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sexual ph



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René Marqués, Ángel Lozada, and the constitution of the (Queer) Puerto Rican national subject

ALFREDO VILLANUEVA-COLLADO

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I explore the subject of the binary homophobia/homosexual desire as a component of the Puerto Rican personal and national masculine subject. I focus on two novels, *La mirada* by René Marqués and *La patografía*, by Ángel Lozada, exploring the ways in which both focus on the homosexual subject and conflate it with a national identity. I have approached this material as an informed queer reader, who has tried to find since adolescence positive queer role models in the literature of my country. *La mirada* has not received the critical scrutiny it deserves. Critics have emphasized its pathological elements without exploring its deep structure, which subverts the surface message. On the other hand, *La patografía* exposes internalized homophobia as a component of Puerto Rican queer writing and unwittingly buttresses the parameters of heterosexual dominant discourse. My conclusion: our political identi-

sexual phobia



Perhaps there is no more difficult decision for a critic than to give an explanation of texts he has disliked as a reader. The first time I read *La maldad* by René Marqués I was motivated by the curiosity of a young Puerto Rican *independentista* reader trying to find something about himself in the pages of a text by an older Puerto Rican gay independentista writer. To my dismay, I found a narrative considered at the time to be a “sick” narrative whose negative, defeatist depiction of homoerotic desire had nothing to do with my life, my identity or my political beliefs. To use an old word in an old meaning, it read queer. My reading of Marqués’ “foundational” anthology, *Cuentos puertorriqueños de hoy*, whose themes Agnès Ortiz aptly describes as: “The masculine body: allegory and self-destruction in ‘El Josco’; mutilation and metamorphosis in ‘El sapo en el espejo’; castration, effeminization, and transference of the phallus to the female corpse in ‘En la noche hay un cuerpo reclinado’” (87) further convinced me there was a dis/ease, a pathology in Puerto Rican literature concerning the masculine subject which was alien to my own personal or creative experience. Further readings reaffirmed this judgment. I decided to avoid Puerto Rican literature and investigate the presence/absence of homosexuals in Latin American narrative, following what I call an archeological—that is, historical, nose-to-the-text approach.

Several incidents during my creative career brought me back to the question of the placement of homoerotic desire within Puerto Rican cultural production. When Pedro López Adorno published his massive anthology of Puerto Rican literature in New York, *Papiros de Babel*, in 1991, he chose Efraín Barradas to be the keynote speaker at the presentation at The Americas Society. Barradas stunned the



I was reminded of Barbara Christian's 1987 essay, "The Race for Theory," she had already sounded the alarm as to the appearance of Theory as a neo-ideology of power, which declared the concept of essential identity invalid at a moment when minorities—women, blacks, gays—were beginning to create themselves. Christian also expressed a preoccupation, which I share, for the given nowadays to theory-oriented criticism (which she considers another tool of colonialism) rather than to a praxis-oriented criticism dedicated to the careful reading of texts in order to explain the cultural circumstances they reflect. She also expressed the contempt she felt for the new terminology containing the hegemonic preferences of the producers of the new literary discourse: the philosophers.¹ Thus, I had to ask myself what leads a homosexual Puerto Rican critic to stand before a Puerto Rican author and question its Puerto Rican/ness on the bases of European ideological constructions? Would he question or deny his "homosexual" identity under these same premises?

A second incident involved the putting together of David William Foster's encyclopedia on authors who have written on gay and lesbian themes in Latin American literature. With respect to Puerto Rican literature, two names immediately came to mind: René Marqués and Luis Rafael Sánchez. I found out that Joe (his former lover) had refused permission for Marqués to be included. With respect to Sánchez, I myself received an urgent message from one of his colleagues at the College of New York (CUNY), advising me that if he were to be included in the volume "his mother would die from a heart attack." He accepted being included only after Foster agreed to his two demands: Foster himself would write the entry on him and would not describe Sánchez as a "gay author"!

