de ésos? ... ¿pues cuánto cobras?--dirigiéndose al jovencito aindiado que estaba junto a él, su compañero--, ¿pues qué no te gusta el chamaquito éste, está bonito, no?
>
> --A eso no le entro--dijo el otro, sonriendo, sirviéndose otro presidencola.
>
> --Aquí se le entra a todo--dijo el hombre--yo le he entrado a todo en la vida, conozco de todo, tengo experiencia de todo, y en este palo han dejado las nalgas, uta, el resto de pendejos que se sentían muy machitos y alborotadores; su madriza y su cogida, por pendejos; pero aquí con el joven no es por

violencia, sino por placer, mira nomás su pielecita ...

--Ahora--le seguía diciendo a su compañero--, si de veras no quieres meterte con putos ["faggots"], pues no lo hagas ni una vez. Si una sola vez te coges a uno, ya te jodiste: nada es como el culo de un pinche puto, y uno se acostumbra. Yo empecé a mayatear [to be the active sex partner with another man] y me quedé acostumbrado. Y una cosa sí te digo: sólo las putas muy viejas ... te dan la cama que un puto con miedo, o cualquier macho que le papalotee el culo de miedo: un culo durito (apretado, de macho) ¿y tú mi buen [sic], pues cuánto cobras? (96-7)

It is at this point that Felipe excuses himself from the very uncomfortable situation of being intimidated with the obligation to have sex (for money) with the senator's bodyguard. This conversation explains why retribution is unleashed on Felipe with such ferocity--first of all, the bodyguard has tipped his hand. He has admitted in front of his violence-bent comrades-in-arms that he has a

predilection for young, fit men--an inclination that his friend does not apparently share, as evidenced by his comment "A eso no le entro". What is interesting is that the first man does not retract his statement that he likes men. Rather, the tactic he follows is that he has sex with putos ("faggots"), apart from the fact that he likes it, because it is a way to intimidate the men he handles for the senator: "en este palo han dejado las nalgas, uta, el resto de pendejos que se sentían muy machitos y alborotadores; su madriza y su cogida, por pendejos".[6] Here, the bodyguard's rationale for his desire for men is that he teaches them a lesson by beating them and sexually dominating them--two acts that in the animal world, of which human beings must be considered members, teach subordinates the established pecking order.

There is an inconsistency in this rationale, though: his use of the term "mayatear" undermines his power trip justification. The term means to play the active insertor role with another man, but more specifically, it is a term that is rarely used by a heterosexual. Therefore, at the

[6] This phrase is replete with Mexicanisms, and for the purposes of facilitating understanding, it can be paraphrased as: "lots of jerks who thought themselves quite the macho troublemaker left their asses on this dick; their beating and a screw, for being a jerk".

same time, the bodyguard tries to disavow his own homosexuality while employing a term used primarily within the gay community. His unsuccessful attempt at distancing himself from homosexuals for the sake of his less sexually-experienced bodyguard friend in essence confirms that he is probably gay himself. The aggressor says that he wants to have sex with Felipe not out of violence, but out of "pleasure"--pleasure Felipe rightfully distrusts, given the bodyguard's violent inclinations, since, in the bodyguard's estimation, pleasure may in reality suggest pain for Felipe. Indeed, it is most probably this inadvertent admission by the bodyguard and his desire to reassert the power that Felipe has challenged that precipitates Felipe's beating. At the same time, however, it could be inferred that the two come looking for Analía and not Felipe, since it is she who has made trouble for the group of bodyguards in the rough-housing scene between them and Martínez. It is more likely, though, given the attention that Blanco lavishes on the conversation between Felipe and the bodyguard, that Felipe is, in fact, the cause of the awaiting retribution. Felipe rebuffs him by slinking out of the club under the guise of having to use the bathroom; thus, the bodyguard feels

compelled to defend himself against 1) the implication that he is gay and 2) Felipe's rejection of him.

We know from page one that the bodyguard eventually finds Felipe that evening in the street and exacts the violence that homophobia causes, but exactly how the attacker is able to be labeled homophobic needs to be explained. In the first place, his initial mispronunciation of "homosexual" as "homocsesual", hints at the fact that he is poorly educated (or at least inebriated). Ignorance immediately makes one vulnerable to the alluring slogans and rhetoric of homophobic discourse. If one has not learned to recognize that different expressions of sexuality are as valid as the 'mainstream one', a taboo on less conventional modes of sexuality arises. The taboo leads to curiosity, and any pleasurable experience gleaned from a taboo will cause guilt. Experience tells us that a negligible amount of psychological exertion is needed to transmute guilt into rage. Though killing Felipe would seem the ultimate punishment, the bodyguard knows from past experience that 'making an example out of him' provides something more valuable and enduring--a deterrent to aspersions on his character. In fact, Felipe's testimonial to other men about

the senator's bodyguards will accomplish the additional task of 'proving' that they are not sissies. The bodyguard's individual act of vengeance, and others like it, will have a cumulative social effect, too: social insurgents (like the novel's strikers who are terrorized by the senator's henchmen) and homosexuals alike will know their place and remain underground.

Another consideration in the bodyguard's homophobia is the endorsement of stereotypes, which are often a source of homophobic discourse. One stereotypical notion is that anal sex is more intense for the active-insertor partner. The statement made by the guard who tries to seduce Felipe that, "si de veras no quieres meterte con putos, pues no lo hagas ni una vez. Si una sola vez te coges a uno, ya te jodiste: nada es como el culo de un pinche puto, y uno se acostumbra,"[7] implies that the active-insertor role with men is even more enjoyable than the same position with women, apparently because the sensation for the insertor is more intense. Whether this more intense sensation is due to the high level of gratification associated with the taboo nature of 'gay sex' or that which the bodyguard himself gleans from

[7] Emphasis added.

his uniquely violent brand of it is not certain, but the implication is also that the physiological difference in the "culo de un pinche puto" makes it highly enjoyable.

When Felipe does finally reappear, it is to participate in a gay nightclub spectacle in which young male prostitutes are auctioned to those in attendance. He is presented to the participants in royal fashion on a litter, but his leg is in a cast and his body bears other marks of his violent beating: "la pierna izquierda, enyesada hasta la punta del pie y una franja vertical de parchecitos adhesivos en parte de la columna, no hacían sino resaltar sus gestos saludables, la sonrisa franca, casi jubilosa". The image here is one of triumph and exultation. The suffering and survival of Felipe make him more attractive to "los hombres borrachos o medio borrachos, travestistas o musculosos, afeminados o sobremasculinizados [que] miraron la aparición con algún sobresalto: el amor, el sexo, el cuerpo en lo que tenía de florecimiento y desamparo, de mutilación y de fragilidad rebeldes, de caída y resurgimiento". The comment that, "La pierna enyesada hacía más amorosa la figura, y más altivo a Felipe, que parecía surgir del yeso como remontando el vuelo" reinforces the majestic, almost mythical

proportions of his reentry (141). Felipe's phoenix-like quality described in this last passage simulates Resurrection triumphalism: Felipe has seen the underbelly of violence born out of homophobia, lives to tell about it, and is revered for his victory.

Felipe is not the only gay character in the novel who is physically mistreated for his sexual orientation. La Gorda, a close (male) friend of Guillermo,[8] encounters the police as he emerges from the steam rooms of one of Mexico City's public bathhouses. Typically, according to La Gorda, fellow clients with whom one has had relations inside the bathhouse, lie in wait outside and "agolpaban en torno al cliente, exigiéndole violentamente propinas y pagos absurdos" (147). The unsuspecting client feels vulnerable to disclosure of his sexuality to authorities or family by the lovers-come-thieves and succumbs to their demands out of fear. Neither of the two parties does anything to combat what is, at its core, homophobia: the would-be attackers take advantage of society's dislike of homosexuals and their fear of exposure; nor do the victims report the violence. Likewise, the victim does not heroically fight back in a

[8] Guillermo will be discussed later in this section. He is the 'writer' of Las púberes canéforas and the forty-something lover of the teenaged Felipe.

symbolically rebellious gesture against the homophobia that allows such an attack to occur in the first place.

La Gorda (a gay male), however, is spared the bandits outside the bathhouse, and instead, falls ironically into the custody of the equally dangerous Mexican police. La Gorda's moral invective against them before their actual arrival on the scene (a foreshadowing move on Blanco's part) is a common complaint among everyday Mexicans: "La figura del policía ... le fascinaba a la Gorda ... no hemos podido crear sino dos tipos de mexicanos que con frecuencia son lo mismo: el político y el policía, el arte de hacer ilegalidad de la ley y delincuencia del orden público" (146).[9] Once "en la calle [donde] siempre est[á] el peligro de la policía" (147), the police threaten him with arrest for "cog[er] en los baños con menores de edad" (148)--a fact left uncorroborated even by the text. Their objective, like that of the client-turned-thief, is merely to extort a generous bribe from la Gorda. La Gorda, however, is the hitherto nonexistent noble figure alluded to above who locks swords with homophobia:

---

[9] For further comment on this assertion, consult Trejo Fuentes's work, La muerte enmascarada: el D.F. de noche--it is a veritable chronicle of police misdeeds.

> La Gorda quedó petrificado ... Pasaron velozmente en su memoria episodios de homosexuales apedreados en baldíos, degollados en pequeños departamentos o aparecidos en cualquier calle, asesinados, con la mandíbula desencajada a tiros. Guillermo le había hablado del mito de San Sebastián, penetrado por flechazos en todo el cuerpo desnudo, que se contorsionaba a cada impacto en una agonía que reproducía los espasmos del placer final. La Gorda pudo haberse puesto servil y amable, como otras veces, y pagar la extorsión; o sacar la falsa credencial de policía judicial ... Pero en algún momento se llegaba al final de la calle, a la consumación de un destino. Quizás el suyo empezaba en ese volkswagen café, sin placas, con la portezuela abierta, que estaba junto (147-8).

La Gorda envisions his impending act of resistance as a striking change of his past behavior in comparable circumstances. The Christ-like figure he sees, San Sebastián, accepts violation and indignity for a higher cause. La Gorda's likening himself to San Sebastián makes him a symbol of martyrdom for the cause of eliminating

homophobia. The mention of the police's "volkswagen café", like the earlier insistence on the "Dart negro", reminds us of the respective fates of Felipe and Claudia. La Gorda will, at best, only be brutalized and released in the wilderness (like Felipe). At worst, he will be killed (like Claudia).

Irene, Guillermo's ex-wife, in contrast, is an example of how her own case of mild or unconscious homophobia may not always lead to dire consequences. At the Bingo-Bango, where Felipe makes his triumphal entrance/reappearance, Irene comments on the festive atmosphere, saying:

> nunca había imaginado que el medio gay fuera tan elegante, tan libre, tan lleno de estilo y de gracia; tantos hombres guapos, y qué ingenio, qué capacidad para divertirse generosamente, con una fraternidad y calidez que no hacía sino contrastar con los antros agresivos de tanto macho torpe y puritano. No había gente más hermosa y amable que los homosexuales, decía; y a partir de ese momento hacía propia su causa. (135)

The gala environment is the reason for her present elation, despite her own tendency to attribute it to the generous,

fun-loving 'nature' (read: 'innate quality') of gay men whose attractiveness seems to be just as intrinsic. She compares this benign gala milieu to her own experience in more dangerous, heterosexual nightclubs. That she is not an object of desire here frees her from the fear that she will be bothered, or worse. This heretofore unknown, 'marvelous' world has captivated her, and she has, according to the narrator, "made their [the homosexuals'] cause her own". Irene as fledgling 'fag-hag,' or a woman who exults in the presence of 'fabulous' gay men is emblematic of a kind of homophobia whose roots are more treacherous than meets the eye. Irene is beguiled by what gay men represent: they are at once unattainable, beautiful and affable all at the same time.[10] Her reifying gaze has the effect of exoticizing gay men and their supposed inherently good qualities. She fails to realize that there are two forces at work: she still sees gay men as 'other', and by extension, inferior in their difference--in this case sexual difference. Their generally observable positive qualities, however, enable her to sublimate difference, idealizing or stereotyping these

[10] After all, Irene is divorced from Guillermo, though the reader is not told if his homosexuality is the cause.

positive characteristics. Homophobia, therefore, is able to masquerade as apparent beneficence.

This last point is not, however, lost on the gay men in attendance: "se burlaban discretamente de ella; o se retiraban, hartos de ser objeto de admiración o de compasión de mujeres liberales ... que venían a sus fiestas con la curiosidad de quien iba al zoológico o a los circos de la niña-tortuga o el muchacho-serpiente" (135). Irene's condescending exoticism, though, is manifestly different from the homophobia of the bodyguard, his companion or the police: at the party she feels drawn to the gay men in attendance because they are fun-loving and good-looking. In other words, they are innocuous because of a stereotype that allows her to view them as an exotic curiosity. Unlike that of the bodyguard or police, Irene's homophobia leads to good acts ("making their cause her own"), but the good-natured aphorism, "if you can't beat them, join them" reminds us to "beware of wolves in sheep's clothing". That is to say, though the bodyguard is violent and Irene is ostensibly admiring, their respective attitudes are still both underpinned by homophobia.

Another kind of homophobia that appears on the surface as having well-meaning intentions is contained in an essay by the Mexican critic, Ignacio Trejo Fuentes. His provocative book of essays, La fiesta y la muerte enmascarada: el Distrito Federal de noche, catalogues the nightlife of the Mexican capital, stunning his readers with socially-motivated essays that continually note the level of violence meted out amid the environs of the megalopolis by either inebriated motorists, licentious solicitors of prostitution, or even the police themselves. Though the essays generally defend the less fortunate and marginalized sectors of Mexican society, the author at times indicts both the causes and effects of the marginalization. The victims (drug users, alcoholics, homosexuals) are (inadvertently?) accused alongside the perpetrators (indirectly, the country's bureaucracy, staggering debt and subsequent poverty; and directly, the police). For example, his comments about prison inmates in Mexico, instead of decrying the deplorable conditions under which they live, imply a stereotype of promiscuity among gays, thereby fueling a homophobia that is already rampant:

> (... Si su salida no es posible de inmediato, les dan los alimentos de la noche y los hacen bañarse y les asignan una celda con otros de los recién llegados. A las diez de la noche se apagan las luces y empiezan las largas horas de zozobra ... En otras áreas del penal, también a esa hora, empieza la 'fiesta' nocturna de los presos, donde suceden cosas de distinto nivel, como el amor homosexual, el consumo de drogas, la planeación de fugas, venganzas, muertes que cobija la noche y sólo se pueden ver con la muerte de ésta, cuando el día nace ...) (66)

His intention is not to legitimate prejudice, but the effect of the previous quote does just that. By equating the coming of dark and fearful night with "cosas de distinto nivel", which include "el amor homosexual", we are to understand that it is to be abhorred. Trejo Fuentes further incriminates homosexuality by placing it on the same level as drug consumption and revenge. His initial effort to defend the defenseless, like Irene's own efforts, is erased by his own prejudice.