The discovery of the closet as the preferred abode of Puerto Rico's most prominent gay writers just deepened my suspicions about the dis/eased nature of the relationship between homoerotic desire and Puerto Rican cultural production—a relationship including a good dose of internalized homophobia and absorbed postmodern neocolonialist discourse, particularly in the critical writings. But this just deepened my curiosity to find out what exactly was going on. I looked elsewhere. "Jum!", by Sánchez, brought no relief. Where Lugo-Ortiz finds an indictment of the society that condemns the homosexual subject to death (97), I found a cold, almost glib, depiction of stereotypes. Sánchez shows but does not explain homophobia among blacks—themselves a marginalized minority—leading to vigilante justice, which involves racism to boot. It is not only the fact that the unnamed protagonist breaks gender norms, but that he also breaks racial barriers. One wonders: If he had had an affair with a neighborhood macho, would he have been spared the same fate? Moreover, the ending struck me as pathetically trite. It is a Western literary commonplace that homosexuals—like "bad women", interracial couples and other "transgressors" of sociosexual norms—do not survive to the end of their narrative.

Enter Ángel Lozada and *La patografía*. A cursory reading horrified me. Two years after *La mirada*, a text rivaling and finally surpassing it in its morbid description of homoerotic desire. It out/queered the older text in terms of oddness. Yet I sensed a kind of continuity between them. If in style and structure, *La patografía* reminded me as a poor version of *La guaracha del Macho Camacho*; in content, it referred me back to Marqués. I wanted to explore in what precise ways both novels represent



Insularismo, by Antonio Pedreira, has been widely identified as the *bête noire* of Puerto Rican cultural production, as Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé exhaustively points out in his essay on Marqués and Manuel Ramos Otero:

Puerto Ricans' equivocalness, superfluity and mobilization are finally problematized in *Insularismo*'s closing chapter in the figure of the "effeminate." Dissecting what he considers the Puerto Rican's "inferiority complex, Pedreira finds in the island's *tupida cantidada* of *afeminados* (abundant number of effeminates) a visible sign of the geographical historical and political limitations that hamper the Puerto Rican's ability to create and thus constitute the nation (167). (Cruz-Malavé)

An "effeminate" is a man who adopts traditional "feminine" behaviors, described in "vulgar" Freudian terms as passivity, submission, and obedience. Pedreira's analysis is not exclusive to him; in fact, they reflect the prevailing racial and geographical determinism of his day. Michael Aronna finds arguments very similar to Pedreira's in *Nuestra América* (1903) by Argentinean Carlos Octavio Bunge, and *Pueblo y Nación* (1909) by Bolivian Alcides Arguedas, all traceable to the French psychologist Gustave Le Bon's theory of the congenital inferiority of hybrid races (149). Aronna points out that "Significantly, the debilitation of the nation is once again grounded in the equation of the male body and psyche. The debilitation of the nation is equivalent to the dissipation of male fluids, energy and spirit, lumped together by Arguedas under the generic concept of 'virilidad'" (163).

Moreover, since the national body, as George L. Mosse has shown exhaustively, is conceived of as masculine, male colonial subjects who choose a path of accommodation or assimilation rather than revolution become "feminized" or "effeminate." Nations are commonly imagined simultaneously as male and female. Germany as "fatherland" has its female counterpart in the figure of "Germania"; England in "Brittania," and France in "Marion." Thus, the masculine national subject functions as a male in a double role: as the fatherland's dutiful son and as the motherland's protector/ defender. Puerto Rico, given its colonial status, cannot be imagined as "patria," but, on the other hand, it lacks a national female image. Instead, there is a lamb on its shield: the classical image of the passive, sacrificial offering.

Assuming the Freudian premise of the human psyche's primary bisexuality, I tried answering a question which has always haunted me: how can heterosexual males release or act out their passive libidinal drives without violating the homosexual taboo? On examining *Al vencedor*, by Argentinean Silvina Bullrich, I found the answer in vassal relationships—represented by male hierarchical structures, the Church, the Corporation, the Army—which allow males to channel their passive drives such as obedience and submission within masculine frameworks without crossing the thin line into overt homosexual behavior—let us say that the homosocial contains and regulates the homoerotic (only to a certain degree, for there are all kinds of elipses).

acting out a male role, and thus national masculine self-image was preserved. In the case of Puerto Rico, however, this was not Puerto Rico's case. In my History of Puerto Rico class I learned a little bit of the fact: Puerto Ricans were invited by Simón Bolívar to join in the war against Spain, but they declined. They would not take up arms against their revolutionary "brother" who considered themselves "loyal to the King of Spain." They chose the role of obedient sons, that is, vassals. Spanish colonial rule thus allowed Puerto Ricans to maintain the image of a male national body while maintaining a passive political stance.

All of this changed with the American invasion. John J. Johnson has made a study of political cartoons in North American newspapers at the time of the Spanish-American War. Latin American republics and contested territories were portrayed as unruly children and lazy blacks in need of both protection and discipline. Most significantly, they were also portrayed as *señoritas* in flamenco dress needing to be rescued by Uncle Sam from a fate worse than death at the hands of some "conquistador."³ The North American invasion of Puerto Rico was thus represented and publicly depicted in gender terms as a contest between a heroic male and a female warlord for a female body. No longer allowed a male national identity, Puerto Rico had become a passive female awaiting penetration by the winning male. This is substantively the image Iván Silén projects of San Juan in his *Poemas de Fili*. How, then, to construct an individual male identity within a female national body?

A second reading of *La mirada*, from what I call a homocritical stance, shows how tortuously Marqués deals with this problem. I want to focus on two scenes: a party on the beach and the so-called "rape" scene in jail. The first has been interpreted as "a manifestation of homosexual panic," and the second a "gang rape" by Cruz (231). I propose that they are related, and that, taken together, they offer a solution to the problem of the creation of the masculine subject within the colonial context.

Just prior to the LSD party, a mysterious woman offers the protagonist a book by Allegro, called *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, which is described quite precisely: "Como única ilustración tenía un pequeño hongo cuya cabeza o 'paraguas' era de un rojo vivo encendido salpicado de puntitos blanco-amarillos" [As the only illustration it had a small mushroom whose head or 'umbrella' was bright red covered in small yellowish white spots] (54). This is a picture of such a cover, corresponding to "un libro en rústica bastante manoseado" [a heavily used paperback], the American Bantam edition:

The woman points to a curious but significant detail: "¿Habías notado que la cruz con el ajusticiado es en realidad un hongo?" [Had you noticed that the cross with the condemned man is in reality a mushroom?] (54). He answers that he had not noticed, that the mushroom looked more like something phallic. The illustration of which he is not aware, confusing it with the cover, is the following:

She adds: "Hay que comer el hongo sagrado para la separación mística del alma" [The sacred mushroom must be ingested for the mystic separation of the soul].





The drug triggers a flashback to the protagonist, who had seen the mysterious Sem, a Puerto Rican student at the University. Sem has joined a hippie commune as its leader and has acquired the possession of a strip of land on the beach. At that point of first contact, the protagonist was correcting essays on Greek mythology, specifically the myth of Ghea, Uranus, and Chronos. Sem's name itself contains a reference to the founder of the Jewish religion. It also leads to the word "semen."

Thus, Marqués refers the reader to a foundational myth dealing with the establishment of hierarchies through mother/son incest and castration of the father. In other words, a myth with its

own self-contained pathology. In his hallucination, the protagonist acts out a significantly altered version of the myth. He first decapitates Ghea, the incestuous mother, and then mutilates Sem, now Uranus, cutting both his arms and castrating him. A Freudian will read this performance as the enactment of the Oedipal trauma. But there is another subtext. Uranus, through his daughter, Venus, or "celestial Venus," a classical trope for homosexual love, is the root word for "Uranian," a word coined by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs in 1862 to describe homosexuals. Thus, by castrating Uranus, the protagonist is ironically investing himself with a "homosexual" (that is, "castrated") identity. By removing his arms, he is taking away the power to grab, to hold, to possess. I am reminded of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," where the narrator's inability to grasp with his arms is proof of his less than sexually aggressive, masculine identity.

But the scene does not end there. The protagonist also stabs the friend with whom he had masturbated in childhood, Julito, in the arm, rendering it useless. Julito, who had turned into Atlas, a Titan who refused to go against Chronus at the time Zeus rebelled against him. So the protagonist as Chronus wounds the figure who would be his own "vassal." And then, for good measure, he cuts down the friend worn by the black man who had attracted him initially because of his well-muscled body, and whom he assumes to be a *norteamericano*, now turned into Haepheestus, husband to Aphrodite and reputedly the ugliest among the Olympians. Moreover, as we have learned from the biblical story of Samson, for a male to lose his hair also means the loss of his phallic power. Such a move is also a sign of tonsure or voluntary "castration" in the ascetic life.