It has become apparent that overt homophobia in Las púberes canéforas leads to violence. How homophobia comes from outside as well as from inside the gay community can be explained by further examining this novel. Las púberes canéforas, though authored by Blanco, is, in turn, the record of Guillermo's intermittent novelistic enterprise.[11] Guillermo is a frustrated writer, described as a forty-something man who "vivía de un desahogado puesto burocrático de mediana importancia" who opines that, "La vida de un homosexual incluía largas caminatas y largos episodios de soledad" (21). From the very beginning of the novel, therefore, one of the main characters, who is gay himself, accepts the stereotype that being gay entails solitude, loneliness and lack of family. No other reasons, like the fact that Guillermo is actually an unpleasant and uninteresting character, are proffered for his loneliness. His own words condemn an entire sector of the population, of which he himself is a member, to what is essentially a long and lonely existence. The social psychologist Martin Kantor submits what could serve as an ad hoc pathology of Guillermo's self-homophobia, saying, generally,

[11] What these differing levels of reality and metanarrativity mean and how they are deployed is explored in more detail by Jorge Ruiz Esparza (237-38).

> Gays and lesbians become homophobic when they go along with/identify with hostile or actually homophobic parents, introjecting their critical nonaccepting attitudes toward them, accepting these attitudes as their own, and in turn treating themselves, and other gays and lesbians, just like their parents treated them. (Kantor 55)

Though Kantor uses parents as an example of a prime source of homophobic discourse, there are myriad others. These same "critical, non-accepting attitudes" probably most frequently come from non-relations and easily insert themselves into a psyche. Indeed, once in place, they fester and their victim frequently turns them against him-/herself. Guillermo is such a victim. Kantor has established categories of homophobic gay men and women.[12] It seems plausible to fit Guillermo into the category of a "depressed gay ... self-homophobe [who] see[s] the world not as a pleasant place to live in ... Those who do not like themselves use their homosexuality to explain and justify this self-dislike"

---

[12] Among these categories, Kantor defines hypomanic, dependent, psychopathic, avoidant, narcissistic, histrionic, post-traumatic stress disorder and dissociative gay men and women (58-61). Though some of what Kantor says meets the needs of this dissertation, I feel compelled to note my skepticism about any discipline's ability to delineate human behavior as 'a type'. This is perhaps rooted in my general distrust of any essentialist-oriented theory.

(58). Guillermo's statement very early in the novel that, "La vida de un homosexual incluía largas caminatas y largos episodios de soledad ¿por qué, a partir de lo que el propio Felipe le había contado, que desde luego no siempre sería la verdad, no contarse una historia?" (21) appears to reflect Kantor's "depressed gay self-homophobe". Indeed, Guillermo's self-dislike, as we see in this passage, has prompted him to write stories for himself that are critical of those in his life in order to distract himself from his own miserable existence.

Specifically, criticism of Felipe is how Guillermo's self-homophobia takes on a specific physical form. In chapter three, Guillermo's generally uncharitable outlook yields the following deprecating portrayal of the Mexican capital's gay community, characterized as a: "putería[13] urbana ... , esclava de sensualidades industriales insatisfactibles, del tipo del Apolo industrial que encarna en los modelos de ropa y de los Olimpos extraídos de los comerciales de la televisión" (39). Most gay men are hard-pressed to imagine "puto" and derivatives of it, being used

[13] In Mexico as in other parts of Spanish America, 'puto' means 'fag' while 'puta', the female variation (and more dominant than any male derivation), means 'whore'. Therefore, it is unclear whether Guillermo's use of the term

in anything other than a disparaging context. Likewise, his willingness to use the highly pejorative term "putería" is directly aligned with his own homophobia. His perception is that urban gay men are nothing but consumers trapped in the one-upmanship of a market ideology, typical, he thinks, of an industrializing, modernizing third world nation such as Mexico. Guillermo, "lleno de avidez por ese apogeo corporal de [los] dieciocho años [de Felipe]" (38), comes to realize that his true annoyance with Felipe stems not from the latter's obsession with money and status but rather from his youth. The association, youth=desire for wealth, is a natural one, since a preoccupation with having enough money and the possessions it can buy is typically associated with an immature mentality. Guillermo, though, conflates youth and immaturity, though it is difficult to expect Felipe to act more mature at only eighteen. Guillermo's impulse is to purge Felipe of

> ese estado pleno y animal que durante algunos años hacía de cualquier muchacho ... ángeles industrializados de la ciudad, deportivos, con camisetas y pantalones ajustados a talles de

---

'putería' in reference to Felipe's street-walking activities, means 'fagginess' or 'whoring'--he may, in fact, intend the double meaning.

> gacela; y cierto aire de paseo en sus tenis y en el semblante, al mismo tiempo inocentón y turbio, finalmente un poco aburrido dentro de los placeres de la abundancia de la clase media, con que andaban por las calles ... . (38-9)

This stimulus broadens into a message of intolerance for what Guillermo himself ("cualquier muchacho") must have been in his own youth. Guillermo regrets his lost youth and now "odi[a ...] la superioridad que el deseo ... le daba a Felipe sobre él" (38). A reductive flow-chart helps explain how self-homophobia can be translated into other-directed homophobia, specifically, in the case Guillermo-Felipe:

> Guillermo hates himself for being gay→Guillermo hates gay men in general→hates gay men's 'artificiality'→hates Felipe's artificiality (a gay characteristic)→(coming full-circle) he hates himself for loving someone who represents all that he hates (homosexuality, artificiality).

As mentioned before, the opening scene of the novel finds Felipe in the grip of his captors, isolated by miles of open fields and forest, while the remainder of the narrative primarily traces the events leading up to the beginning of the book. Felipe's aspirations to belong to a higher social class, which will be realized, he thinks, by purchases of successively more costly material goods, are

the object of constant criticism by Guillermo. Guillermo, however, quietly aspires to the youthful appearance of Felipe, despite the twenty years or so that separate them. Guillermo despises Felipe's social aspirations, love of money and the conspicuous consumption that it carries with it. At the same time, Guillermo's desire for Felipe and his (perceived) attendant failings veils the hypocrisy inherent in his invitation to Felipe to live with him.

The intent is not simply to indict Guillermo as homophobic but rather to establish that the impending violence in the novel can stem from the kind of intolerance he exemplifies. Guillermo's self-hatred, manifest in all that he simultaneously represents, despises and aspires to, festers. All the while compelled by his false superiority to other, supposedly more artificial, gay men Guillermo consistently denigrates gay men. These opinions cannot but influence how others view gay men and thereby promote stereotyping, which is nothing but a codification of homophobia. A homophobia that originates from within the gay community itself has an added level of insidiousness: Guillermo's position of relative authority on the subject of homosexuality, which is derived from his identity as a gay

man, effectively establishes critiques of specific individuals (like those of Felipe) as general truths about an entire population. Additionally, his florid, articulate speech style, indicative of a highly-educated person, is enough to convince, or at least confuse, the average person. In short, he sounds intelligent and seems to know what he is talking about, since he himself is gay, so what he says seems be true. The problem is that homophobic comments are highly infectious: once a comment like the ones Guillermo spouts are heard, they self-recapitulate, especially when they come from a authoritative source. Lastly, should those around Guillermo have felt unsure whether homophobic comments were 'prohibited', given an (expected) intolerance of them, their exposure to his own homophobia sanctions theirs, allowing for further displays of it and the violence it will often induce.

Mátame y verás

In sharp contrast to Las púberes canéforas, Mátame y verás (1994) shows homophobia being allowed to flourish between its gay and straight characters.[14] This interplay

[14] Main characters: la Nenuca (or, Rubén)-gym fanatic, engineer by profession, moustached and in good physical shape; el Jirafón-slim, intellectual movie

should lead to more violence--after all, violence is born out of homophobia, according to our rubric. The truth of the matter, though, is that Blanco seems to create an appropriate environment for the expression of homophobia as a means by which members of the two groups--gay and straight--may better come to understand one another. In the novel, Sergio, who is heterosexual, is invited by a college era, gay classmate, Juan/-ito, to go on holiday during Christmas with him and a group of his gay friends. While on retreat, the members of the group regale each other with stories that are peppered with Sergio's homophobic remarks and Juanito's (and his friends') 'anti-heterosexist ones'.[15] Three culminating moments appear in the novel: first, Sergio and Rubén come to blows; second, Sergio and Juan have a similarly violent exchange, and last, Sergio comes into full knowledge of the overall positive experience of the inter-'cultural' retreat. These two brawls are essentially metaphors for violence in Mexican society as a whole. They

---

buff; Aníbal-Juanito's lover and aspiring actor described as, "buen tipo, demasiado espectacular"; Juanito-friend of Sergio from University (all characters in this listing to this point are gay); Sergio-40-something man with three children whose wife, Carmela, is divorcing him for a younger, green-eyed man of foreign extraction. To complicate matters, Sergio and Juanito have had sex when they were together at the University.

[15] Anti-heterosexist remarks are those that counteract homophobia by denigrating straight people and what is their marginalizing, dominant discourse.

suggest that, though there are violent moments that are outgrowths of homophobia in the evolution toward acceptance of homosexuality, the normally long-lasting consequences of them can be mitigated. What is required is an atmosphere that is largely permissive of the expression of differing, and sometimes emotional, points of view.

Far from positing that spreading homophobic discourse is a social panacea, Blanco's Mátame y verás allows homophobia to be expressed in a constructive manner. The methodology of fomenting homophobic discourse to promote dialog seems counterintuitive, and certainly runs counter to an activist stance. When, however, these intolerant opinions are mitigated by and within a group of gay men and one straight man, the effect is to highlight stereotypes, negate them and arrive at new conclusions--in essence, the effect is to defuse the importance of the violent outgrowths normally associated with intolerance. Blanco knows that homophobic opinions exist in Mexican society and is opposed to them (as he revealed in Las púberes canéforas), but to simply dismiss them would be counterproductive to any end game in which homophobia is to be eliminated altogether. Therefore, by acknowledging such remarks himself Blanco

hopes to show how 'disarming' can be done constructively within Mexico itself.

I sustain the notion that this novel is representative of an emerging acquiescence, or retraction of an ideological stance that is militantly pro-gay, in that Las púberes canéforas, a previous work, expressed a much more radical posture. Las púberes canéforas is itself more intolerant of homophobic violence, whereas Mátame y verás is more realistic in its undertaking. By seeking acceptance at the price of an initial period of intolerance, and perhaps violence--something found to be generally unpalatable to the gay rights movement--, Mátame y verás is typical of the evolutionary trajectory of reticence present also in the works of Luis Zapata.

Interestingly, the narrator of this gay novel, Sergio, is heterosexual. This narrative stance, therefore, is different from that of any of the novels by either Zapata or Blanco so far mentioned. Whereas the narrators of Las púberes canéforas, Siete noches junto al mar, En jirones, and El vampiro de la colonia Roma were all gay, the one of Mátame y verás is not. In addition, this narrator is highly homophobic. As a consequence, the novel places Sergio and

his homophobia in a position of privilege, which suggests that Blanco appreciates the importance of the specific elements of homophobic discourse in Mexican society.

From the novel's outset, Sergio's homophobic description of Juanito sets him up as the intolerant counterpoint to Juanito's eccentricity:

> Entonces me encontré por azar ... al maricón de Juanito, Juan Jacomé ... un dandy el cabrón como envuelto para regalo él mismo, rozagante, relajado, perfumado, como nuevecito, con ropa de sport de firma ... Más meneado que odalisca de cabaret, el cabrón. ¿Te acuerdas del maricón de Juanito, de Juan Jacomé? Ése, el putito-qué putito ni qué putito: putazo ... (15-16)

More than just the use of the pejorative terms "puto" and "maricón" identifies Sergio as a homophobe: the supposedly eccentric way in which Juanito dresses makes Sergio uncomfortable enough to remark on it. This implies how sensitive Sergio is to markers of effeminacy (a supposed trait of the homosexual). These markers are perceived as threatening by Sergio, because, as was mentioned earlier in this chapter, Sedgwick believes that "'homosexual panic' ...

refers to the supposed uncertainty about [one's] own sexual identity" (1990: 20). The initial identification of Juan as homosexual and a description which suggests effeminacy ("dandy ... rozagante, relajado, perfumado", etc.) are countered by Sergio in a masculine description of himself before he actually embarks on his odyssey:

> Y ahí me voy, con mi mochila ... sin rasurar (un poco para distinguirme de los maricones, ¿no?, ya ves que ellos siempre andan atildadísimos ...) en un coche lleno de jotos [effeminate man who takes the insertee sexual role], ora sí que la nave de las locas, ah. (26)

Sergio is obviously sensitive to the cultural markers that are supposedly indicative of 'the homosexual', and feels that his manly stubble, in comparison to the close-shaven countenance of the "maricón", should be sufficient to dispel any misconceptions about his own sexuality.

The following passage deepens the image of Sergio as a homophobe, emphasizing his homosexual panic: "Te diré que al principio tenía mis recelos. Uno nunca sabe qué armas se gastan estos tipos. [... S]í parece que los putos todo el tiempo sí andan queriendo cualquier cosa con cualquiera"

(55). Of note here, though, is how Sergio admits a slightly mitigated stance directly after what is an essentially homophobic statement: "Bueno, me siento un poco ridículo cuando pienso esto" (55). Apparently, the longer he is with Juanito, et al, the easier it is for him to imagine their 'normalcy'. Though intolerant comments are numerous and varied, the free expression of these comments in an atmosphere allows Sergio an incremental diminution of his homophobia.

Sergio's homophobia is more complicated and concrete than he would admit. While still at University, Juan, Sergio, Norma (Sergio's girlfriend at the time), and several other people go on a camping excursion, and because Sergio's girlfriend refuses his sexual advances, he takes a compliant Juanito into the brush, where Juanito assumes the passive-insertee sexual position for both anal and oral sex (19, 20). In a telling passage directed at an unknown narratee,[16] Sergio highlights his somewhat out-of-date, though typical views on sexuality, and perfunctorily justifies his actions:

> ¿Te acuerdas [... de] Cempoala? [... E]sa vez a quien me cogí fue al Juanito. No me salgas con

[16] At this point in the novel, the use of the deictic 'tú' has not yet been clarified.

> teorías de bisexualidad ni pendejadas por el estilo, que en esa época ni existían. El dilema entonces era estar o no estar bien caliente. ... Fue un coito seco, sin caricias ni nada: pues tampoco, ¿qué te crees? Uno bien caliente pero bien acá. Me la mamó, se la metí, me vine y se acabó. (19-20)

Sergio dismisses any notion that he may possess latent feelings of homoeroticism, choosing, rather, to emphasize a libido that simply craved slaking. Sergio would rather the narratee not infer any same-sex desire despite his having had sex with Juanito. It is this kind of homosexual panic, or fear that others will perceive one is gay (more generally, 'paranoia'), that can lead to violence against sexual minorities. Blanco seems to be suggesting here that such paranoia on the part of heterosexuals is counterproductive, that sexuality covers a continuum of behavior and, in the long run, differences between homo- and heterosexuality will (should) be erased if we are to eliminate violence against sexual minorities at its root. The fact that Sergio denies any link between homosexual relations and same-sex desire implies that he represents the

prevailing homophobia that needs to be redirected in contemporary Mexico toward more productive ends.

After this encounter, back at the University, Sergio attempts to further distance himself from "putos" by telling us that he would even punch them in the face:

> El Juanito me rondaba por la universidad, discreto, nomás con los ojos, como diciéndome: "yo contigo como quieras cuando quieras, nomás di", y a mí me daba coraje: lo trataba mal, le quería romper el hocico. [... N]o se me fuera a hacer costumbre, ah; y no le fuera a ir con el chisme a Carmela, ya ves que los putos son re chismosos ... (22)

Sergio's hypersensitivity to matters of sexuality are of greater concern than his overall dismissive tone and subsequent statement: "Que cojan con quien quieran, por donde quieran" (44) would imply. The earlier situation in which Sergio says that neither bisexuality "ni pendejadas del estilo" even existed during his university days, has been replaced by one of terror--terror of the mythical, inherent manipulabi-lity/blackmailability of heterosexual men by gay men, for Juanito could easily spread the gossip

of his 'gay tryst' in the wilds of Mexico to Sergio's new wife. Needless to say, an infidelity with Juanito against the backdrop of homophobically-infused Mexican society might cause Carmela to be doubly troubled.

Sergio's denial of a link between his sexual compulsions and a proscribed sexual orientation is less important than the anxiety (or, "homosexual panic"/will to violence) that results from the suggestive power of his choice of a male-gendered sexual partner (regardless of frequency). He cannot, because of society's prejudice against homosexuality, risk being identified as homosexual himself. In this passage, the fact that he feels capable and even desirous of "romperle el hocico" suggests Sergio's will to defend his masculinity is similar in potency to the anonymous bodyguard's pummeling of Felipe in Las púberes canéforas.

Homophobia, as signaled earlier by Kantor, can originate in one's parents just as easily as in a stranger. As proof, we observe Juanito's own mother. It is not that she disapproves of her son's sexual preference. In contrast to many in Mexican society who do believe it to be reprehensible that two men should engage in sexual activity

together, "La mamá de Juanito [...] no encuentra nada malo en los jotos. Hacen más o menos lo mismo que la gente normal" (124). She senses homophobia emanating from others and is boastful of her (relative) lack of prejudice as it pertains to gay men ("jotos"). However, her highly homophobic remarks concerning lesbians attenuates what, until now, we could call her 'liberalism':

> A quienes no tolera es a las lesbianas, por absurdas: todas son unas insolentes, y tontas, y maleducadas. Que a final de cuentas sólo se hacen pendejas, porque ellas ni trastienda [anal sex] ni nada:
>
> --A ver, nada más explícame, si tienes la bondad: ¿cuál de las manfloras le hace a la otra algo que, digamos, valga la pena? Nada más que la tortilla, que el dedo, que la lengua. Nada más se andan por las ramas, se hacen pendejas ... Por eso luego andan de puro hociconas. (124-5)

It is difficult to postulate how the acceptance of gay men could be dissociated from the acceptance of lesbians. Nonetheless, what the quotation shows is that "machista" sentiment present in Mexican society--a society that values

penetration and the power it connotes (after all, Octavio Paz wrote an entire essay about the socio-semantic might of the term, "chingar" and resultant lexical forms)--is capable of drawing a distinction between what are, in essence, two components of the issue of acceptance.

Blanco, as we have seen in Las púberes canéforas, rarely inculpates one sector of society for the propagation of homophobic discourse to the exclusion of others. Though his usual method places heterosexuals in the homophobe and persecutor role, if we remember Guillermo from Las púberes canéforas, Blanco has implicated gays in their own mistreatment. According to Blanco, the homophobia in Mexican society is due to its presence in both the heterosexual and gay communities. In the following excerpt from Mátame y verás, Juanito (i.e., a gay man) seems to 'understand' why his women friends from University would not want him present at their weddings or even in their lives thereafter:

> [Juanito]: Tampoco las otras me invitaron a sus casamientos ...
>
> [Sergio]: Bueno, también entiéndelas, Juanito: se hacen de nuevas responsabilidades, quieren parecer respetables ...

> [Juanito]: Y peor cuando tienen niños, ¡pues cómo van a querer un maricón cerca! (23)

It is unclear whether Juanito's exclamation actually confirms or mocks Sergio's assertion that the women must "want to appear respectable". In fact, Juanito seemingly recognizes two standing prejudices: the fallacy that homosexuals can somehow magically 'project' their own sexuality onto children and on the other hand that their sexual molestation of youth is a common pastime. Nonetheless, his recognition lacks the radical tone of outcry of the political activist against such groundless notions. Though Juanito desires some level of inclusion by his friends, his acquiescence in the face of discrimination allows it to continue, especially since he does not even give it a name.

In a related quotation, the preeminence given to familial relations by hetero(sexual/-sexist) society is given a new interpretation that affirms Juanito's need for inclusion referred to above: "[Juanito] estaba hablando de que lo bueno de los putos era que no estaban esclavizados por lazos de sangre, que eran aves de presa y no gallinas domesticadas, que ellos inventaban cada día su familia entre

puros extraños" (45). Therefore, at the same time that Juanito affirms the need to belong, he does so in a different context, saying that a blood tie should not be the only criterion for calling any one person 'family'.[17] Acknowledging that no one can be all things for all people even some of the time, what is lacking in Juanito's apparently radical statement is any assertion of gay men/women being able to have their own 'traditional' family. In fact, were Juanito to have addressed this issue, it would have made an even stronger case for the position here adopted: that gay Mexican literature is moving toward a more mainstream stance. Nonetheless, Juanito's mere insistence on the issue of family and belonging is indicative of the natural extension of this line of reasoning, which will eventually include notions of gays' right to 'traditional' family structures of their own. Juanito's truncated need to fit in somewhere, if not as part of his heterosexual friends' extended families, is provisionally fulfilled in a family composed of members of his own sexual affinity group. From there, once comfortable in this subset, Juanito's

[17] In actual fact, at least in the United States, and perhaps elsewhere, gay men and women refer to other gay men and women as 'family' to codify the homosexuality of the person in question.

preexisting family-oriented outlook will likely evolve further and necessitate its expression in children, regardless of their origin. In this way we can posit that this novel is in line with the claim enunciated above.

As mentioned earlier, Mátame y verás largely de-emphasizes the homophobia-violence causal dyad, and rather focuses on its first component--a natural effect of casting Sergio, the (stereo)typically homophobic heterosexual--in the role of protagonist and 'official chronicler'. There are, in fact, two pivotal moments of violent exchange in which the homophobic discourse, which I have treated exclusively until now, finds an outlet. These two events serve as markers of a quickening tempo in the narrative. Indeed, their positioning, the first, at nearly the half-way point, and the other, near the conclusion of the novel, cap what are its two essential sections.[18]

Sergio's homophobic comments, a product of his discomfort in the company of homosexuals, which, in turn, is theoretically part of a discomfort with his own sexuality (and sexuality in general), have been predominant in the

[18] The novel is divided into chapters, and their importance is thematic and cyclical. Nonetheless, the two divisions marked by the fight scenes are more useful in a wider sociological context. The closing page-worth's of narrative, could be considered a very short, 'third section'.

first section of the novel. These comments crescendo, driving Rubén (one of the holiday companions) to strike and wrestle with Sergio. It comes as no surprise to us at this point that, as was seen in the case of Las púberes canéforas, homophobic discourse can result in violence. In an interesting twist on this theme, though, Sergio, as a result of his homophobia, insults Rubén, and Rubén is the one who physically retaliates. As was affirmed earlier, Sergio encapsulates in one figure all of the intolerance surrounding the choice of a sexual partner of the same biological sex in Mexico. Nonetheless, Rubén and Sergio befriend each other, and when their trust in the other is broken, each must work to recuperate his nascent bond.

Conversational interchange between Sergio and Rubén occurs soon after the group's arrival in their resort town of San Isidro, where they strike common ground on the subject of "mota", or marijuana (51). They smoke it together and then recline for hours in the sun, Rubén being nude. Rubén remarks, "¿Te molesta que me quite un poco la tanga? Siempre que venimos aquí me tuesto todo encuerado; [Sergio] No, llégale, a mí ni en cuenta" (55). All seems tranquil, but in the following passage, Sergio's gay panic prevents

him from enjoying himself fully: "Sospecho que quien nos vea aquí, tirados como iguanas las horas de las horas, pacíficamente, hablando sólo a ratos, nos tomará por una pareja gay ... " (54). This is only one comment in a series of increasingly contemptuous comments Sergio makes to Rubén about gays which foreshadow the impasse toward which their relationship is hurtling. Rubén tries to comfort the recent divorcé, Sergio, by telling him that the events in one's life are of no real importance and that Rubén's own slogan, "no dejo que me toque la angustia, para nada", functions exceedingly well as a code for maintaining a healthy mental and emotional life. To Rubén's advice that he copy this outlook, Sergio responds,

> No mames, pinche baquetón ... ¿tú qué sabes de problemas, ah? No tienes hijos ni responsabilidades. Ni ambiciones: verdades [sic] ambiciones. A ver, ¿qué ambiciones tienes, culero? ... Ahí tu ropa, tu limpieza, tu salud, tus pesas, tu bronceador ... Más bien estás como muerto ... Ahí flotando invisible y sobrante, lejos de vivos. (57)

Sergio's assertion that people who have "children", "ambitions" and other "responsibilities" are really the only ones who have problems is at best only insensitive, but in reality, it is highly heterosexist. At the same time, a negative value judgment has been leveled against any 'other' ambition Rubén may have. Simply because these ambitions do not include children (at least at the moment), Sergio insults Rubén. Sergio adds that he believes the only esteemed elements in Rubén's life are his workouts, clothes and hygiene, which points to a commonly-held belief that gay men are superficial.[19] In the end, Sergio likens Rubén's way of life to being dead ("lejos de vivos").

Rubén is caught unawares by the intolerant and insensitive remarks issuing from the mouth of someone he had considered a friend, albeit a newly-struck amity, and feels compelled to reply physically. Sergio seems astonished at the attack that ensues after his commentary, but we catch a glimpse into the reason such remarks so inflame Rubén:

---

[19] Anecdotal evidence of this belief is the tongue-in-cheek editorial of May 6, 2002 by Michael Alvear on National Public Radio's syndicated program, "All Things Considered". His assertion was that humor cannot but offend some people all of the time, and that this is acceptable--even necessary to get laughs. Though his point was that we can--no, must--take comfort and even revel in the ridiculousness of stereotypes, his own supposed distrust of them was missing in his facetious quip, "I'm not saying gay men are shallow, but I've stepped in deeper puddles".

> Apenas estoy acabando de responderle esto ... cuando le tengo ora sí que sobre mí ... pinche corpachón de gimnasio, los ojos ora sí echando furia, las venas saltonas en las sienes, sofocándome ... el cabrón nomás me quiere hacer no sé qué llave de luchas, para obligarme a tragarme mis palabras, y pedirle perdón. "No entiendes nada, pendejo. No sabes nada", me grita ... "No sabes nada, no sabes nada" ... "No entiendes nada, no sabes nada" ... (57-8)

Rubén has been constantly besieged by this kind of prejudice, and is, in part, the reason for his physical outburst--after all, Sergio has betrayed what he originally considered a friendship. More importantly, though, the "no sabes nada" erupts from an even deeper, more personal place: Sergio leaves the febrile scene and, upon returning rejoins the group and hears Rubén, "contando su vida de pe a pa, como la Gran Tragedia del Mundo" (59). As it turns out, Rubén's psyche and outlook on life have undergone complete metamorphosis because of the tragic outcome of a tryst turned long-term relationship with a man named César. The story of the budding relationship between Rubén and César is

interrupted by the arrival of a friend (Melba). In the interval when the others go to greet her, Rubén continues his tale, and they miss hearing about César's brain tumor, resultant wasting and eventual death: "Rubén seguía hablando de César, nada más para mí. La parte fuerte se la habían perdido mis compañeros de ruta" (85). The centrality Blanco affords this anecdote by Blanco indicates that it is essential to the comprehension of Rubén as a character: his seeming artificiality is a mask for the deep emotional wounds he bears from his relationship with César, and not a 'result' or intrinsic quality of his or any others' homosexual orientation. By burying himself in the mundane details of his existence (clothing, physical fitness, etc.), he is able to function. His repetition of "no entiendes nada, no sabes nada" to Sergio finds justification in Rubén's story--a story never heard before (or after, apparently) by his closest friends. Only Sergio is afforded the full explanation, and it is this explanation that repairs the break initially caused by his own homophobic remarks.

That homophobia leads to violence against sexual minorities has been established, but when that violence

emanates from a gay individual, and not a heterosexual one, our original formula falls into question. This particular act of violence is the direct result of the accumulation of Sergio's homophobic remarks directed at Rubén, and this precipitates Rubén's aggression. We arrive at the conclusion, therefore, that 'homophobia still leads to violence', and our equation remains largely intact.