To summarize, in this rewriting of the myth, the protagonist kills the mother figure, castrates and incapacitates but does not kill the Father figure, wounds his faithful vassal, and shaves the head of none other than Aphrodite's husband. In literal terms he has disposed of the female figure, the woman who had seduced him the book, and wounded the three men who have aroused him sexually, depriving them of external signs of Phallic power: hair, testicles, arms. But



The protagonist lands in jail. Forced homosexuality is a fact of life with systems everywhere. Rape is a common occurrence. But once more, Marqués subverts the surface meaning of his text. The black man turns out to be from that site of interracial desire in the Puerto Rican Imaginary, Loíza Aldea, an exhibitionist to boot, as evidenced by his having performed nude in Paris, of male Josephine Baker. He tells the protagonist: “tienes una cara que no se which points to an identity based on what I have called the Somatic Order, in opposition to Lacan’s Symbolic order, and whose goal is physical, not mental pleasure. Sem is there, minus balls and arms, and Julito, with his withered arm as appendage. Other characters enter the performance; the two hippie guitarists (again, arms), a huge blond *Americano* and his effeminate boyfriend, and two guards. They want a public confirmation of the sexual relationship between the black man and the protagonist. Marqués uses this scene as a pretext for the first overt and explicit description of masculine same-sex desire in Puerto Rican literature, presented as a sacrificial, crucifixion scene, which Marqués turns upside down—inverts?—quite openly. As we have seen, this scene refers back to the conversation with the woman prior to the ingestion of the hallucinogen. Because this passage from the novel was censored, the text was not allowed to be published in Spain but was published in Puerto Rico.

The episode is carefully constructed as a *mise-en-scène*, in which each participant occupies a specific space (64–5). The protagonist and the black man are at the top. What begins as forced sex soon turns into an orgiastic celebration of same-sex desire, with bodies plugging into each other until they become one gigantic desiring machine. The protagonist begins sucking the black man, who is penetrated by the blond *Americano*, thus becoming active and passive simultaneously. The latter’s boyfriend zeroes in on one of the protagonist’s nipples. Sem may not have a

balls but he does have a mouth which he puts to good use, attaching himself to the protagonist. He is not excluded; the castration is over. Julito may have a withered arm but other organs are functioning normally. Another cancelled

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“castration.” He penetrates the protagonist, who in turn puts his own arms to jerking off the two guitarists, one on each side of him. The guards look on and masturbate. The protagonist discovers homoerotic pleasure, “un placer indescribible both as goal and process. It must be stressed that in this scenario the assumption of phallic power *does not hinder* the male’s capacity to give and receive somatic pleasure.”

But, as usual, there is another subtext. Given the heretical use of Crucifixion imagery, the protagonist is also the sacrificial lamb. The lamb on the patio



does not mean you've renounced sex. Bodies will not be denied access to pleasure. Let me emphasize key elements that are absent: the rigid role-assignment associated with sexual binarism, the equation of passivity with femaleness, power as phallic, all of them components of the Law of the Father. We are in the realm of the Somatic Order, the giving and receiving of pleasure, the capacity to use both the holy stick, orifices and organs, without sacrificing one's maleness.

Christ has been portrayed many times as a practicing homosexual, surrounded by a band of male lovers (particularly John). Marqués reveals the unnamed but homoeroticism of the Judeo-Christian tradition, grounded as it is in male relations: God-the-Father, God-the-Son, and exclusively male disciples who have souls and become "the Brides of Christ." As they appear in Matthew 19:12: "Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven." Marqués's characters do not define themselves as such. They renounce masculinity by connecting libidinally with other males. They have found that in the Somatic Order non-hierarchical relationships are possible. The leveling element of the Somatic Order also exposes the betrayal by the Father, whose fiction is the most unstable. The passive son may found a Father-oriented religion, but not a male-identity nation, for the very concept of "patria" requires masculine, that is, Phallic, masculinity.

At the end of the novel, the protagonist seems to have taken on Sem's place as a visionary and a spiritual leader. He has learned to overcome castration, but the ending is left unexplainably ambiguous. Marqués did write a coda to *La mirada del hijo*. In his short story, "La ira del resucitado" Christ, as a shirtless, shoeless, Puerto Rican hippie, with a burning gaze, descends from the mountain to punish Puerto Ricans for their materialism and political conservatism.⁵ For a "paternalist pig," Reyes Marqués has turned out to be more transgressive and daring than many of his literary critics. But not daring enough to satisfy this reader.