Before the conclusion of the novel, there is another violent exchange, this time, in accordance with our previous assertion that violence is directed at gay, lesbian, transgendered, or queer individuals and originates from heterosexuals. Juan, Sergio and the gang are finishing their vacation together, and "en recuerdo de nuestros viejos tiempos", Juan asks Sergio to sing "A la orilla del mar", a "bolero" he sang incessantly while at the university. Let us bear in mind that "nuestros tiempos" were times at the university when Juan aspired to Sergio's friendship and Sergio disdained his efforts to do so. Furthermore, the "times" Juanito speaks of are also those during which he and Sergio had a sexual experience together. Sergio's last-ditch attempt at deflecting Juan's request to sing the song provokes his protest of "es la [canción] que le gustaba a la

Carmela" (137). To worsen matters, Sergio does sing the song, but is begged time and again for an encore, prompting his following thought:

> Pinche Juanito, pensé, mientras cantaba ello de Si tú quieres nuestro amor recordar / busca a la orilla del mar / un nombre que grabé en la arena ... ; "qué se me hace que estás queriendo ahorita otras Lagunas de Cempoala, cabrón, ahora que tu Aníbal está perdido de borracho en la recámara. Pues ni madres: nada de otras Lagunas de Cempoala ... " (138)

The inundating convergence of past and present realities is too much for Sergio: as he sings a song, two very different experiences in his life--his marriage to Carmela and a sexual fling in the wilderness ("las Lagunas de Cempoala"[20]) with Juanito--become conflated, and Sergio becomes uneasy. It is amidst the remembrance of his past that Sergio's superficial composure gives way: he notices a cordless telephone--in the 'on' position--sitting in the hedge. The first notion to occur to Sergio is that Juanito must have

---

[20] For a discussion of how Sergio's gay panic is, in part, attributable to what happened between him and Juanito in the Lagunas de Cempoala, see page 83 of this chapter, as well as pages 19-20 of the original text.

cozened him into serenading his wife, Carmela, as she listened at the other end of the open telephone connection (138-9). This is, of course, untrue (as the text clarifies), but, the following manifestation of his paranoia is an outgrowth of the homophobic discourse that he has espoused for so long, and, consequently, internalized:

> --Seguro has estado de acuerdo con Carmela todo este tiempo, todos estos años. Nunca la dejaste de ver ni nada. Me tendiste una trampa, puto, culero. Eres amigo de ella, se cuentan todo, se pusieron de acuerdo. Me vendiste, hijo de la chingada. Seguro hasta le contaste lo de las Lagunas de Cempoala, miserable. (139)

His distrust of Juan is based on the stereotype, cited earlier in this chapter, as well as by Sedgwick in her explication of her theory on gay panic, that, as Sergio so succinctly put it, "Todo puto es puto y no guarda ningún secreto y hace fraudes, dicen, o se deja chantajear" (63). Though Sergio says, "dicen" in an effort to make his stereotype someone else's, he must, in part, believe it for him to react as he does against Juan.

The importance of the deictic nature of the use of the second person subject pronoun, "tú", is fully revealed only in the final paragraphs of the novel. Until this point, the reader is forced to merely assume that its purpose is, in a more personal way than the critical stance typical of an essay format could allow, to help Sergio remember how he felt in the days following his wife's abandonment of him for a younger, less "aztecoide"-looking (68) man of wealth. The reader is provided a hint that this is the purpose, but the concluding sentence of the following quotation (from much earlier in the novel) does not remove the veil of secrecy from around Sergio's continual use of 'tú': "Precisamente para ayudarme a pensar, oh mi Ángel de la Guarda, inicié este pormenorizado informe, a ver si algún día llego a comprenderme yo mismo. Ya tú me comprenderás. Espero que ilustre tu veterano conocimiento del mundo" (51). The novel closes with Sergio thinking/dreaming about himself in the future on the metro, looking over his (present) shoulder reading his journal/computer laughing (at himself) for how silly he had been (all because, apparently, of his impending divorce). The 'Hombre del Traje Gris' born out of his imagination and who looks over his shoulder is the

projection of the sixty-something man he believes he will become. This man will comfort him in the future (and, thus, comforts him now), saying, "que no haga tantos panchos, que la vida es sencilla; me susurras con las ayudas del azar y del tiempo" (141). The use of "tú", therefore, is directed at the future man he is destined to be, though he knows that that man will deride his (current) pettiness.

The question of what Sergio here is chiding himself for is not entirely clear, but we may surmise that it is his homophobia. His self-admonition to "not act so silly" ["No hagas tantos panchos" (141)] seems to have less to do with how his separation and impending divorce from Carmela than with the eye-opening experience that is a vacation with four gay men that serves to eclipse his marital affairs. We need look no further than the fact that at center stage are the conversations and experiences with his companions. Carmela has, by the end of the novel, definitively exited stage left. It is probable that his light scolding to himself, though non-specific, has arisen from what has been a surprisingly enjoyable experience with people whom in the past he would avoid and, when forced to interact with them, deride: Sergio's hostile treatment of Juanito during their

time at the university transmogrifies into an actual apology (134).

Further evidence that Sergio's homophobia has, by means of its very unleashing, has been nearly eliminated. His protracted stay with Rubén ("la Nenuca"), "el Jirafón", Aníbal and Juanito has made a believer out of him. In the quote referenced earlier, we hear in his reproach of himself the echoes of Rubén's life philosophy. Sergio's future self utters the message "la vida es sencilla" (141), mimicking Rubén's motto of "no dejo que me toque la angustia, para nada" (57). If we remember, Sergio condemns his way of thinking, dismissing it <u>in toto,</u> saying that it is ludicrous, too easy, given the frivolity that is Rubén's life. By the close of the novel, however, Sergio has internalized Rubén's point of view. His acceptance of it is so total that a projection of his future self, perhaps even more convinced of the motto's validity because of the wisdom that comes with age, whispers it lovingly like a grandfather to his grandson. That Rubén underwent a (more tragic?) loss than that which Sergio's divorce represents in his truncated relationship with César enables Sergio to reclassify as disaffection that which he originally saw as frivolity.

Their common bond of upheaval in personal relationships has bridged the gap created by discomfort that surrounds questions of sexuality which, in Sergio's case, manifested itself in the form of homophobia.

Perhaps it is Melba, the bygone B-movie starlet, who best downplays the fixation on sexual orientation and its relation to identity formation. About the minor character, "el Jirafón" (who goes missing during the holiday only to turn up having temporarily taken up with a man he met at a party), Melba says the following: "Eso es lo único con ustedes los putos, que siempre necesitan su nana, su pilmama" (118). After Sergio and Juanito's brawl over the incident we'll call the bolero-turned-serenade, Melba repeats, with slight variation, her statement about "el Jirafón": "Es lo único con los heteros: que siempre necesitan su nana, su pilmama" (141 emphasis added). The transparency of this device does not diminish its capacity to instruct: sexuality and orientation are but elements in a much more complex and unique identity.

In conclusion, José Joaquín Blanco's two novels, Las púberes canéforas (1983) and Mátame y verás (1994), are typical of the trajectory being followed by the contemporary

gay Mexican novel. In the earlier of the two works, a gay civil rights tradition begun in the late 1970s reaches full expression in the condemnation of homophobia and its possibility of inducing violence. Its conclusion presents a pessimistic reality: violence as the culmination of homophobia may be an immutable truth. In this conclusion, "la Gorda" is spirited away in a tan-colored Volkswagen, and the reader is left wondering about his fate, all the while conscious of the fact that, the last time one of the novel's characters was taken away in a car whose make and color were specified, he ended up badly beaten and left for dead in the countryside. In this novel, the point of view of the gay man is featured, the reader sympathizes with this point of view, and the villains are duly vilified, and thereby, made despicable. The message to stamp out homophobia by fighting back (or by simply surviving to some day decry its legion evils) is radical and unrelenting.

Mátame y verás differs sharply in several respects and is most typical of emerging reticence in the contemporary gay Mexican novel. The point of view is that of a heterosexual man, Sergio, and his homophobic comments stand in stark relief. In fact, intolerance, from both gay and

straight characters directed at the other group, becomes the true protagonist of the novel. Although violence twice makes a cameo appearance, Blanco's central message of the eradication of intolerance of sexual minorities (Las púberes canéforas) is greatly mitigated in Mátame y verás. The final result of a pacific society in which no one's sexuality is the sole reason for violence being enacted against her/him does not change. In essence, however, Blanco knows that, in the short run, a 180-degree readjustment in thinking in contemporary Mexico is impossible. In time, however, given the proper environment in which to express homophobia, the more distasteful aspects of it, like violence, may be eliminated. Sergio lives in just such an environment during two weeks with gay men, and his role as the stock character of the stereotypical homophobic male given to violence is transformed into one of tolerance by the end of the novel.

In conclusion, Rodríguez Lozano has said of both of the novels I have treated--one published in the mid-1980s the other in the mid-1990s--, "[La experimentación] no sucede ya en Mátame y verás. En Las púberes canéforas el lector descubre a un José Joaquín Blanco más ágil y menos

acartonado, con una narración fresca..." (84). This lack of experimentation will stand as an interesting contrast to the work of Mario Bellatin, who is a true innovator in the Mexican novel.

Chapter Three

Mario Bellatin: Silence, Symbolism and Stigma

SINCE MARIO BELLATIN WAS BORN IN MEXICO, was raised in Peru, and now resides in Mexico, both countries now understandably vie for the right to claim this young, experimental writer as their own. This dual nationality allows us to include him in this dissertation as a writer typical of a new generation in Mexican letters.[1] Bellatin himself has affirmed the important role his return to Mexico has played in his career as a writer:

> Mis padres son de Perú. Nací aquí [en México]. Viví un tiempito aquí y después me fui a Perú con mis padres ... Después de Perú, volví a México. A México siempre he venido por cuatro o cinco meses. Pero llegó un punto en que necesitaba todo el tiempo para escribir solamente. Cuando vine a México, me vine a escribir. (Hind 8)

Mario Bellatin received the Xavier Villaurutia prize in 2001 for his novel Flores. His other works are Las mujeres de Sal (1986), Efecto invernadero (1992), Canon perpetuo

---

[1] Indeed, if we consider Bellatin Peruvian, his writing may prove in a future, more comprehensive study, to be an example of a larger trend of reticence in contemporary Spanish American fiction.

(1993), Salon de belleza (1994), Damas chinas (1995), Poeta Ciego (1998), El jardín de la señora Murakami: Oto no-Murakami monogatari (2000), Shiki Nagaoka: una nariz de ficción (2001), La escuela del dolor humano de Sechuán (2001) and Jacobo el mutante (2002).[2] Additionally, Bellatin has done much publishing on the Internet, and countless interviews (both good and bad) abound there as well.

Despite the prolific nature of Bellatin's publishing and conversations with reporters, there is a serious paucity of critical investigation on his novels. This lacuna can only be explained by the relative difficulty of 'understanding' the hermetic nature of his novels. The important leap forward in Spanish American letters that his narrative project represents, though, demands a thoroughgoing treatment of his dozen-plus short novels, only a fraction of which I undertake in this chapter.

Bellatin belongs to a generation of men whose gay friends have been greatly affected by the AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) epidemic that began to develop over twenty years ago[3], and it is in the wake of their

---

[2] Thanks to Emily Hind for providing such an exhaustive listing of Bellatin's works.

[3] AIDS first appeared in 1981 in the United States.

passing that he publishes Salón de belleza, in which a beauty salon is implausibly transformed into a "Moridero", or refuge for those in the last stages of AIDS. The first AIDS cases in Mexico were documented in 1983. From there, new cases rose dramatically, as depicted in appendix 1.[4] The current news is not encouraging, despite successful reductions in AIDS cases between 1993 and 1998: the number of AIDS cases remains high and reductions in one year are almost invariably erased by increases in the following year. The total number of reported AIDS cases in 2001 was not much different than that of the year of peak reporting, 1993. The total number of adults and children living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)/AIDS in Mexico reached 150,000 by the end of 1999 (UNAIDS/WHO).[5]

---

[4] The actual statistics reflected by the graphic representation of reported AIDS cases are as follows in 1983, 6 cases; in 1984, another 6 cases; in 1985, 29; in 1986, 246; in 1987, 518; in 1988, 905; in 1989, 1605; in 1990, 2587; in 1991, 3155; in 1992, 3210; in 1993, 5058; in 1994, 4111; in 1995, 4310; in 1996, 4216; in 1997, 3670; in 1998, 4758; in 1999, 4372; in 2000, 4855; in 2001, 4297. These numbers total 51,914 total known cases of AIDS in Mexico since its appearance. Mexico's total population is 97,635,000 people.

[5] It must be stated that the estimated .14% of the Mexican population that is affected by HIV/AIDS is relatively small compared to the US's .3%. Indeed, infection rates, according to the United Nations are lower in Mexico than in most other Latin American nations. At the same time, we must understand that reporting remains imperfect, especially given the isolated nature of many of Mexico's population and high rate of poverty. In the United States there exists a disproportionately high rate of infection among its own poor, reports from this sector of the Mexican population are most likely underrepresented.

Salón de belleza

Amidst a health crisis as daunting as AIDS, it may seem surprising that "AIDS" is never mentioned by name in Salón de belleza. Linguistic allusions and oblique comparisons between illness in fish and human beings are made instead. Nonetheless, or perhaps because of the disinclination to name AIDS and other narrative techniques I examine, the novel does not run the risk of recreating the predominant atmosphere of unspeakability surrounding it--rather, it emphatically, though indirectly, calls attention to HIV/AIDS and the need to eradicate it. Bellatin's Salón de belleza is a novel that focuses on the AIDS epidemic of contemporary Mexico, wherein he examines how sickness (and irrational fear of it) can be attached to sexuality and, consequently, (mis)construed as an indicator of difference. First, this chapter examines the effects of Bellatin's interesting choice linguistically to euphemize AIDS through the use of metaphor and silence in Salón de belleza. Subsequently, we shall more summarily consider how difference is manifested in a dissimilar manner in a later novel, Poeta Ciego.

Before an analysis of the novel at hand, we must complete an examination of the process by which sickness has generally been able to become a metaphor in larger society. In her seminal essay, Illness as Metaphor, first published in 1978, Susan Sontag veritably establishes the groundwork for future AIDS criticism. Though her first work centers on cancer and tuberculosis (and, to an extent, syphilis and leprosy), many of the mechanisms that enabled popular ideas and misconceptions of infection to attach themselves so firmly to these illnesses were the same at work in the 1980s on AIDS. This facilitated her writing of the 1988 AIDS and Its Metaphors, a reformulation of her Illness as Metaphor with an eye toward the (then) relatively new medical phenomenon. In the earlier of her essays, she states from the outset that, "Illness is the night-side of life" (3), immediately acknowledging the attachment to illness images of fear and the unknown that one frequently associates with "night" and darkness. Sontag means to convey here that illness inspires the same fear, invisibility, suspicion and paranoia that night has traditionally inspired in folklore, literature and real life.

Both Simon Watney and Susan Sontag lobby each in their own way for the elimination of any metaphorical interpretation of illness. Both critics argue that attaching abstract, moral consequence to the concept of illness in general, and AIDS specifically, serves to dehumanize those whom it afflicts. Sontag especially decries the attachment of military metaphors to HIV/AIDS. Warlike signifiers like "plague", "invasion", "casualty", "victim", "lethal virus", "viral assualt", "threat", "agent", and "enemy" are notions that the critic argues enable a process of generalized abstraction of HIV/AIDS--one that inevitably with HIV/AIDS cast the ("embattled")/"patient" (another word she dislikes because of its French root "sufferer") in the role of war's perpetual loser. This desensitization in turn leads to a heartless "flush[ing] out [of] an identity that might have remained hidden ... .It also confirms an identity ... that isolates the ill and exposes them to harassment and persecution" (Sontag 113). Paula Treichler, however, understands the irreparable 'metaphorical' harm that has been wrought, stating, "No matter how much we may desire, with Susan Sontag, to resist treating illness as metaphor,

and this semantic work--this effort to 'make sense of' AIDS--has to be done" (1988: 34). Treichler understands that the damage has been done. The media and the unaffected (i.e., uninfected) general public have attached meaning and morality to AIDS and the means by which this has been able to be done must be uncovered. Salón de belleza maintains a deconstructionist dialogue with this AIDS-as-punishment notion. The idea that AIDS is castigation rained down from somewhere above against homosexuality and sex contra natura is surreptitiously dismantled.