Ángel Lozada's *La patografía* does not move beyond the most common of commonplaces. It tries very hard to be "postmodern" in structure but only achieves a renumbing rhythm, interrupted by innumerable digressions into religious texts, in a pathetic effort to achieve intertextuality. It is meant as both a critique of religion and Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Spiritualism, Santería—and Puerto Rican culture. It shapes and rejects gay identity. The protagonist, also called Ángel, exhibits what has been called "the sissy syndrome" as a child, identifying himself as a girl and indulging in his fantasies of becoming Charitín and the Bionic Woman. Even before he identifies with the women in his family, all of whom have suffered domestic violence, imagining himself as a girl. The mother is a particularly repugnant character, an aggressive and abusive woman to whom her son's problems can be primarily traced. Males are depicted as violent husbands and lovers, indifferent or absent fathers, retarded siblings. Puerto Rican society is depicted as fundamentally hypocritical in sexual matters, ruled simultaneously by an obsessive need for privacy and an equally obsessive need to denigrate other people's lives, indifferent to the plight of homosexuals, or downright homophobic.

Because of his Pentecostal beliefs, Ángel himself is the most homophobic character. He clings to religion as the only "cure" for his condition: "Estoy seguro que si me entregarme, Cristo me limpiará con su sangre de todo pecado y me liberará de todos los demonios que me tienen encadenado. Y aunque me gustan los hombres, sé que esto es un demonio, una mala influencia." He is a homophobic



like being what I am but I cannot avoid it] (280) He fetishizes the word “pato.” It shapes his identity, as in “Pato you are if they say you are.” ‘Patosidad’ is act of effeminate behaviors that are not necessarily associated with homosexuality.

Todo el mundo dice que soy un PATO. Todos mis compañeros en la escuela pública me llaman, me gritan y me lastiman diciéndome p marimacho maricón, marica... todos me dicen que me parto, que soy marica. Me preguntan todos si tengo tota. Y me hacen así con la mano, la tiran para atrás y para delante y me dicen que me parto. Que soy una gallina y que no sé pelear. Que no me gustan las chicas. Yo me quedo callado. No me puedo defender porque tengo miedo que me vayan a matar en una pelea. Y como todos los demás niños son más fuertes que yo, sé que me van a ganar y me pueden romper la cabeza. Nadie quiere jugar conmigo, porque además soy gordito y no tengo coordinación (268).

[Everyone says I’m a DUCK. All of my public school classmates shout at me, call me names and hurt me saying that I am a queer, a faggot, a homo... all of them say I act funny, that I’m a queen, a queer. They move their hands back and forth and say I move funny. That I don’t like girls. I keep quiet. I don’t defend myself because I could get killed in a fight. And since all the other boys are stronger than I am, they could break my head. Also, I am fat, and have no coordination.]

Actual sex plays a very reduced role in the construction of Ángel’s homosexuality. There are childhood games with Jesús, a neighbor, which stop when the mother tells Jesús has tried to penetrate Ángel’s younger brother. There is an attempt to play house with a little girlfriend, which is spoiled by Ángel’s insistence on becoming the Bionic Commando. There are fantasies and wet dreams. But the narrative strains the reader’s willingness to believe of disbelief by taking the protagonist into early adulthood without a major sexual encounter, particularly in the environment of Mayagüez and the Colegio de Aguirre, both widely regarded in Puerto Rican popular culture as hotbeds of homosexuality.

La patografía’s connection to Puerto Rican national male identity comes in the novel’s most bizarre moment. In the last section, called “El patocidio,” Ángel, having failed to be “cured” by God of his “patosidad,” literally becomes a green duck. (I could not but be reminded of Kermit, the Sesame Street character, and his signature song, “It’s not easy being green.”). He starts laying eggs, always in public places, always when aroused by either religion or other matters.

In Puerto Rican Spanish, “poner un huevo” signifies to commit a social gaffe, to expose one’s vulnerability in public. In Ángel’s case, it means the involuntary revelation



park, where he finally accepts and enjoys his “naturaleza patil” [duck nature]. The town goes after him: he is beaten up, his feathers plucked, raped with a bottle of India, and left to die tied to a fence (shadows of Matthew Shepard?). As he lies there he asks his aunt to cook his flesh as “Pato a la mayagüezana” and provides the recipe, which is then broadcast on a TV cooking program and brings Mayagüez everlasting fame.

The lynching episode is described as a battle for Puerto Rican gender and national identity, in which even Ángel’s mother participates: “La isla de Puerto Rico era el Cordero y, por lo tanto, había que defenderla del Pato sodomita que en aquellos momentos se estaba bañando frescamente en el parque de los Próceres” [The Puerto Rico was the Lamb’s island, and it had to be defended from that sodomite duck that at that very moment was rashly taking a dip in Los Próceres Park] (306). The duck makes its appearance both as a sign of Puerto Rican identity and as Divine punishment of that identity. Lozada does not explore the possibility that the lamb and the duck may be but two faces of the same coin, since the lamb’s sacrificial submissiveness points to a passive national identity. In his desire to expose what he considers the bottomless pit of Puerto Rican homophobia, Lozada dispenses with subtlety.

Celebraremos... para que la isla completa y el planeta completo y el mundo se entere de que la isla de Puerto Rico es la isla del Cordero, y para que que no permitiremos la intrusión de un Satanás y sus demonios, y para que combatiremos con uñas y dientes a todo el que nazca Pato, a todo el que ponga huevos, a todo aquel al que le salga plumas, y pasaremos una ordenanza, una ley: que a los Patos no los queremos, que a los Patos los mataremos, porque queremos esta isla limpia de lo animal, sin Patos, sin aves que nos molesten. Por eso de ahora en adelante les decimos a los Patos: en Puerto Rico no los queremos, en Puerto Rico los mataremos, porque aquí no es un crimen matar a un animal. (317–8).

[We will celebrate... so that the whole island and the whole planet and the whole world knows that Puerto Rico is the Lamb’s island, and we will not allow Satan and his demons to intrude, we will fight tooth and nail against anyone born a Duck, anyone laying eggs, anyone growing feathers, and we will pass an order, a law: that we do not want Ducks, we will kill them because we want this island free from animals, birds bothering us. That’s why from now on we tell Ducks: we don’t want you in Puerto Rico. We will kill you in Puerto Rico, because here killing animals is not a crime.]

Lozada’s heavy-handed satire is, however, undermined or “deconstructed” by the exaltation of Ángel as a victim: “...y toda aquella ciudad patofóbica, aquella ciudad criminal, aquel pueblo sin escrúpulos, sin miseria, sí, sin miseria, abrieron fuego por primera vez en la historia de aquella isla, como machos, valientemente, contra el niño inocente que nunca les había hecho nada malo, contra aquel futuro extranjero.”



This passage abruptly changes the focus from the protagonist to Puerto Rican national identity and the localization of “la loca” as a marker of difference within a Puerto Rican “imagined community.” I propose that “la loca” is an integral component to such an Imaginary, whose purpose is to preserve a certain notion of collective maleness, the “virilidad” inevitably lost to the colonial condition. On the other hand, there is the pathological inflation of the protagonist’s presumed victim status, since by this time he neither a child nor an innocent.

Lozada makes it explicit that the Pato’s murder acts as a compensatory performance for the lack of political aggressiveness against a much more powerful foe, and ironically stresses its positive results: it unifies Puerto Ricans against a common enemy and allows them to act like men, as protectors of the motherland and dutiful sons of the fatherland. In order to prove and assert their collective virility, according to

Lozada, Puerto Ricans
kill *Patos* instead of

gringos: “...todos quedaron
sumamente satisfechos,

porque aquel patocidio fue el único y más alto acto de heroísmo, la única obra de valentía, la más alta defensa de los valores de la Isla del Cordero, y el más sublime acto de hombría que aquel pueblo mayagüezano cometió jamás” [...all of them were very satisfied, since the duckcide was the only and highest act of heroism, the work of courage, the highest defense of the Island of the Lamb’s values, and the most sublime act of manliness that the Mayaguezan people ever committed].

However, a statement by the protagonist at the end of the section called “El arrebató” calls the very nature of this violence into question. Ángel has been unable to stop his own body from betraying him: “Jesucristo está claro, el que me a la mujer de su hermano comete adulterio. A mí me gustan las espaldas, las caderas y los muslos de los nenes, así que ya he cometido EL PECADO. Desde que me masturbarme, todas las noches sueño que Jesús me está penetrando por el culo y me levanto todas las mañanas con los calzoncillos mojados” [Jesus Christ is whoever desires his brother’s wife has committed the SIN. Since I stopped masturbating, every night I dream that Jesus is plugging my little asshole and I wake up every morning with wet underwear.](281).