Héctor Carrillo said in a related statement more recently, "[t]he association of sex and sexuality with darkness and night was symbolic of sex's transgressive nature" (x).[6] Carrillo's statement reinforces Sontag's previous assertion, but further overlays it, especially as it pertains to AIDS, with a feeling of sexual naughtiness and subversion. After all, HIV/AIDS' largely (homo)sexual mode of transmission has become infamous and forever linked with sexuality, darkness, night, and transgression. Confirming the gay male connection in the emergence of HIV/AIDS Paula Treichler states,

---

[6] Also see the Trejo Fuentes excerpt on page 94 of this dissertation for reiteration of this notion.

> ... AIDS ... had been initially framed [as ...] a disease of the '4-H Club'--homosexuals, hemophiliacs, heroin users and Haitians--with homosexuals leading the charge. Each of those four groups ... was presumed to be male. And where sexual transmission is concerned, AIDS was almost universally understood as a 'gay man's disease'. (1998: 85)

Since deceit, doubt and fear surrounding HIV/AIDS was largely attributed to one demographic--namely, gay men--, Sontag's statement that "plagues are invariably regarded as judgments on society ... This is a traditional use of sexually-transmitted diseases: to be described as punishments not just of individuals but of a group" (AIDS 142), AIDS and those it afflicts, gays, can be seen as a punishment in the context of Salón de belleza.[7] Taking a cue from Sontag, Simon Watney traces how fear and superstition give way to the ostracism faced by PLWAs's (people living with AIDS):

> Reading AIDS as the outward and visible sign of an imagined depravity of will, AIDS commentary deftly

[7] As signalled by Estela J. Vieira, Bellatin joins the likes of Camus and Saramago in treating the western literary theme of plague.

> returns us to a premodern vision of the body, according to which heresy and sin are held to be scored in the features of their voluntary subjects by punitive and admonitory manifestations of disease. (204)

Depravity of will, understood here as male-male sexual relations, that Watney references here serves to underscore the disapproval surrounding sexual difference and to reinforce the 'gay sex' association HIV/AIDS acquired beginning in the 1980s.

Sontag's and Watney's entreaty to detach meaning from illness seems, interestingly, to bring little to bear on Mario Bellatin: he composes a novel whose intent is to inspire sympathy for, and rage in the name of, people living with AIDS. Nevertheless, his euphemistic reference to a mystery 'sickness', and generally elusive style makes use of the metaphors of delinquency, transgression and punishment that have attached themselves to AIDS. Salón de belleza is a fictional representation of a world preoccupied with the spectacle and spectre of AIDS. Though the sickness coded in the text is never referred to by any other name than "el mal" or "la enfermedad," and those it

afflicts as "víctimas" or "los enfermos," it becomes acutely apparent that the malady in question is the compendium of symptoms, infections and diseases that are Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Our ability to arrive at this conclusion owes in large part to the descriptions of several diseases that define AIDS.

The textual cues that AIDS is the malady in question center primarily around descriptions of its most frequently associated illnesses, which, when manifest, almost invariably indicate the presence of the HIV/AIDS. One such disease is Kaposi's Sarcoma (or KS, as it is more colloquially known). It is a rare form of non-lethal cancer that predominates in men with HIV/AIDS: "The disease typically causes tumors to develop in the tissue below the skin surface ... These lesions ... appear as raised blotches or nodules that may be purple, brown or red in color" (http://www.cancer.org). Since the narrator describes his own body as "esquelético, invadido de llagas y ampollas" (20), we can infer that KS is present. Generalized weight-loss is another symptom of HIV/AIDS. When the narrator says, "Hasta ahora tengo sólo atisbos, sobre todo signos externos tales como la pérdida de peso"

(22), and we put this statement with the KS lesions he mentions, they seems consistent with the standard medical descriptions of HIV/AIDS.

Other "víctimas" who are mentioned by the narrator exhibit signs of another HIV/AIDS-specific condition, namely, Cryptosporidiosis infection (or, "Crypto", as it is widely known by those who are HIV-positive).[8] Cryptosporidiosis is a parasite, manifesting symptoms of "watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, and upset stomach or a slight fever" (thebody.com). The parasite is killed easily in the body of a healthy individual, but in the case of a person with a weakened immune system, Crypto can linger, recur and complicate other HIV/AIDS-related health problems. As medicines of any sort are prohibited by the narrator since they only prolong suffering and death we read in painstaking detail about the infection's progress left to run its course unchecked by even simple antibiotics:

> Una de las maneras más fastidiosas de morir se da cuando la enfermedad empieza por el estómago ... Cuando el mal empieza por la cabeza, por los

[8] See "Remarks of Michael Callen" in Crimp, et al, p. 164.

> pulmones u otras zonas, pronto compromete las demás funciones vitales ... Con el estómago es diferente. El huésped sufre una diarrea constante que va minando el organismo pero sólo hasta cierto punto. El estómago se afloja cada vez más y el enfermo cada día está más decaído. Nunca llega a alterarse este continuo deterioro. Sigue su ritmo sin altas ni bajas. Sin grandes sufrimientos súbitos. Sencillamente lo aquejan cólicos y calambres constantes. Intensos y sostenidos. En el Moridero he tenido a huéspedes que han soportado este proceso hasta por un año. Y durante todo este periodo los dolores se han mantenido invariables. Y el enfermo sabe que no tiene remedio ... Hasta que llega un día en que el organismo se ha vaciado por dentro de tal modo que no queda ya nada por eliminar. En ese instante no queda sino esperar el final. (58-59)

From the description of these two quite 'emblematic' conditions, Kaposi's Sarcoma and Cryptosporidiosis infection, we are able to arrive at a provisional

conclusion that the 'mal' with which the narrator and his charges are beset is indeed HIV/AIDS.

The setting of the novel is unusual. The purchase of the salon was made possible by the narrator's saved earnings from entering prostitution at the age of sixteen (45-6). The beauty salon has been converted by its owner (who is also the unnamed narrator) into a place for those infected by HIV and who manifest an advanced stage of AIDS, to be able to die peacefully and to be constantly and consistently nursed. We can see how the narrator's transformation of his place of business was warranted--it had become a social necessity, because, "Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally, contagious ... Contact with someone afflicted with a disease regarded as a mysterious malevolency inevitably feels like a trespass; worse, like the violation of a taboo", (Illness, 6). The owner/narrator early on in the novel dubs his locale "el Moridero".[9] The exigency the

[9] The term "Moridero" may be roughly translated into English as "place for the dying", though I shall not use this phrase throughout this chapter as a reference to the salon since it would be tiring, awkward and untrue to the dehumanizing spirit in which the Spanish word is deployed. Vieira, author of one of the only extant, interesting articles treating Salón de belleza, chooses to translate "Moridero" as "semi-mortuary" or "mortuary" with a grave critical implication--the utilization of the word "mortuary" implies that the salon is where corpses are kept until burial. This is not the function of Bellatin's Moridero. A novel of social protest would be egregiously remiss to represent

Moridero meets is further explained by the narrator in the following way:

> Debo darles una cama y un plato de sopa a las víctimas en cuyos cuerpos la enfermedad se ha desarrollado ... Las ayudas son esporádicas. De cuando en cuando, alguna institución se acuerda de nuestra existencia y nos socorre con algo de dinero. Otros quieren colaborar con medicinas, pero les tengo que recalcar que el salón de belleza no es un hospital ni una clínica sino sencillamente un Moridero. (21)

The reason for the refusal, and what comes to be able to be termed the narrator's fear of medical intervention is dual: first, the sickness is relentless and terminal ("El mal no tenía cura", 50). In no case has the narrator seen any

---

People Living With AIDS as dead bodies waiting for burial. Though Bellatin refrains from calling them "PLWAs" and chooses instead "guests" or "victims", his intent is nonetheless clear--this is a woefully neglected class of sick people deserving of respect and succor, and "mortuary" deprives them of these needs. Spanish lends conveniently to invention by creating a noun from nearly any verb; in this case, from "morir" ("to die") Bellatin derives "Moridero" ("die-ery" [non-grammatical]). Despite "Moridero's" lack of recognition by the Real Academia Española, a leading authority on standard, Peninsular Spanish, there is incidence of the word's usage, at least as evidenced by some online poetry and short stories. Manuel Seco's, et al, Diccionario del español actual, however, provides the only definition of which I am aware: "Lugar donde se retira un animal para morir. Tb fig, referido a pers." (3138). The application of the term, therefore, does tend to depersonalize the status of PLWAs and "Moridero" is in keeping with the narrator's distanced, helpless tone. As I find no satisfactory equivalent in English, I shall retain the use of the original "Moridero" throughout. In a few cases, I will also simply use "salon".

other result than the death of his "guests", as he most frequently refers to those staying at the salon. Therefore, medicines are unnecessary, not to mention costly for the benefactor. Second, any pharmaceutical product would merely prolong patients' discomfort and delay what is an inevitable, and already painful, death.[10]

The notion of the common hair salon (not our Moridero), conjures thoughts of women undergoing beauty treatments, reminding us of human vanity and financial overindulgence. The narrator has sold the bulk of the customary salon accoutrements--hair dryers, reclining chairs for shampooing, etc.--to help finance the narrator's act of charity (21). What is left are those salon tools whose practical value in attending to AIDS patients--rubber gloves, containers, pans, clips and cosmetic carts--prevents the narrator from disposing of them. The salon, having been thus transformed into a place for those dying from AIDS, immediately bestows a new, ironic patina--one of disease, agony and disfigurement--on the concept "beauty salon", which is also the title of the novella.

This thorough corruption of the salon image is alone enough to create a feeling of disorientation. Indeed, the intent of the salon-cum-Moridero image is to create an atmosphere that is at once disconcerting and unnerving to the reader--not only has a place of business, dedicated to the enhancing the beauty of its clients, earning money for its owner, been bastardized to become a place of humility, charity and reliance on the beneficence of neighbors (which is never considerable), but the atmosphere inside is now defiled by sickly malodorousness and anguished, emaciated bodies covered in lesions. The narrator spares the reader no detail and the ensuing descriptions serve to heighten the disorientation initially caused by the corruption of the salon image.

If we explore the notion of beauty further within the context of the novel, we find that the repulsion caused by the physically-disfiguring capability of AIDS is a primary concern for the narrator:

> Un elemento muy importante, que deseché de modo radical fueron los espejos, que en su momento multiplicaban con sus reflejos los acuarios y la transformación que iban adquiriendo las clientas a

> medida que se sometían al tratamiento de la peluquería y del maquillaje. A pesar de que creo estar acostumbrado a este ambiente, me parece que para todos sería ahora insoportable multiplicar la agonía hasta ese extraño infinito que producen los espejos puestos uno frente al otro. (22)

Bellatin inverts a symbol of beauty and excess--the quintessential mirror image--such that it attains synonymy with death and paucity of every kind. Society rejects these patients as radically as the narrator does the mirrors that betray their own agony.

In tension with the reticence surrounding the name of the disease is Bellatin's very apparent condemnation of the mistreatment people living with AIDS receive because of the malignancy built up around HIV/AIDS by society and the media. Of the five novels so far treated in this study, this is the first that evidences a strong internal logic of signs to communicate its message rather than dialogue or plot. The primary sign system involves an unlikely coupling between fish/aquariums and people living with AIDS. This system of signs indirectly conveys a message of protest; however, this infrastructure does present some

contradictions, or at least, complexities. At the same time, however hesitant Salón de belleza is to overtly denote AIDS as the real-world referent of its metaphorical substructure, the identification is clear because we are aware of what is signified by, among other elements, the descriptions of the illnesses associated with AIDS. The silence and mystery with which the novel surrounds the disease is what endows the text with such force. Salón de belleza, is, therefore, a very powerful text of social protest that never actually utters the name of its intended target while avoiding "las estridencias a las que el tema podría dar lugar" (Giménez Bartlet).

The foregoing statement from Héctor Carrillo's The Night is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS is interesting in light of the apparent reticence present in Salón de belleza: Bellatin's will not to name AIDS would seem to fall into the camp Carrillo describes as conservative in Mexican society--that which prefers silence when it comes to discussion of HIV/AIDS prevention.

> In Mexico AIDS and HIV prevention have been, since the mid-1980s, the motor powering most social discourse about sex and sexuality ... AIDS

> made the schisms between groups with opposing ideological positions more evident than ever and prompted people ... to enter the discussion and advance their particular views about Mexican sexuality. These players proposed alternative pictures about the future of Mexican sex and sexuality, pictures that seemed extremely different from each other and that included all sorts of imaginable strategies--from promotion of condom use and sexual education to calls for a retreat into silence about sexual matters and a return to old-fashioned 'moral traditions'--as antidotes against the epidemic. (209; 210, emphasis added)

AIDS activist groups like ACT-UP, whose "Silence=Death" campaigns were so ubiquitous in the 1980s, decried silence since it merely shrouded the illness in secrecy and shame. Not speaking out, attending a protest, was likened by ACT-UP to a kind of death, since AIDS would continue to languish in the margins of the American conscience and more people would die from AIDS. Bellatin's text doesn't run the risk of furthering silence and death, however

counterintuitive it may seem since his novel does not, after all, mention AIDS specifically. The ultimate result of Bellatin's highly symbolic, reticent text is not, interestingly, to advance or preserve secrecy and shame, but rather, to provoke rage, principally because the referent--AIDS--, though technically absent, is omnipresent in the descriptions of characters who manifest the unmistakable symptoms and suffering of AIDS and with whom the reader comes to sympathize.

In 1999, Raymond Taylor Schultz examined ten American plays that deal with the subject of AIDS without their mentioning it linguistically. We can see a strong coefficient of silence between these American plays and Bellatin's Salón de belleza:

> But while all gay dramatists now write under the shadow of AIDS, they all do not necessarily feel the need or desire to speak its name. Whether they are treating the disease indirectly, realistically or metaphorically, they choose, in certain instances, not to explicitly voice its presence, however obvious that presence might be. Moreover, on some occasions, they even go to great lengths

> to prevent or even suppress both its presence and its direct voicing in the text of their plays. Yet even in these instances where 'AIDS' the word is not to be found, it is still possible for readers of these texts either 'to decode the signs that signify AIDS within the text' or to perceive the disease's presence or influence in those cases where its expected invocation is marked, instead, by a 'significant absence.'" (Jones 229 in Schultz 10)

Salón de belleza's byproduct--namely, the reader's rage--underscores the fact that a dearth of onomastic tags can frequently be more powerful than outright identification.

The reader endures painfully specific details of HIV/AIDS infection, but late--three-quarters of the way into the novel, in fact. The delay implies that this abundance and kind of detail may have been too much any earlier than it actually makes its entrance. The passage directly after this laments this painful, gradual manner by which the patient must die. The narrator perceives of HIV/AIDS as a disease whose indiscriminate final torture varies from patient to patient. The real injustice, he says, though, is

that the patient occupied a bed for over a year, depriving someone else of it. In the face of this kind of insensitive, jarring passage, the reader hopes for a change in tone, but is confronted with similar ones from here to the end of the novel. Though the narration hereafter may lack the same specificity in description of symptoms, etc., it is replaced by a defeatist tone and macabre visions of the fish that surround him: "los peces atacados por los hongos ["fungi"] se volvían sagrados e intocables. Me había llamado la atención cómo cualquier pez con hongos sólo moría de ese mal. A mí tal vez me sucedería lo mismo si me aventuraba a visitar los Baños" (63).

The impression that the novel is spontaneous and hurried could be conveyed by its short, clipped sentences, unflinchingly direct tone and first-person narration. It is a monologue, possessing a conversational tone. This may be seem at first a contradiction in terms, but the reader fills the role of an informal narratee. That is to say, although at no point does he say "ustedes" or "los lectores", there is a self-consciousness that implies a perception on the part of the narrator of an audience. The confidential nature of the information we receive from such a forthcoming

narrator is disarming. The presumption that this is an improvised work can be no further from the truth. As stated earlier, the main structuring element is fish symbolism. The passages that discuss the narrator's affinity for keeping fish are interspersed with generally longer passages that treat issues related to the Moridero (specifically, its patients, daily responsibilities related to it, the narrator's past, HIV/AIDS discourse, etc.). After careful dissection of the sections of the novel, an even more complex relationship is discovered: the novel opens with one sentence about fish and counters with another about the guests of the Moridero. The pairing of fish and humans, whose purpose is still unclear so early in the novel, is immediately established. Bellatin's pairings are exacting, opening both section one and two with references to the allegorical nature of the aquariums and closing each with the more concrete, oftentimes shocking comments on his patients and human nature.[11] That the amount of 'breath' spent on human nature is considerably more (almost double) is not surprising, but the beginning of section one, however, is unique. In the second narrative pairing, talk of

[11] See appendices 2, 3

fish consists of thirty-four sentences, while people and HIV/AIDS only receive five.[12] The reason for this only occurrence of disequilibrium in the novel is that Bellatin is attempting to ease the reader into what is essentially a very moving novel--so much so that it would be tempting to lay it aside for all its emotion and graphic description of human physical torment through disease--by first presenting more prosaic, banal talk of the narrator as an aquarium fancier rather than AIDS "sufferer".

There is social commentary of a more direct nature as well. As mentioned before, the owner refuses medical help, shunning doctors and their drugs. Perhaps this is Bellatin's passive-aggressive way of morally condemning the medical community at large, since his patients are denied medical attention at hospitals and clinics. About the gay men attacked in the streets by "la Banda de Matacabros" (or, "Gang of Queer-bashers") he says,[13]

> ... creo que si después de un enfrentamiento alguno salía con vida era peor. En los hospitales

---

[12] See appendix 2.

[13] Murray and Dynes have documented the connection between cabrón (i.e., here - cabro in the compound word, matacabros, or, literally, queer-killers) and male homosexuality. Specifically, "cabrón" normally refers to the active-insertor participant in male-male sexual relations (187-88).

> donde los internaban siempre los trataban con desprecio y muchas veces no querían recibirlos por temor a que estuviesen enfermos ... nació en mí la compasión de recoger a alguno que otro compañero herido que no tenía a dónde recurrir. Tal vez de esta manera se fue formando este triste Moridero que tengo la desgracia de regentar. (15)

According to the narrator, there is a "cantidad cada vez mayor de personas que han venido a morir al salón de belleza" (13-14), and these people he admits to the salon/Moridero are no longer "solamente amigos en cuyos cuerpos el mal está avanzado, sino que la mayoría se trata de extraños que no tienen dónde morir. Además del Moridero, la única alternativa sería perecer en la calle" (14). The social commentary is two-fold: the government's health care system is not caring for the sick and destitute, as evidenced by the choice of either dying in the streets or the Moridero. Further, any government campaign to teach HIV/AIDS prevention seems to be missing its intended audience, evidenced by the "cantidad cada vez mayor" of people resorting to the Moridero, which, in turn, indicates a generally rising incidence of HIV infection.

The Moridero can be readily understood as an extension of society. Inside it, after all, the conditions are deplorable--there is no personnel to staff it, and a general paucity of every imaginable kind. This description would seem to accurately reflect the generally apathetic attitude of governments and citizens alike. The Moridero represents not society in general, but rather a gay subculture wherein the members must fend for themselves and for each other in a communal setting. The Moridero is at the same time a referent of society's abandonment and the resultant, necessary altruism shown by the affected subculture. The solidarity of the gay male, HIV/AIDS-infected sector of the population, in the absence of any other solidarity, accentuates larger society's disunity with the effort to assist PLWAs.

Related to the topic of neglect is the narrator's own tone. When recounting the kind of relationship that he maintains with his guests, he insists on emotional distance from them. This distance in tone is not reflective of the physical distance which is demonstrated later in the novel. For the moment, though, he feels so removed from their

plight that he says he has unbelievably lost the ability to identify his patients on an individual basis:

> Puede parecer difícil que me crean, pero ya casi no identifico a los huéspedes. He llegado a un estado tal que todos son iguales para mí ... [N]o son más que cuerpos en trance de desaparición. (25)

That the narrator, the caretaker and constant companion has arrived at such a level of inurement to his guests' condition suggests a similar disaffiliation with PLWAs on the part of the general population. On the one hand, it is understandable that the narrator would desire a certain distance from his charges. The fact that HIV/AIDS is terminal in most every case (though nowadays the long-term survival rate is much better) is what impels the narrator to adopt an aloof posture, for if not, it can be surmised that his emotional well-being could be jeopardized in the long run. Additionally, the fact that the narrator himself suffers the same plight as his guests reinforces the need for indifference: he sees death all around him, he has the same illness as the dying, and knows he will eventually meet the same end. By remaining cool to his guests,

therefore, he can partially stave-off the nagging idea of his own mortality. The narrator's relationship with his guests reflects society's own relationship with PLWAs. If one so close to these PLWAs is unable to maintain an attachment to them, it may be hopeless to expect Mexican society, which perceives of itself (however incorrectly) as largely insulated from a 'gay disease', to be charitable.

Aquariums--prominent fixtures of the salon--alternate between reinforcing the dilapidated, lugubrious environment and elivening it. Before the transformation of the salon into the Moridero, the narrator describes how his affinity for fish arose: "Hace algunos años, mi interés por los acuarios me llevó a decorar mi salón de belleza con peces de distintos colores" (11). The fact that this is the first sentence of the tale indicates the importance of this symbol. Indeed, the fish and their tanks are constant symbols whose description acts as an interruption to the narrator's central 'story' (the plight of those who come to die in the Moridero). When the narrator at first places the aquariums in the salon, it is in the hope that they might gladden his clients, despite their warnings that fish are bad luck and a "foreign" pastime (13). Though at first the

fish bring cheer, once he transforms the salon into the Moridero, the narrator says, "me deprime ver cómo los peces han ido desapareciendo. Tal vez sea que el agua corriente está llegando con demasiado cloro o quizá no tengo el tiempo suficiente para darles los cuidados que se merecen" (11). By this third sentence of the novel, then, we know that he owns a Moridero, what its function is, and that it contains aquariums whose fish are dying. The fish and the patients are both his charges, and his lack of success with both groups reaches a lamentable nadir.

The narrator initiates his aquarium hobby with guppies because they are the most "resistentes ... ideales para un principiante" and "tienen la particularidad de reproducirse rápidamente" (11). He goes on to describe an early disaster of the novice aquarist: the morning after establishing the first aquarium, the male was dead, necessitating its removal with a latex glove reserved until recently for dyeing his clients' hair. Later, a female guppy gives birth to her fry and the other female in the tank eats all but three. The mother, who suffers post-partum complications, dies, and again he employs the latex glove. One cannot help but connect the mention of the latex glove with the medical

profession's need for their use in matters of infectious diseases like AIDS. The rubber glove, therefore, becomes a symbol of the PLWA's figurative untouchability. In this small vignette about his first experience with keeping fish from the beginning of the novel (11-13), Bellatin makes us look at our own world in miniature. Dangers of everyday life, senseless death and environmental threats abound. This allegory between a fish's daily existence and that of a human being can then be understood as one existing throughout the novel.

If we examine more closely the progression of this hobby, we can note several interesting points: as in most animals, the male guppy is very ornate. Some have swords on the upper part of the tail fin, some tail fins are veritable fans, and nearly all are brilliantly colored. The same is true of the "carpas doradas" (or, goldfish) he purchases. The flamboyant, colorful nature of the fish reflects some stereotypical views of gay men: gay men have been referred to using such words as "flaming" and "flamboyant". The fish even inspire which outfit the narrator dons for his nightly transvestism: "Cuando me aficioné a las Carpas Doradas, además del sosiego que me causaba su contemplación, siempre

buscaba algo dorado para salir vestido de mujer por las noches" (15). Fish, therefore, act as signifiers on two levels: they represent visually (i.e., they are flamboyantly colored, which represents gay men's "proclivity" to call attention to themselves through dress or mannerisms) and metaphorically [i.e., they are kept in a fishbowl/(Moridero) by him] the sick gay men the narrator cares for. They are kept, in aquariums and are at his mercy, which, as we have seen, often fails, for his interest wanes and both the sick men in his care and the fish themselves sicken and die and the narrator disposes of them. In the second place, they represent the homosexual stereotype of flamboyance.

This last statement of stereotypes of homosexuals begs further explanation. Bellatin, as we have said before, refuses to mention AIDS by name, which can be construed as a moment of reticence that may induce readers other than gay men to choose the novella at the moment of purchase in a bookstore. Another example of reticence can be found in the flamboyant homosexual reference. Stereotypes are frequently employed in order to establish a connection between the familiar and the unknown. In this case, the narrator's choice of dress for the evening based on the appearance of

his fish is comical. Transvestism, attributed frequently almost exclusively (and somewhat mistakenly) to the gay community, enables the reader to identify the fish under the narrator's care as a reference to the men he cares for.

The narrator moves from species that are relatively elementary to maintain (guppies, Black Tetras, goldfish) onto the more difficult to care for fish like angelfish, pencilfish, Corydoras catfish, piranha, Betta, and finally, the axolotl, or Mexican Salamander.[14] In an effort to discover the additional utility of the fish leitmotif, I shall comment on only two of the species of fish I reference: the Black Tetra (or, "monjita" in Spanish, whose latin nomenclature is Gynocorymbus ternetzi) and the Axolotl (Ambystoma mexicanum). The Black Tetra is "an undemanding species that will adapt to a range of conditions".[15] This is one of the first fish typically introduced into a community aquarium in order to test water quality and to improve the skill level of the hobbyist. Black Tetras are black and grey to white in coloration. In contrast to the guppies the narrator has had in the past, therefore, they are drab and

---

[14] The Mexican Salamander is technically an amphibian and not a fish, as implied by the narrator. For a picture of this creature, please see Appendices, fig. 3.

[15] From http://www.myaquarium.com.

uninteresting. Nonetheless, it is on the Black Tetra that the narrator lavishes the most description. The narrator places on the bedside table next to a boy with whom he has been intimate and with whom he senses a special emotional bond a bowl of Black Tetras. The narrator removes the bowl's heater once he realizes that the tuberculosis has almost completely overtaken his body, and he is close to death. He in fact neglects the boy, most likely in an attempt to distance himself from the thought that his friend's death is imminent. The boy dies some days after the narrator deprives the fish of their source of heat, and several days later, the Black Tetras perish from hypothermia (25-29; 43-45). There is a distinct parallel here: the boy literally dies from a lung infection, but in a figurative sense, he dies from a lack of attention (or 'warmth') from the narrator. The fish likewise die from neglect--a similar removal of heat, though in this case it actual heat. The close parallel maintained by Bellatin between the boy with whom the narrator has intimacy and the bowl of Black Tetras that dies from hypothermia further cements the fish/PLWA association.

Bellatin moves from fish to amphibians in the symbolically more complex choice of the "axolotl", or

Mexican Salamander.[16] As fish exist differently than amphibians (the latter exists between land and water, breathing oxygen in both environments), the reader is left to infer a different semiotic relationship in the axolotl.[17] It is my contention that the axolotl is a useful dual image, designating the residents of the Moridero as well as society as a whole. In Náhuatl mythology, "Xolotl es aquel dios criminal de Teotihuacán que, por medio de transformaciones, resistió cuanto pudo hasta sucumbir ante el culto del sol y de la luna" (Robelo 825). In an attempt to avoid death, "metióse en el agua, y [sic] hízose pez que se llama axolotl; y de alli [sic] le tomaron y le mataron" (P. Sahagún in Robelo 826). The importance of these portraits of the god Xolote is the fact that, like the Moridero's residents, he futilely resists death.

The narrator's axolotl in Salón de belleza may also represent the constantly stuggling, though helpless, marionette-like plight of PLWAs: the etymology of the word "xolote" is in question, but there is some evidence that, in

---

[16] The word "axolotl" comes from Náhuatl, a language spoken among some Uto-Aztecan tribes.

[17] It is unclear whether Bellatin is cognizant of the difference between fish and the axolotl, since, upon initiating the sequence involving the salamander, the narrator states, "Los peces más extraños que alguna vez he criado han sido los Axolotes [sic]" (56 emphasis added).

addition to being the mythological figure described here, it also means "doll" or "toy". Additionally, as the axolotl is used as a component of a local diet in some places in Mexico, its own vulnerability mirrors that of the salon's patients.