The language employed affects a childish tone, emphasized by the use of diminutives: *nenes*, *pipí*, *culito*, *nalguitas*, *patito*. Desperate, Ángel exclaims: “soy Pato! ¡Soy un siervo de Dios!” [I’m not a Duck! I am God’s servant! (281). A moment later he declares: “¡Si me quedo en la Gran Tribulación cometo PATOCIDIO!” [If I am trapped in the Great Tribulation I will commit DUCK KILLING (285). This declaration is followed by two pages and a half of the word *Pato*, once more drawing attention to the fetishistic nature of the protagonist’s obsession with the sign itself. Thus, the “patocidio” is both an act of violence committed by the protagonist against himself—a suicide—and a communal act of violence—a

It is also a textual murder, that is, a conscious decision by the author/protagonist to kill off the character. The text is grounded in a stream of autobiographical allusions bringing together the author and the protagonist: the protagonist’s



Other revisions: 1862, 1909, and 1960]. The whole quote is taken *verbatim* from the Bible and appears on the Internet. Casiodoro de Reina was the first to translate the Bible into Spanish, after his conversion to Lutheranism. The Inquisition persecuted him “Master of heretics” and he spent most of his life fleeing Philip II’s age. This Protestant version of the Bible, widely used by Evangelicals, offers “daily readings” for spiritual instruction. I suspected a hidden autobiographical allusion and the “Daily Reading” for Losada’s own birthday, October 10th.

I found four daily readings, two of which impact directly on the novel. The first, from Apocalypse 10 is titled: “El ángel con el librito” [The angel with the book]. The passage from Jeremiah 22.11–23 describes the punishment of Salum and Gedon, both sons of the king of Judah, who were cursed by Jehovah and expelled from the Kingdom for loving men. Ángel (the author? the protagonist?) writes that he wants to finish a text called *Patografía* before he reaches el Arrebato (266). He gives the target publication date as before 1999 because that is the year of both El Arrebato and the Gran Tribulación, and he does not know what is going to happen after (283). Thus, at the end of the novel, autobiography separates from fiction. Carlos turns into a green duck, is killed and cooked. The other Ángel finishes his novel —he is “the angel with the book” of the sacred text.

What struck me as a gay reader was the coincidence of themes and focus between *La mirada*, *La patografía*, and, to an extent, Luis Rafael Sánchez’s “jungle” the violence, the obsessive use of religious symbols, the internalized homophobia, the characterization of the homosexual as effeminate or “Loca” and his eventual destruction at the hands of the community, the closet as the safest place, homoeroticism as a pathology of maleness, and, finally, the conflation of indigenous male identity—both homo and hetero—and the problematics of a genderized national identity under colonialism. This reader will not cease his questioning of Puerto Rican literary and cultural productions until Puerto Rican critics and writers decide to confront the gender issues imbedded in them.





NOTES

- ¹ I included this material in my article “(Homo)sexualidad y periferia en la novela de Marta Brunet y Silvina Bullrich.” *V Simposio Internacional de Literatura*, Instituto Literario y Cultural Hispánico (1991): 79–94. Because I consider Theory to be an ideological construct of the new hegemonic discourse coming from Europe and entrenched in American academia and Queer Studies, I do not utilize it in this article.
- ² In my article, “Metasexualidad, vasallaje y parasitismo: *Al vencedor*, de Silvina Bullrich.” *Hispanofila* 108 (Mayo 1993): 59–74.
- ³ I discuss Johnson’s caricatures in my article “Eugenio María de Hostos y la del progreso en *Mi viaje al sur*.” *Caribbean Review* 23, 3–4 (1990): 139–49.
- ⁴ I explore Silén’s utilization of the Filí Melé image in “Filí-Melé la esquiwa: s mujer en la poesia de Iván Silén y Luis Palés Matos.” *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, X (Fall 1982): 47–54.
- ⁵ This story appeared for the first time in the fourth edition of *En una ciudad* *San Juan* and was included in subsequent editions. It also appears in *Inmersos en* (San Juan: Editorial Antillana, 1976).

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