At the same time, however, the ill-tempered and voracious nature of the axolotl reflects a similarly ill-tempered and voracious society:

> Yo mismo debía pasar una esponjita por el vidrio, pues eran tan feroces y tan carnívoros que no aceptaban ni por un instante la presencia de un Pez Basurero. Una vez probé con un par mientras ellos [los axolotes] dormían ... da la casualidad que apenas dejé el acuario, los dos Axolotes se lanzaron a devorar a los Peces Basureros. Regresé a los pocos instantes y me encontré con la carnicería. Los Axolotes nuevamente estaban en el fondo. En apariencia estaban tranquilos, pero de la boca de cada uno sobresalían partes de los Peces Basureros. (56-7)

The defenseless catfish ("Pez Basurero") here is an apparent reference to the guests of the Moridero: they take what they

can get, scavenging leftovers from the bottom of the aquarium as any marginalized class of the Mexican citizenry. Eating the defenseless catfish, therefore, the axolotl represents a (generalized) Mexican attitude toward the sick and forgotten. The axolotl later exhibit a carnivorous ferocity toward each other, corresponding to the stereotypical Mexican "chingado versus chingador" mentality explained by Octavio Paz, and referenced ad nauseum by countless other critics. Simply put, the idea is that the typical Mexican would rather 'chingar' than 'ser chingado'.[18]

Poeta Ciego

The semiotic reading I have so far rendered of Salón de belleza is an important step in understanding the larger narrative project that Bellatin has undertaken. On several interview occasions, however, he has avowed his desire to create playful texts whose coup de grâce lies in his purposeful tricking the reader into a sense of comfort. The apparently forthright manner of narration of Salón de belleza (its unencumbered vocabulary, linear chronology of

[18] The root word in question in Paz's essay is, "chingar", or "to fuck", and the thrust of his argument is largely social rather than sexual, though a case for the latter perspective could be made.

events and believably exotic setting) bids the reader enter fully into the fictionalized world of the author. What awaits the reader is alluring, however deceptive the novel is. Diana Palaversich has called Bellatin's literary world "absurdo y hermético pero perfectamente coherente" (27). She also posits that he has not written various novels, "sino una misma novela que se lleva publicando en varias entregas" (27).[19]

Just such an example of the playfulness and hermetic nature typical of the writings of Mario Bellatin is the short novel Poeta Ciego (1998). The novel recounts the fantastical goings-on of a quasi-religious sect--in reality, it is a terrifyingly cruel cult full of vindictive characters. The description found on the back cover of the novel says simply that,

> un poeta ciego ... funda una secta de oscuros principios cuyas reglas se basan en una sexualidad maliciosa ... Muy pronto la comunidad

[19] This interpretation of the novelistic enterprise of Mario Bellatin as continuoous and purposely deceptive is borne out by the author himself in the unpublished interview done by Hind cited earlier in this chapter: "Todos mis libros son una especie de retruécanos y búsqueda de lograr que el lector no lea lo que está leyendo (4) ... [Borges] Te hubiera dado un universo totalmente verosímil. En cambio yo te doy un univesro ya cargadamente inverosímil. ¿Quién va a creer que es verdad? Te doy los elementos para decir que todo es una gran mentira. Mi interés no es crear estos personajes imaginarios" (5).

será escenario del cisma, la locura fanática y la lucha para obtener el poder.

This description ignores the upsetting images of murder, rape, kidnapping, mass immolations and pederasty. These scenes serve primarily as moments of intrigue and as references in time--they chiefly help to reconstruct the timeline of events leading up to the culminating scene of mass immolation on a school bus of all but a few of the sect's members. The issues of chronology and sexuality in the novel are interesting, and certainly worthy of further investigation, but, instead, I will briefly focus on Bellatin's use of physical difference to draw a connection between Poeta Ciego and Salón de belleza in an effort to demonstrate how different the two novels are in their use of physical difference.

Salón de belleza's use of symbolism (salon image, references to fauna) was part of a larger effort on Bellatin's part to conceal AIDS. Attached to this symbolism was the discernible 'different' quality of the Moridero's guests--they were isolated, kept apart from the rest of society because they were physically marked by the disease. In Poeta Ciego, physical deformity is appropriated by

members of the cult to set apart those they consider especially gifted to hear divine truths and, subsequently, to compose 'gospels' (primarily in the form of poetry and secret writings to which the real reader is not made privy) and teach the youth of the sect.

The insistence on difference--esentially stigma, as we have seen in Salón de belleza--present in Poeta Ciego owes in large part to the interpretations of the blind poet who founds the cult. His obsession with birthmarks reveals itself early in the novel: "Uno de los recuerdos importantes que el Poeta Ciego guardaba de su infancia, era la exploración con el tacto de los extensos lunares que aparecían en todos los miembros de la familia ... " (16). Of the divine importance connoted by birthmarks (or "los lunares") it is later said,

> Los había de diferentes tipos. Como protuberancias, leves como pecas o con vellos en la superficie. Algunos eran congénitos y otros adquiridos a lo largo de la existencia. Unos podían ser benignos y otros indicio de algún tipo de cáncer ... [S]e encontraba la idea de que la Iluminación más pura sólo podía hallarse en esos

> puntos oscuros conocidos como lunares, que a su vez sólo significaban manifestaciones externas de cierta forma de elección divina. (80-81)

The fact that in both novels physical difference is the basis for isolation is a central theme for Bellatin. In the case of Poeta Ciego, however, it undergirds not just isolation and stigma (though a positive one, since it supposedly signfies divine selection), but also religious fanaticism and violence.

The end of the novel insinuates a continuation of this religious fanaticism based on physical difference. In the form of background, the poet decrees that, upon his death, his writings (termed, "el Cuadernillo de las Cosas Difíciles de Explicar") should be destroyed. His motivation for such a decree is unclear, but, given the megalomaniacal nature of absolutist rulers, his ego may be one cause. Nonetheless, these writings are not destroyed upon his macabre demise, but rather kept by another person in the sect whose birthmark is of an inferior size and 'quality' (la Profesora Virginia). Her own insignificant birthmark would never be considered of enough importance to carry on

the cult.[20] We are left to surmise that these writings will serve as the foundation for the new sect that will arise when we are told:

> [La Profesora Virginia n]o podía saber que a cientos de kilómetros de distancia, en ese mismo instante, era hallado un recién nacido a la orilla del mar. Se trataba de un niño con la cabeza en forma de globo, al cual le faltaban las orejas ... la enfermera despidió el autobús con una mano mientras sujetaba con la otra el Cuadernillo de las Cosas Difíciles de Explicar. (172-3)

This exaggerated physical abnormality will be the (arbitrary) evidence for divine selection of this child as leader, as did the blindness of the original founding poet, also adopted by a family who found him on the sea's shores. The close parallel in the history of the dead poet and the foundling leaves no room for misinterpretation of the child's destiny to become the new authoritarian.

---

[20] Profesora Virginia is also a kind of spouse to the poet. She cares for him and takes dictation for the "Cuadernillo de las Cosas Difíciles de Explicar". Nonetheless, she kills him when she finds him having sex with his nurse (29-30). It is understandable that her jealousy would be motive for his murder, but her feelings of inferiority are, as well. She is essentially only a subject, though a close one.

To conclude, Salón de belleza and Poeta Ciego both serve as allegorical and hermetic tales; however, these qualities are intensified to such a degree in the latter that the reader must ascribe a 'meaning' that is much more oblique than that contained in Salón de belleza. According to Bellatin, stigma and difference, as I hope to have shown, serve to separate sectors of society in different ways whose outcome is always pernicious to unity and tolerance. It seems almost a tautology to say so, but his subtlety in the form of silence, reticence and metaphors veil this truth in such a way as to make more satisfying its (re)discovery.

Conclusion

Zapata, Blanco and Bellatin vary greatly in their approach to issues of importance to the Mexican gay community. The themes they treat are equally as different, and they are presented, stylistically and technically in widely varying fashions. If it were not for the fact that all three authors exhibit "gay themes ... and [have] authored works in which something like a gay sensibility can be identified" (Foster 1991), we could classify these authors differently as essentially belonging to disparate literary schools and movements. Indeed, if one had need of to do so, I would say that Zapata and Blanco undoubtedly inherit the Onda's characteristics and pass into the Post-Boom with theis later novels; Bellatin, on the other hand, represents a blending of Post-Boom characteristics along with an uncharacteristic (of the Post-Boom) strong innovation in the areas of form and technique.

Zapata doggedly insists (though progressively less with each work) in El vampiro de la colonia Roma, En jirones and Siete noches junto al mar on the use of sex/eroticism as a useful vehicle for the expression of modes of sexual identity formation. It would be interesting

to see if these articulations of sexual identity formation are valid in a heterosexual context. That is to say, if, as we have asserted, gender identity and sexual position significantly shape sexuality in a same-sex context, it would be worthwhile to investigate to what extent this can be observed in novels that treat opposite sex relation.

Blanco's anti-homophobia campaign is admirable. Moreover, that discourse regarding tolerance and understanding is present in the literary work of such a recognizable literary voice, the message should carry a certain authority. It is a generally held belief that novels containing a social agenda, or "literatura comprometida", tend to be of less artistic quality. On this point, we must note that the earlier of the novels I treat, Las púberes canéforas, this is not true. As soon as his message became more apparent and infused into mainstream literature, there was a drop in literary quality in Mátame y verás.

I believe Bellatin would be hard-pressed, because of his typically elusive nature, to denote his own work "activist" in nature. Nonetheless, cautionary tones in both Salón de belleza and Poeta Ciego come across and expose

them as at least partially socially-motivated. His novels' hermetic nature and highly symbolic atmosphere demonstrate that perhaps this new voice of Mexican literature will occasion further innovation within the gay novel and other literature of social activism.

We have witnessed a reduction in the level of "writerly-ness" in the cases of both Zapata and Blanco (i.e., innovation of technique, circular or fragmented structure, etc.). It is with Mario Bellatin that we begin to see a renewal of narrative technique and structural playfulness typical of old masters like Borges, Cortázar, Fuentes and Márquez, while maintaining Zapata and Blanco's reticence vis-à-vis "gay issues".

In a recent interview conducted with David Toscana, Brescia and Bennett somewhat dubiously posit in their summary of the interview that, "escritores de su generación rechaz[an] el legado del 'boom' latinoamericano. Toscana reacciona contra ese rechazo y propone una voz personal..." (351). The logic behind an apparent rediscovery and re-valuation of the Boom (which we witness in Bellatin) is described by Toscana himself:

> ... diría que pertenezco a un grupo de escritores mexicanos que cree en la evolución ... Me interesa más la tradición y ver la forma de la tradición que querer de pronto llevar una bandera de innovador ... mis intereses están más en la vuelta de tuerca de la tradición, en buscar nuevas formas y nuevas voces para revelar algo, que en querer inventar un hilo negro. (354-55)

It would seem that Toscana, and perhaps other writers of his generation (Bellatin is mentioned by him as a new and important voice that "hay que seguir" in contemporary Mexican literature), might not mind if their own "personal voice[s]" resort to elements of the past. Words used by Toscana, like "evolution", are not radical in tone--they do not denote rupture, but they do denote eventual change.

It is my contention that narrative elements typical of many contemporary gay novels, such as undifficulted word choice, simplistic plot line, obvious argument and sometimes endless braying of social messages will eventually tire a sophisticated Mexican audience. Included in the novels of which I speak here are some of the ones I treat in this dissertation, specifically, <u>En jirones, Siete</u>

noches junto al mar and Mátame y verás. Without belaboring the issue, there are already myriad romance novels of a gay thematics that do not enter into this dissertation whose simplicity will always have a market niche--but it, too, will contribute to general reader weariness. Perhaps this fatigue will prompt more writers like Bellatin to continue to renew the genre and require more from readers interested in more than "just another coming out story" (of which there are countless many to name and that do not form part of this dissertation).

Zapata, Blanco and Bellatin coincide on one primary point: their effort to incorporate their texts into the mainstream of the Mexican canon seems to indicate their shunning of any figurative membership in a cliquish society of gay men or gay male writers. Rather, they seem to emphasize the commonality of theme that each of their novels share with greater society: sexuality in the case of Zapata; violence in the case of Blanco; and ostracism on the part of Bellatin.

Appendices

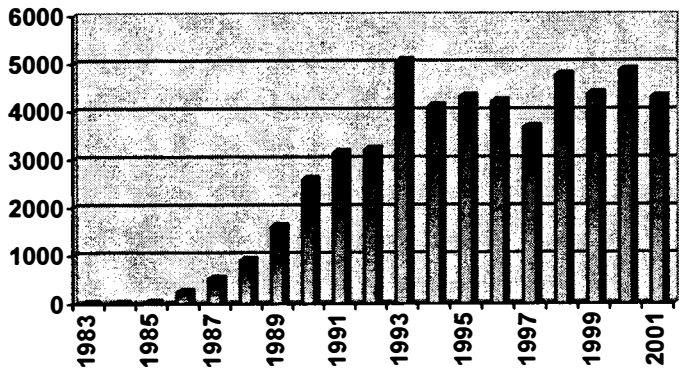
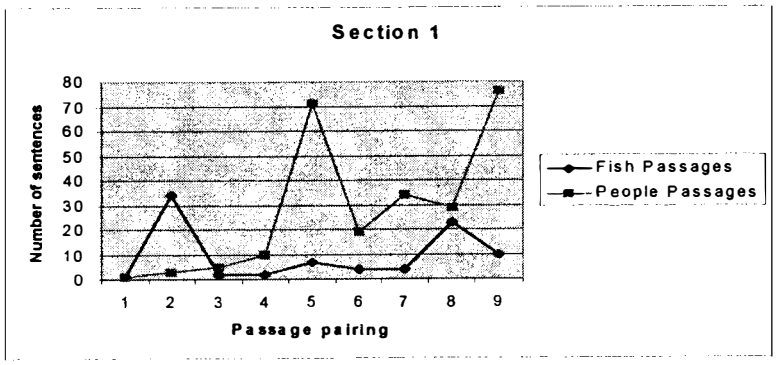
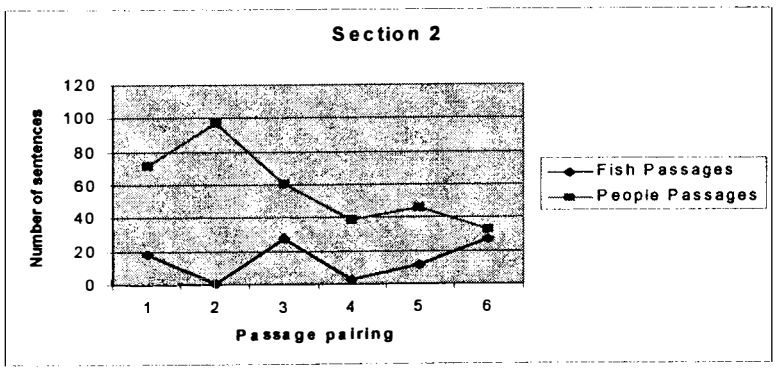


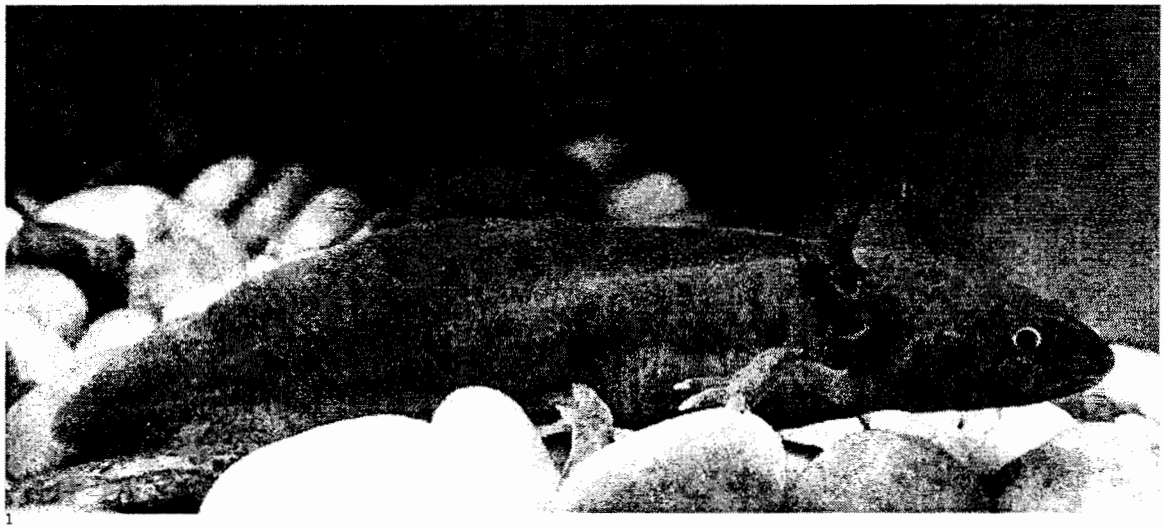
Fig. 1: AIDS cases by year of reporting, Mexico





Figs. 2, 3: Sentence length, fish vs. people

Fig. 4
Ambystoma
mexicanum
("axolotl")



[1]

[1] Photograph (Jessica Miller, 2003) found at the following internet webpage address: http://elib.cs.berkeley.edu/cgi/img_query?enlarge=0000+0000+1203+0695.

List of Works Cited

Alemán, Mateo. Guzmán de Alfarache. Madrid: Cátedra, 1992 (1599).

Alvear, Michael. "What is Funny?" All Things Considered. National Public Radio. May 6, 2002.

Asturias, Miguel Ángel. El Señor Presidente. Barcelona: Alianza, 1994 (1955).

"Axolotl." Webster's Third International Dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam Webster, 1981.

Barbachano Ponce, Miguel. El diario de José Toledo. México: Premià, 1988.

Barry, Peter. Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory. Manchester UP: Manchester, 1995.

Bellatin, Mario. Jacobo el mutante. México: Alfaguara, 2002.

---. Flores. México: Joaquín Mortiz, 2001.

---. La escuela del dolor humano de Sechuán. México: Tusquets, 2001.

---. Shiki Nagaoka: Una nariz de ficción. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2001.

---. Salon de beauté. Paris: Stock, 2000.

---. El jardín de la señora Murakami. México: Tusquets, 2000.

---. Salón de belleza. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2000.

---. Canon Perpetuo. (Efecto invernadero. Canon Perpetuo. Damas chinas.) México: Plaza y Janés, 1999.

---. Poeta Ciego. México, D.F.: Tusquets, 1998.

Berman, Sabina. Lunas. México: Katún, 1988.

Blanco, José Joaquín. El castigador. México: Era, 1995.

---. Mátame y verás. Era: México, 1994.

---. Se visten novias (somos insuperables). México: Cal y Arena, 1993.

---. Letras al vuelo. México: El Nacional, 1992.

---. Las púberes canéforas. México: Cal y Arena, 1991.

---. Las intensidades corrosivas. Villahermosa: Instituto de Cultura de Tabasco, 1990.

---. Los mexicanos se pintan solos. México: Pórtico de la Ciudad de México, 1990.

---. Un chavo bien helado. México: Era, 1990.

---. La literatura en la Nueva España. Conquista y Nuevo Mundo. México: Cal y Arena, 1989.

---. Cuando todas las chamacas se pusieron medias nylon (y otras crónicas). México: Juan Boldó I Clement, 1988.

---. Función de medianoche. México: Era, 1986.

---. Calles como incendios. México: Océano, 1985.

---. José Revueltas. México: Terra Nova, 1985.

---. Crónica de la poesía mexicana reciente. México: Katún, 1983.

---. Crónica de la literatura reciente en México (1950-1980). México: Instituto Nacional de Arte e Historia, 1982.

---. La siesta en el parque. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982.

---. La paja en el ojo: ensayos de crítica. Puebla: U Autónoma de Puebla, 1980.

---. La vida es larga y además no importa. México: Premià, 1979.

---. Retratos con paisaje: ensayos de crítica. Puebla: U Autónoma de Puebla, 1979.

---. Se llamaba Vasconcelos. Una evocación crítica. México: Fondo Cultural Económico, 1977.

---. La ciudad tan personal. México: Cefol, 1976.

---. Otra vez la playa. México: Instituto Nacional de la Juventud Mexicana, 1980.

Brescia, Pablo and Scott M. Bennett. "¿Nueva narrativa? Entrevista con David Toscana." Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos 18:2 (2002): 351-62.

Brushwood, John S. La novela mexicana (1967-1982). México: Grijalbo, 1984.

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Callen, Michael. "Remarks." American Public Health Association Annual Meeting. Las Vegas, NV, 1986. AIDS: Cultural Analysis Cultural Activism. Douglas Crimp, ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 161-66.

Calva, José Rafael. Utopía Gay. Oasis: México, 1984.

Carrier, J.M. "Sexual Behavior and the Spread of AIDS in Mexico." Medical Anthropology 10 (1989): 129-142.

Carrillo, Héctor. The Night Is Young: Sexuality in Mexico in the Time of AIDS. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002.

Ceballos Maldonado, José. Después de todo. México: Diógenes, 1969.

Cortés, Eladio, ed. Dictionary of Mexican Literature. Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1992.

Covarrubias, Alicia. "El vampiro de la colonia Roma, de Luis Zapata: la nueva picaresca y el reportaje ficticio." Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana 20:39 (1994): 183-97.

"Cryptosporidiosis." <http://www.thebody.com/cdc/cryptosporidiosis.html>.

D'Lugo, Carol Clark. The Fragmented Novel in Mexico: The Politics of Form. Austin: U of Texas P, 1997.

Dallal, Alberto. Mocambo. Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1976.

Doty, Alexander. Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.

Ellis, Robert Richard. "Introduction." Susana Chávez-Silverman and Librada Hernández, eds. Reading and Writing the Ambiente: Queer Sexualities in Latino, Latin American, and Spanish Culture. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2000. 3-18.

Fernández de Lizardi, José Joaquín. El Periquillo Sarniento. Mexicanos Unidos: México, 1977 (1816).

Flores, Ángel, ed. Latin American Authors: The Twentieth Century. New York: The H.W. Wilson Co., 1992.

Fone, Byrne R.S. Homophobia: a History. Metropolitan: New York, 2000.

Foster, David William. Sexual Textualities: Essays on Queering Latin American Writing. Austin: U of Texas P, 1997.

---, ed. Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994.

---. Gay and Lesbian Themes in Latin American Writing. Austin: U of Texas P, 1991.

Foucault, Michel. "The Repressive Hypothesis." The Foucault Reader. Paul Rabinow, ed. New York: Pantheon, 1984. 301-329.

García Márquez, Gabriel. Crónica de una muerte anunciada. Plaza y Janés: Barcelona, 1999.

Giménez Bartlet, Alicia. Review, Salón de belleza. <http://www.elperiodico.com>.

González del Alba, Luis. El vino de los bravos. México: Katún, 1981.

Gutmann, Matthew C. The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City. Berkeley: U of California P, 1996.

Hind, Emily. "Entrevista con Mario Bellatin." Unpublished. 2001.

Jaén, Didier T. "La neopicaresca en México: Elena Poniatowska y Luis Zapata." Tinta 1:5 (1987): 23-29.

Jagose, Annamarie. Queer Theory: An Introduction. New York: New York UP, 1996.

Jones, James W. "Refusing the Name: The Absence of AIDS in Recent American Male Fiction." Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis. Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier, eds. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. 225-243.

Kantor, Martin. Homophobia: Description, Development, and Dynamics of Gay Bashing. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998.

"Kaposi's Sarcoma." www.cancer.org/docroot/cre/content/cri_2_4_1x_what_is_Kaposis_Sarcaoma_21.asp?sitearea=cri

Lazarillo de Tormes. Madrid: Cátedra, 1990 (1554).

Manzor-Coats, Lillian. "Introduction." Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook. David William Foster, ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994. xv-xxxvi.

Monsiváis, Carlos. "Prólogo." Estatua de sal. Salvador Novo. Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes: México, 1998. 9-41.

"Moridero." Diccionario del español actual. Manuel Seco, et al, eds. Madrid: Aguilar, 2001. 3138.

Muñoz, Mario. "En torno a la narrativa mexicana de tema homosexual." La Palabra y el Hombre 84 (Oct-Dec 1992): 21-37.

Murray, Stephen O., ed. "Hispanic Homosexuals: A Spanish Lexicon." Latin American Male Homosexualities. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1995. 180-192.

Ojeda, Jorge Arturo. Octavio. México: Premià, 1982.

Palaversich, Diana. "Apuntes para una lectura de Mario Bellatin." Chasqui 32:1 (2003): 25-38.

Paz, Octavio. "Máscaras mexicanas." El laberinto de la soledad. Fondo de Cultura Económica: México, 1972.

Pérez de Mendiola, Marina. "Las púberes canéforas and the Inscription of Sexual Identities." Gender and Identity Formation in Contemporary Mexican Literature. New York: Garland, 1998. 87-104.

Poniatowska, Elena. Hasta no verte Jesús mío. Era: México, 1969.

Prieur, Annick. Mema's House, Mexico City: On Transvestites, Queens, and Machos. U of Chicago P: Chicago, 1998.

de Quevedo y Villegas, Francisco. El Buscón. Madrid: Cátedra, 1996 (1604).

Rela, Walter. A Bibliographical Guide to Spanish American Literature: Twentieth Century Sources. Greenwood: Westport, CT, 1988.

Robelo, Cecilio A. "Xolotl." Diccionario de mitología náhuatl. México: Innovación, 1980. 825-28.

Rodríguez Cetina, Raúl. Flash Back. México: Premià, 1982.

---. El desconocido. México: Duncan/Universidad Autónoma de México, 1977.

Rodríguez Lozano, Miguel G. "La prosa liberadora de José Joaquín Blanco." Desde afuera: narrativa mexicana contemporánea. México: AbrAxas, 1998. 81-85.

Roffiel, Rosamaría. Amora. México: Planeta, 1989.

Ruiz Esparza, Jorge. "Homotextualidad: la diferencia y la escritura." Coloquio Internacional: Escritura y sexualidad en la Literatura Hispanoamericana. Centre de

Recherches Latino-Américaines, Université de Poitiers: Madrid, 1990. 233-52.

Sainz, Gustavo, ed. Jaula de palabras. México: Grijalbo, 1980.

Schaefer Rodríguez, Claudia. "Luis Zapata." Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook. David William Foster, ed. Greenwood: Westport, CT, 1994. 460-70.

Schifter, Jacobo. Lila's House: Male Prostitution in Latin America. New York: Harrington Park, 1998.

Schneider, Luis Mario. "El tema homosexual en la nueva narrativa mexicana." Casa del tiempo 5 (49-50): 82-86, 1985.

Schultz, Raymond Thomas. "When the 'A-Word' Is Never Spoken: The Direct and Subtle Impact of AIDS on Gay Dramatic Literature." Diss. Wayne State U, 2000.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, ed. Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997.

---. "Queer and Now." Tendencies. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993. 1-20.

---. Epistemology of the Closet. Berkeley: U California P, 1990.

---. Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

Smith, Verity, ed. Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997.

Sontag, Susan. Illness as Metaphor; and, AIDS and Its Metaphors. New York: Picador, 1989.

Teichmann, Reinhard. "Interview with Luis Zapata." De la onda en adelante: Conversaciones con 21 novelistas mexicanos. México: Posada, 1987. 355-374.

Torres, Vicente F. "De la Onda a nuestros días." Memoria de papel 2:3 (1992): 132-42.

Torres-Ortiz, Víctor F. "Transgresión y ruptura en la narrativa de Luis Zapata." Diss. U of New Mexico, 1996.

Torres-Rosado, Santos. "Canon and Innovation in Adonis García: A Picaresque Novel." Monographic Review:Revista Monográfica 7 (1991): 276-83.

Treichler, Paula A. "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification." AIDS: Cultural Analysis Cultural Activism. Douglas Crimp, ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988. 31-70.

--- and Catherine A. Warren. "'Maybe Next Year': Feminist Silence and the AIDS Epidemic." The Visible Woman: Imaging Technologies, Gender and Science. Paula A. Treichler, Lisa Cartwright and Constance Penley, eds. New York: New York UP, 1998. 83-130.

Trejo Fuentes, Ignacio. La fiesta y la muerte enmascarada: El Distrito Federal de noche: Lo que somos, lo que tenemos, lo que se puede perder. México: Colibrí, 1999.

Turón, Carlos Eduardo. Sobre esta piedra. México: Oasis, 1981.

United Nations. Statistical Yearbook, 40th Issue 1993. New York: United Nations, 1995.

UNAIDS. <http://www.unaids.org/hivaidsinfo/statistics/fact_sheets/pdfs/Mexico_en.pdf>.

Vieira, Estela. "Writing the Present, Rewriting the Plague, José Saramago's Ensaio sobre a cegueira and Mario Bellatin's Salón de belleza." Ciberletras 7, 2003. <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v07/vieira.html>.

Warner, Michael, ed. Fear of a Queer Planet. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.

Watney, Simon. "The Spectacle of AIDS." AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism. Douglas Crimp, ed. Cambridge: MIT P, 1996. 71-86.

Westmoreland, Maurice. "Postmodern Depthlessness, and Finding Pleasure in Zapata'a Melodrama." Modern Language Studies 28:2 (1998): 103-16.

---. "Camp in the Works of Luis Zapata." Modern Languages Studies 25:2 (1995): 45-59.

Zapata, Luis. Siete noches junto al mar. México: Colibrí, 1999.

---. El vampiro de la colonia Roma. México, Grijalbo, 1996.

---. La pasión más fuerte. México: Océano, 1995.

---. ¿Por qué mejor no nos vamos? México: Cal y Arena, 1992.

---. De cuerpo entero. México: UNAM, 1990.

---. Ese amor que hasta ayer nos quemaba. México: Posada, 1989.

---. La hermana secreta de Angélica María. México: Cal y Arena, 1989.

---. En jirones. México: Posada, 1985.

---. De amor es mi negra pena. México: Panfleto y Pantomima, 1983.

---. Melodrama. México: Posada, 1983.

---. Adonis García: A Picaresque Novel. Trans. Edward A. Lacey. San Francisco: Sunshine Gay P, 1981.

---. De pétalos perennes. México: Posada, 1981.

---. Las aventuras, desventuras y sueños de Adonis García, el vampiro de la colonia Roma. México: Grijalbo, 1979.

---. Hasta en las mejores familias. México: Novaro, 1975.